THEPHILANTHROPYPROJECT

EMPOWERING YOUTH TO CHANGE THE WORLD

Writing a Press Release

A press release is a written statement to the media. It can announce a range of news items, including scheduled events, personal promotions, awards, new products and services, sales accomplishments, etc. It can also be used to generate a feature story. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a press release.

Step 1: Headline

Write a genuine headline. It should be brief, clear and to the point: an ultra-compact version of the press release's key point. Plenty of PR professionals recommend writing your headline at the end, after the rest of the release is written. If you follow that instruction, continue on and come back to writing the headline once the rest is done. The headline is known as the eye-catcher and is very important to the whole release.

"Local students on a mission to end hunger!" See how that works? Now you want to know more! News release headlines should have a "grabber" to attract journalists, just as a newspaper headline is meant to grab readers.

Headlines written in bold! A bold headline also typically uses a larger font size than the body copy. Conventional press release headlines use the present tense and exclude "a" and "the", as well as forms of the verb "to be" in certain contexts.

First word capitalized. As are all proper nouns. Most headline words appear in lower-case letters, although using a stylized "small caps" font style can create a more graphically news-attractive look and feel. Do not capitalize every word.

Extract important keywords. The simplest method to create the press release headline is to extract the most important keywords from your press release. From these keywords, try to frame a logical and attention-getting statement. If including a summary sentence after the headline, the same rules apply. Using keywords early will give you better visibility in search engines, and it will be simpler for journalists and readers to get the idea of the press release content.

Step 2: Body

Write the body copy. The press release should be written as you want it to appear in a news story. And remember this: most journalists are very busy, and don't have time to research your big announcement, so much of what you write for your press release will be what the journalists use in their writeup of your campaign or corresponding event. Whatever you want them to say, this is where you put it.

Start with the date and city in which the press release originates.

The lead, or first sentence, should grab the reader and say concisely what is happening. For example, if the headline is "Local students on a mission to end hunger!" the first sentence might be something like, "Students at Centaurus High School holding a Hunger Banquet as part of their campaign to raise awareness

and money for organizations working to fight hunger." It expands the headline enough to fill in some of the details, and brings the reader further into the story. The next one to two sentences should then expand upon the lead.

The press release body copy should be compact. Avoid using very long sentences and paragraphs. Avoid repetition and overuse of fancy language and jargon. Strive for simplicity, and no wasted words.

The first paragraph (two to three sentences) should sum up the press release, and the additional content must elaborate it. In a fast-paced world, neither journalists, nor other readers, would read the entire press release if the start of the article didn't generate interest.

Deal with actual facts –– events, products, services, people, targets, goals, plans, projects. Try to provide maximum use of concrete facts. This is news. A simple method for writing an effective press release is to make a list of following clarifications: Who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Step 3: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How

Communicate the "5 W's" (and the H) clearly. Who, what, when, where, why - and how - should tell the reader everything they need to know. Consider the checklist in context with the points below, using the example above to generate our press release:

Who is this about? Students at Centaurus High School

What is the actual news? Students at Centaurus High School holding a Hunger Banquet as part of their campaign to raise awareness and money for organizations working to fight hunger

When does this event happen? This coming Friday

Where does this event take place? Centaurus High School in Lafayette, CO

Why this is news? These students are raising awareness and money for an important cause

How is this happening? Students are raising money through ticket and t-shirt sales at the Hunger Banquet, as well as accepting donations on their Philanthropy Project campaign page.

With the basics defined, fill in the gaps with information about the people, products, items, dates and other things related with the news.

Keep it short and to the point. If you are sending a hard copy, the text should be double-spaced.

The more newsworthy you make the press release copy, the better the chances of it being selected by a journalist for reporting. Find out what "newsworthy" means to a given market and use this knowledge to hook the editor or reporter.

Step 4: Edit & Polish

Make it clean, crisp, and applicable to your audience. Odds are whoever you sent your press release to has a dozen just like it in his/her inbox just waiting to be ignored. If you want yours to be chosen, it's got to be good. Not only does it have to be good, but it has to be as close to "ready for press" as possible.

When an editor looks at your piece, he/she is thinking about how long it's going to take them to get it to print. If your work is full of errors, lacking content, or just needs to be revived, they're not going to waste their time. So make sure you have good grammar, all the basics, and have something to write about.

Why should these people care what you have to say? If you're sending it to the right audience, it'll be obvious. If you're not, well, why are you wasting your time? Give the right people a piece of news (news, not advertising) and you're on the right track.

They'll care more if you send it in the morning. That gives them time to pad your piece into what they're already working on. Be considerate.

Step 5: Provide Additional Information

Tie it together. Provide some extra information links that support your press release. Provide a link to your campaign page on The Philanthropy Project, as well as links to the organizations that will receive the funds you raise during your campaign.

Formatting Your Press Release

Step 1: Structure

Get the basic structure down. Alright, now that you've got the meat of it together, how do you put on paper? Well, for starters, cut it to length. Your press release should not be longer than one page. No one's going to waste time on 5 paragraphs unless you're covering WWIII. Here's what you need (some of which we've already covered):

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE should go at the top of the page, on the left margin.

The headline, usually in bold, should be centered below that.

If you'd like, put a subhead in italics (briefly elaborating the headline).

First paragraph: most important information. May be quite news-like, in that it starts with a date or where the news is coming from.

Second (and probable third) paragraph: secondary information. Should include quotes and facts.

Boilerplate information: more on your campaign. Who are you? What's your mission? What is The Philanthropy Project?

Contact information: more on the writer (probably you!). If you grab someone's interest, they'll want to be able to find out more!

Step 2: Boilerplate

Write a boilerplate underneath the body of your release. That means it's time to include information about yourself and The Philanthropy Project.

The title for this section should be "About [YOUR NAME]."

After the title, use a paragraph or two to describe yourself and your mission with 5 or 6 lines each. For example:

"We are Maddie and Maddie, two students in the IB Diploma program at Centaurus High School in Lafayette, Colorado. The topic of hunger is very dear to us, and we are on a mission to help change the world one meal at a time. Our goal is to raise $5,000 dollars through our campaign on The Philanthropy Project. The money raised will be donated Sister Carmen, No Kid Hungry and Oxfam International – organizations on a local, national and international level all working to stop the world hunger crisis.

The Philanthropy Project is an online platform that helps youth take action, increase awareness and raise money for causes that inspire them.

At the end of this section, point to your campaign page on The Philanthropy Project. The link should be the exact and complete URL without any embedding so that, even if this page is printed, the link will be printed as it is. For example: http://philanthropyproject.com/two-ib-students-campaigning-against-hunger/ and not "Click here to visit the website".

Step 3: Contact Information

Add your contact information. If your press release is really newsworthy, journalists would surely like more information or would like to interview key people associated with it.

The contact details must be limited and specific only to the current press release. The contact details must include your name, phone and email address.

Step 4: # #

Signal the end of the press release with three # (hash) symbols. Center these directly underneath the last line of the release. This is a journalistic standard. It may look like you're over-tweeting, but you're not. This is how it's done.

Additional Tips

- Include a "call to action" in your release. This is information on what you want the public to do with the information that you are releasing. For example, do you want readers to donate to your campaign or purchase a ticket to your Hunger Banquet? If so, explain that they can do this via your campaign page on The Philanthropy Project.
- Research actual press releases on the web to get the feel of the tone, the language, the structure and the format of a press release.
- Craft each release to target a specific media outlet and send it to the specific reporter who covers that beat. This information can usually be found on the outlet's website. Blasting the identical press release to multiple outlets and multiple reporters at the same outlet is a sign that you are taking shortcuts rather than targeting a specific market.
- A follow-up call can help develop a press release into a full story.
- Use your headline as the subject line of the email. If you've written a good "grabber" headline, this will help your message stand out in the editor's email inbox.

- Send your release by email, and use formatting sparingly. Giant type and multiple colors don't enhance your news, they distract from it. Put the release in the body of the email, not as an attachment. If you must use an attachment, make it a plain text or Rich Text Format file. Word documents are acceptable at most outlets, but if you are using the newest version (.docx), save down a version (.doc). Newspapers especially, are on tight budgets now, and many have not upgraded. The easiest way is just to type or paste the release straight into the email message.
- Do not waste time writing the headline until the release is done. Copy editors write the real headlines in newspapers and magazines, but it is good to come up with a catchy title or "headline" for the release. This headline may be your only chance. Keep it concise and factual. It's a good idea not to write it until after you finish the press release. You don't know yet exactly what you – or those you interview, will say. When you have finished a draft of the release, you may decide to revise your lead – or not. Then, and only then, think about the headline.
- The timing of the press release is very important. It must be relevant and recent news, not too old and not too distant.
- Always include a quote – ideally from the lead individual involved in the subject matter of the release. The text need not be an actual quote but it should be plausible. Either way, it is essential to check that the person being quoted is happy with it. A quote allows a busy journalist to prepare a complete article without doing a follow-up interview.
- Do not include other people's contact details without getting their agreement. In addition, they must be available at all reasonable hours in the days following the release.
- When emailing a press release, do not make the subject line of your email "press release." You will only blend into the crowd. Get the editor's attention by making the subject line your "grabber" headline, for example, "Local students on a mission to end hunger!"