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# A complete guide to writing an effective press release



There are some clear rules when it comes to writing press releases — covering everything from news angles to structure. [Debbie Leven](#) of [The PR Coach](#) offers a complete guide to writing press releases that get results

Before you write and issue a press release, ask “Is there news value in this story? And, “Does it warrant a release?” Too often organisations feel obliged to write press releases using material that is not newsworthy. Fact: if the journalist does not consider it newsworthy, it won’t get coverage. Your aim is to get coverage and raise awareness among your [target audiences](#).

There are key elements that a journalist looks for in a story — and the human interest angle is key. Do you have a human interest angle, and can you show that your news has an impact on people?

Once you have decided that you have a story to tell, you need to draft your release abiding by very clear rules. These rules are designed to make it as easy as possible for journalists to use your material.

## *What should go into a press release?*

Answer the following questions about your news:

- **Who?** Who are the key players — your company, anyone else involved with the product? Who does your news affect/who does it benefit?
- **What?** What is new?
- **Why?** Why is this important news — what does it provide that is different?
- **Where?** Where is this happening/is there a geographical angle/is the location of business relevant?
- **When?** What is the timing of this? Does this add significance?
- **How?** How did this come about?

As a starting point, writing down the answers to these questions can be helpful. It's then a matter of putting them together in short punchy sentences. That sounds simple, but can be quite challenging. If you can't get the words right straight away, keep trying. Most press releases go through several drafts before they are right. It's essential that you get across the benefits that your news will bring.

It's helpful to look at the 'news in brief' section in newspapers. If you can capture the essence of your story in 50 words or fewer, as they do in newspapers, you are on the right track. Ideally, for your first paragraph, you should be looking at no more than two sentences, each of 25 words or fewer. You need to get the essence of your story in the first paragraph. Often, once you have crafted your first paragraph the rest will follow, with each paragraph providing more information and explanation.

It is not uncommon for press releases to be printed in the publication without any further follow-up with the sender. One point to bear in mind is that editors edit from the bottom of a press release up so ensure the most important points are at the top of the release.

### ***What angle should I focus on in the release?***

The most important thing to think about when writing a press release is [the target audience](#). The angle that will interest the readers of a specialist magazine will be very different to those that read the local newspaper. In fact, you should write different versions of your release for the different audiences you are targeting.

When thinking about the audience, consider what knowledge they have about your company and product and the type of language they will understand. The language used to describe production processes, for example, might be relevant for specialist engineering titles but not for your local newspaper.

### ***How do I structure and present the release?***

Key ways to structure and present your press release are below:

#### **Timing — for immediate release or embargo?**

You need to indicate at the top of the release whether it is for immediate release or under embargo and if so, give the relevant date. Generally, immediate release will be sufficient. It can be frustrating for journalists to receive information under embargo that cannot be published straight away. An embargo does not mean that journalists can't contact you about it however. It just means that you are asking them not to use the information before a particular date.

#### **Give the release a title**

Under the immediate release or embargo heading, next give a title. The job of the title is to grab attention and encourage the journalist to read more. Don't labour over what title might look good in print — most journalists/editors will change the title anyway if the release is to be used.

#### **Use double spacing**

It's good form to use double spacing, with wide margins. This helps the journalist in making notes and helps present your news clearly.

#### **How many paragraphs?**

The answer is as few as you need to get your points across. Avoid waffle and lengthy explanation. Keep the copy as tight as possible. If your release runs to three pages plus, this suggests it's an article rather than a press release.

So, you need to get all the information into the first paragraph. The test of success is whether the story can be understood in its entirety if only the first paragraph was reproduced in print.

The second paragraph expands on information in the first, giving a bit more detail. Often, the third paragraph provides a quote. The fourth paragraph outlines final information, such as referencing websites and ordering, or mentions other products in development, for example.

### **How to end the press release**

Signal the end of the press release with the word “Ends” in bold. After “Ends”, write “For further information, please contact” and list your details or those of an appointed person. Do give a mobile number so that journalists can make contact out of office hours. The more accessible you are, the better.

If any further points of information are needed, these can go in “Notes to editors” under the contact information. Examples might include background information on the company (called a boilerplate), or a note saying that photos are available. It’s helpful to number these points to make the presentation of your release as clean as possible.

### ***Which journalists should I target?***

It’s essential to research the [press and media](#) you will be targeting. Get hold of back copies of publications and tune in to relevant radio and TV programmes. This will enable you to tailor your story to suit. For any news story, there are many layers that can be used to target press and media. If a company launches a product, there might be mileage in targeting any, or all, of the following:

- local press (the area in which the company is based)
- specialist press (the company’s sector)
- specialist press (read by people who will benefit from the news in the release)
- consumer press (if there is a more mainstream benefit)
- national press (if there is significant impact or change)

When you do your research, identify working patterns and deadlines. Many weekly local papers, for example, have a Tuesday deadline for Thursday publication. So, you might be wise not to issue and chase a local press journalist on a Tuesday when they are trying to finalise their stories.

### ***What writing style should I use?***

A [writing style](#) with sentences that are 25 words in length, preferably fewer, helps give your release ‘punch’. You don’t need to give lengthy explanations. The release should give the journalist the essence of the story. They will telephone you if they want more information. If you get the news content right and write to the publication’s style, you give yourself a good chance of getting your story across.

The release should take a **factual** tone and be **short** and **concise**. If anything about your story needs further explanation, place this additional information in ‘Notes to editors’.

For issuing to broadcast journalists, the same rules apply in terms of writing and presentation. It is not uncommon to be invited for interview and find that, particularly in live interview situations, the interviewer has only read the first paragraph of the release or scanned it in the 30 seconds before the interview.

### ***What's the best way to get a release to a journalist?***

Generally, by email. It's wise to treat the subject line on the email as the title, to grab the journalist's attention. Any release sent by email should be pasted into the email rather than attached. Many press and media organisations have automatic blocks on attachments. Also, it's wise to avoid any jpeg logos. [Journalists](#) are inundated by emails, so do **follow up** your emailed press release with a telephone call to check receipt and help sell your idea.

### ***Should I always send photos with the release?***

If there is scope to use photography with your story, it's an opportunity worth taking. If you look through the newspapers during the week, you'll find that many stories appear as just a photograph and caption. It's a great way to get your message across, and can be quite striking. Avoid head-and-shoulders shots, however — think more creatively.

Explore with your photographer the ideas you have. Be careful with branding, as shots that have large logos in the background can be a huge turn off. For press shots, think how the shot will be reproduced — in black and white or colour? Photos that are to be reproduced in black and white need careful thought to get the tones right.

It's advisable to include in your press release, under 'Note to editors', that photos are available on request rather than sending them automatically with your email release. Clogging up in-boxes won't win you any friends. When you send through a photograph, always include a caption. If people are included, state "Left to right..." then list the people in the shot and any further detail that's relevant (i.e. where, when, etc).

### ***Press release checklist***

- Assess if the story has **news value** and if a release is appropriate.
- Research the **target press** and media. Review publications to get a feel for the tone and style. Identify deadlines.
- Identify the **key facts** – ask who, what, why, where, when, how?
- **Draft** a template structure for your story.
- Decide who should be **quoted** from your organisation and if third-party quotes would be useful.
- Check whether a **photo** can support the release.

Written by [Debbie Leven](#) of [The PR Coach](#).

From the website: <http://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2014/jul/14/how-to-write-press-release>

## How to write an effective press release

If you want good press coverage, you need to master the art of the press release. Here are some tips

How would a TV presenter introduce your story? Asking yourself that question should give you the top line.  
Photograph: Max Mumby/Indigo/Getty Images

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**Janet Murray** Tuesday 16 June 2015 14.48 BST

If you're looking to get media coverage for your small business, being able to write an effective press release is an essential skill. But how long should a press release be? And what kind of information should you include? Here are a few tips to help you get started:

### ***Make sure your story is newsworthy***

Before you even attempt to write a press release, think about the things you like to read, watch and listen to in the media. Most of us are generally interested in things we haven't heard before, find surprising or help solve our problems. So before drafting your press release, it's worth asking yourself these questions:

1. Is there anything "new" in my story?
2. Is there anything unusual or unexpected about it?
3. Would this be of interest to anyone outside my business?
4. Will anyone actually care?

The last one sounds harsh, but is probably the most important: you might be excited about your new marketing director or the launch of your new product, but will anyone else be interested? If the answer is "no", hold off on that press release until you've got a better story.

If you're not sure whether your story is newsworthy, read, watch or listen to the publications or programmes you'd like coverage in to get a feel for the kind of stories they typically cover.

### ***Write killer headlines***

Most journalists get hundreds of emails every day, so it's a good idea to label emails containing press releases with the phrase "press release" or "story idea". A great subject line is also a must.

But don't try to be clever: most journalists will spend just a few seconds deciding whether something looks interesting. If they don't immediately understand what your story is about, they'll move on to the next thing in their inbox.

So if your story is about the the launch of the first financial planning consultancy for women, say exactly that. "Women cash in on financial planning" might sound like a better headline, but may mean nothing to a busy journalist scanning their inbox.

### ***Get your top line in the first line of your press release***

Getting a journalist to open your email is important, but if your first sentence doesn't grab them, they may not read any further – which is why you need to get the "top line" (the most important bit) of your story right at the beginning of your release. Your first line should be a summary of the story (in no more than around 15-20 words) and read like the opening of a news story.

Journalists are generally taught to get as many of the "five Ws" (who, what, where, why and when) in the opening line of news stories, so if you want examples of great first lines for press releases, look no further than your daily newspaper.

Another trick is to imagine your story is going to be covered on a TV or radio programme. A presenter generally has around 5-6 seconds to introduce each item eg "And coming up next ... why a local cafe owner is giving a free coffee this weekend to anyone born in July." If your story was going to be featured on the radio today, how would the presenter introduce it? Asking yourself that question should give you the top line of your story.

### ***Be concise***

The ideal length of a press release is about an A4 side or about 300 to 400 words (the length of a short news item). That's just three or four short paragraphs and a couple of of quotes. If yours is longer than that, you've probably got unnecessary waffle that doesn't add anything to your story.

Don't be tempted to include background information about your company in the opening paragraph. This – along with any other additional information – can always be included in a "notes to editors" section at the end (it's fine to run over to a second page for this).

Sub-headings and bullet points can be useful to make information easy to digest, particularly if you're including figures or statistics.

### ***Use quotes to provide insight, not information***

Including quotes from people in your company can be helpful for journalists (and on regional or trade publications are often used, word for word). A common beginner's mistake is to use quotes to provide information, for example, "last year, we employed 100 staff in 12 different countries and turned over £5m."

Quotes should be used to provide insight and opinion and sound like a real person said them. They definitely shouldn't be full of jargon or technical language.

### ***A few more tips ...***

While it can be a useful background document for journalists, a press release isn't a story. If you want to maximise your chances of getting press coverage, you will have to tweak your idea, and your release, for different publications or programmes. You can find more information about how to find journalists' contacts details in [this article](#).

When you send a press release, it's a good idea to include a short outline of your idea (no more than a paragraph) and where you think it might fit in the publication you're pitching to. Paste your press release underneath, as a busy journalist may not bother to open an attachment. Photos can be helpful if they add something to the story, but avoid sending big files that will clog up peoples' inboxes.

And finally ... aim high, but be realistic in your expectations. Most journalists are swamped with press releases, so it may take you a few attempts and a bit of chasing to land press coverage for your business. Don't give up though; determination and a willingness to learn can take you a very long way.

*Janet Murray is a freelance journalist and media consultant. Her blog can be found[here](#). She tweets [@jan\\_murray](#)*

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