

How to Position Your Story for the Masses

You need to be able to take the information that the client gives you and you need to be able to say to yourself, “Why would other people care about this?” And then you need to be able to present that story in a way that’s relevant to them.

One of my favorite stories that illustrates this point beautifully is about the famous writer Nora Ephron.

When Nora Ephron was in high school, she took a journalism class and the teacher gave the students an exercise. He said, “I’m going to tell you about a story that needs to be written for the school newspaper, and I want you to turn around and write a great headline for it.”

So then he gave them the information. He said, “This Thursday in Sacramento, there’s going to be an educational seminar, and all of the teachers and staff from the school are going to be attending. Here’s a list of topics that are going to be talked about, here’s a list of speakers,” and on and on.

And then he said, “Okay. Now, go ahead and write the headline for this story.”

So the kids all took their sharpened pencils and they sat down, and they started writing. And they handed in their headlines and the teacher picked up this big stack of papers and started reading

them, and what he discovered was that he had received a bunch of headlines that were just regurgitated facts.

The kids just took all the information that he just gave them like, “educational seminar on Thursday,” and “faculty is attending,” etc. etc.

And he took all of this and he went like this, “Trash.” And he threw it all in the trash and he said, “The real headline for this story is...”

Wait for it... “School is closed on Thursday.”

So as a press release copywriter, I do not want you to fall into the trap of thinking that your job is to just give out information.

You always need to be thinking about the end reader, thinking about the journalist who could potentially share the story, sometimes with millions of people if you’re lucky.

And you always need to be saying to yourself, “Why should they care? What is the part that they are going to care about?” And make sure to give them that story.