How to write a press release

A press release is a short summary of an event that is sent to the media. It is the standard way of informing a large number of people about something that needs to be publicized.

Before you get started, here are a few simple guidelines to follow:

1. **Start with a bang!** Give all the most important information in the first paragraph. Get everyone interested enough in your event to read the rest of the news release.
2. **Be simple and concise.** Don't use fancy wording or long sentences. Get your point across quickly and clearly. Don't use exclamation points and try to write in the third person.
3. **Be picky.** Type your press release and double space it. Check carefully for accuracy - double check names, dates, times, addresses and telephone numbers.
4. **Give opinions a voice.** Use quotes instead of just making statements. For example, instead of saying "This event is a lot of fun", say "Jane Smith, who has attended the last 4 years says 'This event is so much fun! My friends just love it!'." (Naturally, make sure the quote is real.)

And before you send out your release, check that all the information is there!

WHO ... Tell which organizations are involved. When quoting people, give their full name and position.

WHAT ... Be sure to say exactly what's going on - what exact activities are taking place?

WHEN ... Give the full date and time and don't forget to specify if it's a.m. or p.m.!

WHERE ... Give the exact location of your event - you may also wish to include directions or information such as where to park.

HOW ... to buy tickets: go to www.... or call to order.... Give the information!

WHY ... Why is this worth reading about? Why is the event happening? Why is the event so special that people will want to attend?

WHO CARES ... Explain what impact this event has on your community, audience, listeners...

CONTACT ... Include a contact name, a telephone number, an e-mail and a website - and double check to make sure it's right!

TIPS:

The Basics

- **Remember the who, what, when, where, and how.** But don't list them. Your release should be in the form of sentences in paragraphs. (See bulleted lists below if you want who, what, etc.)

Formatting

- **Avoid unnecessary capitalization.** Don't capitalize words that don't need to be capitalized, even if they're important. Avoid this: "This Annual Festival will feature Live Music on the square, along with Arts & Crafts vendors, Good Food, and Fun for Kids!"
- **Always include a headline.** The headline definitely needs a verb.
    - **Wrong:** "4th Annual Pecan Creek Crawfish Festival, May 11."
    - **Right:** "Mark Your Calendars for the 4th Annual Pecan Creek Crawfish Festival."
    - **It can even be fun:** "Step into Your Dancin' Boots at Pecan Creek Dance Club."
- **AVOID ALL CAPS HEADLINES.** Editors will be forced to rewrite your headlines and body copy IF THEY ARE IN ALL CAPS.
- **Use a preferred date format and avoid ordinal numbers.** Use a date format like "May 11, 2011" — no need to abbreviate the month — and avoid formats such as "5/11/11." Don't use ordinal numbers in dates; for example: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th. "The 23rd Annual Festival" is fine.
- **Use quotes for quotes.** Don't use quotes for emphasis. Use them when someone (or something) is being quoted directly.
- **Try to avoid bulleted lists.** Bulleted lists of events, musicians, and other items in your body copy don't fit well into print. List those items in sentence form; for example: "Food vendors at the festival include Ron Jon's BBQ, Fry-It-All, and Carl's Drink Fountain."

- o **Bonus:** Include bulleted lists along with your release, separate from your body copy; it's great for editors who are looking for sidebars. Don't leave that information out of the body copy, though. (Look below for the **Calendar Blurb**.)
- **Drop the bolds.** There's a good chance your text will be reformatted and your bold and underlined text will be returned to normal. In fact, don't underline at all.

How many words?

- **No more then 500**

Things to Remember

- **Look around.** Check other articles in the publication or on the website you're submitting to. If your release includes formatting that's different from everything else that has been published, there's a good chance that the editor is going to reformat yours.
- **Remember your out-of-town reader.** Include full addresses (great for GPS), driving directions (if needed), and **area codes in phone numbers**.
- **Include contact information for readers.** Websites, phone numbers, and email addresses in the body copy help readers reach you for more information.
- **Include contact information for editors.** If an editor has a question about your release, the event coordinator may not be the best person to contact. Include contact information (which won't be published) with your release in case the editor needs clarification or more information.
- **Include a calendar blurb.** If a publication or website features a calendar and you're publicizing an event, include a much-shortened blurb about your event. Include city, name, dates and times, location name and address, and the highlights. This also allows an editor to put this information into a box near your release.
- **Don't use sentence fragments.** Write in complete sentences so editors don't have to rewrite what you send in.
- **Avoid dashes.** Use dashes to pull out an aside — like this right here — and not as glue to stick sentence fragments together.

- **Slash the http.** These days, people can identify a URL without the "http://" part. You can leave that off; it makes the release easier to read.
- **We can feel the excitement!!!** Only one exclamation point is needed at any one time, and, truthfully, only once (if that) in your release.
- **Leave ™ and ® at home.** Trademark, registered trademark, and copyright symbols are fine in advertising, but they're going to be stripped out of your release. For example, The National Association of REALTORS® requires all mentions of their trademarked term to be shown as "REALTOR®" but publications are going to say "Realtor."

Photos

- **Include captions.** Caption your photos to make them even more interesting. Describe what's going on in the photo using a complete sentence or two (with a verb). Long captions will be edited down. Make sure your captions are with your release and not inside your body copy.
- **Remember the credit.** Be sure to credit the photographer in each caption. Use "Photo by (name of photographer, and company, if applicable)." Do not use "Photo copyright" to credit the photographer. Keep in mind that photographers sometimes don't want to be credited, or a group or company may want the credit. Use "Photo courtesy (name of group or company)" instead.
- **The bigger, the better.** High resolution photos look better in print and online; editors have more flexibility with their use when they can resize and crop the photos as needed.
  - Use the original photo file from the camera.
  - For print, photos less than 1 megabyte (1024 kilobytes) usually can't be printed very large.
  - If needed, offer a web page so editors can select from several photos and download as needed. This avoid using up inbox disk space.
- **Always go JPG.** JPG (or JPEG) is the format of choice for distributing photos. Luckily, this is the format used by most modern digital cameras.

- **Don't scale down.** Don't use the email feature included with your camera software. This drastically reduces the size of the photo before emailing it, rendering it useless to editors.
- **Never embed photos.** Do not embed photos into your press release document; they should accompany the release as separate files.
- **Turn off the date stamp.** Some brands of digital cameras add a date and time stamp in the lower right hand corner of photos. Turn this feature off.
- **Don't fancy it up.** When you use a professional or semi-pro photographer to take photos for your release, ask them not to overlay a watermark advertising their business on the photo. Credit the photographer in the caption instead. Make sure your photographer hasn't severely cropped the photo or added a frame to the image file. Keep it simple.