Newspapers and News Releases

News releases are often an integral part of a communications campaign. In fact, it’s hard to imagine a communications campaign that does not make use of news releases at some point.

Writing for newspapers is different than writing an essay, a business report or even copy for a direct mail piece.

To understand why and how writing for newspapers is different, let’s first take a look at newspapers.

Newspapers

A newspaper is a business first and a public service second. The publisher must meet his or her payroll and operating expenses and earn a return on his or her investment. Instincts for public service follow.

The newspaper’s income comes from its circulation - the number of copies sold. The circulation determines advertising and circulation revenues, which depends on NEWS.

What is News?

News is news! Three-quarters of the word “news” is “new.” Newspaper editors are looking for new material that will interest readers. Because all of us are basically interested in ourselves, our families, friends, people we have heard about and our communities, the wise editor fills the paper with local news. The space that’s left is filled with entertainment, education and enlightenment. This material is called “filler”

The average daily newspaper runs about 200 stories each day. The editor has from 800 to 1,000 news releases and story ideas to choose from. The Lansing State Journal mailroom estimates that it handles 140,000,000 pieces of mail each year.

Editors generally weigh one story against another when deciding what to publish. They base their decisions on a set of standards called “news values.”

News Values

Some of the criteria for determining the news value of a story are:

- **Timeliness** - The story should be current, immediate or seasonal. Daily newspapers don’t use yesterday’s news. Weekly newspapers will use last week’s news. (Broadcast media will use last hour’s news.) Without timeliness, a news story is either history or prediction.
• **Localness or proximity** - The story is physically and/or psychologically close. Your newspaper’s circulation (or listening audience) determines localness. Major dailies cover wider areas than weeklies. Psychological closeness means stories feel close to us because of their content’s nature. Can you think of some psychologically close stories you have read?

• **Prominence or importance** - News should be crucial. The importance of the event to the audience, the impact on the community and the repercussions of the event all affect the event’s coverage.

• **Names** - Big names make news, however local names are even better in small communities.

• **Size** - The size of the event, group or project is important. The bigger it is, the more likely it is to be covered. Big is relative. Fifty people at a small township meeting may be news; fifty people at a meeting in Detroit may not be news.

• **Dollars** - How much money is involved? The bigger the dollar amounts, the bigger the news. Again, remember that dollar impact is relative. Is $100,000 big?

• **Consequence and/or conflict?** - What will happen as a result of the event, award or project? Will taxes go up? Will citizens’ lives be better? Will controversial feelings be aroused in the community?

• **Human interest** - People are interested in other people, especially children and the elderly. If your story can be told through a real life story, it will have more appeal to the editor.

**When Does News Happen?**

News takes place every day. The media may cover it, but they also rely on outside sources to provide them with information about what is happening in the community.

• **Advance Story**

When you let the newspaper know about upcoming events, you are providing them with *advance news*. Advance stories generally have the following information:

• Date
• Time
• Place (even the room number)
• Purpose or significance
• Names of the sources of information
• **Follow-up Story**

Follow-up stories are frequently used in newspapers. The follow-up story:

- Gives the time, date and place.
- Tells what happened.
- Tells why it happened.
- Tells how or for whom it happened.
- Explains the consequences.
- Gives more details.

**News Release Writing**

When you submit a story to a newspaper, you are expected to submit it in a format called the inverted pyramid. In this style, you start your story with a lead, which summarizes the most important facts of the story. You then fill in the details in descending order of importance. Why?

**Why Inverted Pyramid?**

In most newspapers, the amount of space available for news depends on the amount of advertising sold. If space is at a premium, the editor may need to cut your story. Because editors work under tremendous deadline pressures, they can’t always take the time to read the whole story and make judgments about what can or can’t be cut. They will simply drop the last paragraph or two because, as journalists, they were trained to write in the inverted pyramid style. They expect to receive news releases written this way.

Think for a moment about how you read a newspaper. Do you read a headline and the first paragraph or two of a story and then skip to another story? Most people “scan” newspapers this way, reading in-depth only the articles that catch their attention and interest them.

**5W-1H**

Assume that you have been assigned the task of sending a news release to the local newspaper. How do you decide what facts need to be placed in the lead?

The key elements to a news story: Who, What, Where, When, Why and How will help. What, who, when and where are generally more important to the story than why and how. They should be included in the first sentence of a “summary lead.”
Summary Lead Examples:

- “Toxic fumes sent seven people to the hospital and caused state workers to evacuate an office building Monday.” (What, who and when)
- “The two newest Japanese luxury-car divisions, Nissan’s Infiniti and Toyota’s Lexus, tied for top ranking in a consumer satisfaction survey released Monday.” (Who, what and when.)

You can also write an “impact” lead using questions, quotations, suspended interest or big facts to capture the reader’s attention.

Impact Lead Examples:

- “If you want to earn up to $6.60 an hour, collect a suntan and strut about with a whistle and authority, be a lifeguard at Lake Lansing’s public beach.”
- “Michigan House Democrats may see Gov. John Engler in court.”
- “People in sweatshirts and mink coats rubbed elbows at the fourth annual WKAR Wine Tasting Benefit at the Kellogg Center.”

Types of Leads

By using differing grammatical constructions, numerous general summary leads can be formed. By learning the conscious use of these varieties, a reporter can overcome dull and conventional news writing. The temper or form of the lead often governs the tone of the entire story.

Here are summary leads illustrating emphasis on one of the 5 W’s and the 1 H, presented without reference to grammatical identification:

The “WHO” Lead

Mrs. Mary Muto, a widow and operator of a small candy store at 518 S. Western Ave., was robbed of $2,000 today when three men entered the shop on the pretense of buying candy....

The “WHAT” Lead

The kidnapping of John Beard remained unsolved today while search for the 10-year-old lad’s body continued among the waters of Lake-of-the-Woods...

The “WHY” Lead

His wedding halted a few days before the ceremony when he lost his job two months ago, Henry Brudnicki, 24, of 1501 W. 14th St., yesterday chose death to life without marriage...
The “WHEN” Lead

Not until Wednesday or Thursday will new applicants be able to sign up for either street or park work, street officials announced here today…

The “WHERE” Lead

PROVIDENCE-New England has an epidemic of measles, according to the health authorities of the six states. Rhode Island has had reports of 2,400 cases…

The “HOW” Lead

Emergency first aid by the police today prevented the death of Marshall Mowbrey, an unemployed electrician living at 443 Kennedy St., Wilmette, when he attempted to cut his throat early this morning in the Grayson garage, 233 George Ave....

Although no editor instructs a reporter to use certain grammatical forms in writing news leads, it will help a reporter to know what effects may be obtained by using one of the half-dozen varieties adaptable to news writing.

News Writing Style in Summary

Place the most important sentence at the beginning of the paragraph and the most important paragraph at the top of the story. This lead paragraph should summarize your story. The lead should include the 5 Ws and H. The two main types of leads are summary and impact. After the lead, organize facts in order of decreasing importance. Keep sentences short, paragraphs short and words simple. Answer questions that your lead may arouse in readers. Be sure your story can stand the cutoff test. Can you cut the last paragraph and still have the story make sense?

Characteristics of a good news story:

- Uses simple, short, non-technical words.
- Uses effective and active verbs.
- Avoids adjectives; they may express values or opinions.
- Uses short sentences (18 words or less).
- Is edited.
- Does not editorialize.
- Always indicates sources of facts.
- Is written in the third person.

Attribution

Logical ordering of news details bridged by transitional phrases help a story’s cohesion. Attribution helps form transition and lends credibility and variety to your story.
Examples:

- “Chief wine maker Tony Peterson said sulfites added to most wines give people hangovers and many do not know they are allergic to the chemical.”
- “Ralph Carhart, head of California’s Adopt-a-Highway program, said the state has similar campaigns to plant trees and wildflowers along roads.”
- “‘I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take it anymore,’ Hilton said. ‘Our generation has screwed you kids up the wazoo.’”

Accuracy Counts

Remember, accuracy counts. Proofread and check the spelling of names, places, dates and times. If you write Wednesday, June 8, when June 8 is a Thursday, the editor can’t second guess whether you meant Wednesday or Thursday. If he or she doesn’t have the time to call you to double-check, your story will be put aside.

Fact and Opinion

A final word about the difference between a fact and an opinion. In newspaper terms, a fact is primarily sense information - something we saw, heard, and/or touched. Opinion involves judgment, regardless of whether it’s right or wrong.

For example, “It was a wonderful day” is opinion. “The day was cloudless and 78 degrees” is factual. On the other hand - “‘It was a good day,’ John Smith said,” is a fact if we heard him say it. We’re vouching for the quotation, not the accuracy of his opinion.

The source of all opinion must be identified in newspapers.

Basics on Preparing News Copy

In the newspaper business, as in just about everything else, we’ve got to do things “by the rules.” All releases, whether spot, advance, feature or local, must follow the accepted form. Nine things to remember are:

1. The issuing source, its address, your name and telephone number should appear at the top of the page.

2. The next item on the page should be the date on which the information can be used. You can state this in any one of several accepted ways:

   **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

   FOR RELEASE: October 5, 1998
   
   *(Use when a release is linked with a special event and timing is important. However, don’t count on a newsperson honoring a specific date.)*

3. The next item on the page should be a brief, newspaper-style headline that gives a capsule indication of what the release is about.
4. After this identifying head, the story should begin with a dateline (the location from which the story originated, i.e., EAST LANSING, MI -). The beginning of the story is called the “lead.” It should be not more than 16 to 20 words long, excluding the dateline.

5. All copy should be double-spaced (typewritten, of course!) and only on one side of a standard 8 1/2” x 11” sheet of white paper.

6. Paragraphs and sentences should not be split between one page and the next.

7. If the release runs longer than one page, the word “-- more --“ should appear at the bottom of each page except the last.

8. At the top of the second page, and every additional page after that, there should be a “slug” consisting of one or two key identifying words from the headline on page one, and a page number.

9. After the last line of the text, the symbol -- 30 --, -- ## -- or -- kj -- should appear.
News Writing - “Writing Rules”

Capitalization

1. Do not capitalize occupational descriptions or false titles before a name.
   
   • *actor Mel Gibson*
   • *author Sarah Paretsky*
   • *basketball superstar Magic Johnson*

2. A general rule is that with names of places and things, both the distinguishing and non-distinguishing part are capitalized.

   • *Hilton Hotel*
   • *Grand River*
   • *Capitol Building*

3. Capitalize:
   
   • Proper nouns (*Kristen, David, Boston, England*)
   • Proper names (*Democratic Party, West Virginia*)
   • Popular names (*South Side of Chicago, Badlands of North Dakota*)
   • Derivatives (words derived from a proper noun - *American, Christian, Marxist*)
   • Capitalize names of races - *Indian, Caucasian, Negro* Red, white and black are not names of races.

Numbers

1. Never begin a sentence with a numeral. If you have to start a sentence with a number, spell it out.

   • *Fifteen desserts were prepared for the picnic.*
   • *Kristen ate all 15 desserts at the picnic.*

2. Spell out numbers under 10 and use numerals for numbers 10 and over

   *Except for…*

   • The hour of the day: 9 o’clock; 10:30 p.m.  
     Do not write “nine” o’clock, except to begin a sentence. Do not use zeros after an exact hour: 8 o’clock (not 8:00 o’clock). You may use a.m. or p.m. lower case) instead of o’clock.
   • A definite sum of money: $8  
     Do not write eight dollars, except to begin a sentence. Do not use zeros after an exact dollar amount: $8 (not $8.00). If less than $1, use a numeral with the word “cents” 5 cents.
   • Statement of age: 5 years old.  
     Always use numerals, except to begin a sentence.
• Days of the month
  The meeting will be held on Feb. 3. (Not Feb. 3rd.) Never use “th “rd” or “nd” after numerals.

• Miscellaneous
  Measurements. The room is 30 feet by 19 feet.
  Degrees. The thermometer read 12 degrees F.
  Percentages. He paid 11 percent interest.

Abbreviations

1. Spell out in full the names of organizations, firms, universities, groups or clubs the first time the name is used.

   • Example: The Student Hockey Association met at Kellogg Center on Jan. 12. Eighteen SHA members attended classes on all aspects of the game.

2. Abbreviate the following street identifications:

   • Example: Street (410 Jackson St.)
     Boulevard (8900 Halston Blvd.)
     Avenue (936 Wayside Ave.)
     Terrace (4789 Eastlawn Ter.)

   Except for...

   • When the street number is not used, spell out and capitalize Street, Avenue, Boulevard and Terrace.

   • Example: the church on Holmes Street.

   DO NOT abbreviate Point, Plaza, Road, Port, Drive, Place, Circle or Lane.

3. Abbreviate points of the compass in street addresses.

   • Example: 1054 N. Third St. 678 Highland Rd., NE

4. Months. Do not abbreviate March, April, May, June and July. Other months are abbreviated only when they are used with a date.

   • Example: The Students in Agriculture meeting will be held on Jan. 22, 1994. The last conference was in January 1993.
5. Do not abbreviate days of the week, given names, points of the compass in city names or parts of city names.

   - **Example:** Monday or Tuesday never Mon. or Tues.
     William and Charles never Wm. or Chas.
     East Lansing never E. Lansing
     Grand Rapids never Gd. Rapids

6. Abbreviate and capitalize titles before names:

   - **Examples:** Sen. Don Reigle...Don Reigle, senator from Michigan
     Gov. John Engler...John Engler, governor
     President Clinton (president is never abbreviated)
The Oasis
Tempe, Arizona

“Where a full mug is never a mirage”

Contact: Jeff Fisher
Fisher Publicity, Inc.
1513 Spartan Village, Suite D
East Lansing, MI 48823
(517) 355-2747

FOR RELEASE: August 20, 1998

The Oasis: New Country Bar to Open

TEMPE, Ariz. - The Oasis, a new country western bar, will open this fall coinciding with the beginning of Arizona State University’s 1998 Fall Semester.

“The Oasis will provide a unique atmosphere and a change from the current campus bar scene,” says Fred Melms, who along with Tom Cullen, owns the bar. Melms and Cullen are 1993 graduates of Michigan State University.

Activities at the Oasis, whose slogan is “Where a full mug is never a mirage,” will include mechanical bull riding, horseshoes, Karaoke nights, dance instructions and live country western entertainment. The bar will also feature multiple large screen televisions and a dance floor.

“We believe the current popularity of country western performers in mainstream pop music provides excellent grounds for the opening and success of the Oasis,” says Melms.

-- more --
The bar will feature a diverse menu of Southwestern cuisine, including the house specialty, the Bronco Burger.

“Daily drink and menu specials will be featured,” says Melms, “and the low price menu is geared towards the college student.”

The Oasis owners plan to become involved in the sponsorship of local rodeos, golf tournaments and charity events.

“Unlike many businesses, especially bars, we are making a firm commitment to the people of Tempe and Arizona State University, Cullen says.

The bar will initially employ 20 people.
A Good News Release Example (Another Format)

Marina Hill
602 N. South St.
Tempe, AZ 99999
(602) 845-8585
July 24, 1998

For Immediate Release

NEW BAR OPENING

TEMPE, Ariz. - Expect a change in the Arizona State University bar scene this fall. The grand opening of the Oasis on Sept. 1 will attract patrons of all ages - not just the college crowd.

The Oasis, a new country/western bar, will offer a good value, a large dance floor, and plenty in the way of entertainment. In addition to watching sports on several large-screen TVs, patrons can participate in dance lessons, karaoke nights and other special events.

And just in case pitching horseshoes works up an appetite, a full service menu featuring Southwestern cuisine is available with prices geared toward the college student’s wallet.

Tom Cullen, co-owner of the new bar, said he wanted to open a bar that provided a unique atmosphere for the public that was a change from the current campus scene.

The Oasis also plans to get involved in the community through sponsorship of local events, such as rodeos, golf tournaments and charity events.

-- 30 --
Tipsheets

There are times when it is appropriate to send your news formatted as a tipsheet. Tipsheets are 3-5 snippets of information (5W-1H per snippet) about unique and interesting upcoming activities, events, products, services or awards for an individual, organization or group. Tipsheets are used to attract media coverage.

1. A tipsheet is an easy to develop timesaver.

2. It unifies office operations because all office personnel involved usually collaborate to issue a tipsheet.

3. It provides a good summary for others to quickly learn what media outreach you are doing or want.

4. It enables news editors and news directors to make a quick decision about the newsworthiness of what you are offering.

5. It enables news people to follow-up with your sources and develop the information according to their own news formats.

6. It is extremely flexible. You can send tip sheets to the media on almost any schedule that suits your organization.

7. The tipsheet is a money saver because it takes less staff time to produce than a news release.
## TIPSHEET
### SWIMMING EVENTS FOR JUNE 1993

#### LAKE LANSING
**LIFEGUARDS DEMONSTRATE SAFETY SKILLS**

According to the Michigan Department of Public Health, accidental drowning in Michigan is on the rise. To help draw attention to this, American Red Cross trained lifeguards will provide the public with a three hour display of water survival and safety skills at Lake Lansing-North on June 10, 1993. For more information, contact Jackie Dean, special events coordinator for Ingham County Parks and Recreation, at (517) 347-0835.

#### WATER SAFETY INSTRUCTOR ADDRESSES PARENTS

Many parents are not aware of the importance of teaching their children how to swim. To combat this, Water Safety Instructor Monica Goldammer will be giving a presentation at Haslett High School on June 15, 1993. The presentation will include an introduction to *Learn to Swim*, a Haslett Community Education swimming lesson program. For more information, contact Monica Goldammer at (517) 351-8950.

#### HASLETT HIGH SCHOOL’S BOYS SWIM TEAM SHARES SKILLS WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

To get young children interested in swimming, Haslett High School’s boys swim team will be spending time in the water with kindergartners from Wilkshire Elementary School during the third week in June. The swim team will be stressing the importance of feeling comfortable in the water. For more information, contact James Blackfoot, Haslett High School swim coach, at (517) 339-8000.

#### HOME DROWN PROOFING CLASS TO BE OFFERED

Frequently, drownings of small children occur in less than two inches of water in private homes. Laura Simons, director of health and safety at the Mid-Michigan Chapter of the American Red Cross, will be conducting a course to help individuals recognize potential water hazards in their homes. The class will meet June 19, 1993 at Haslett Middle School. For more information contact Laura Simons at (517) 332-4500.
A Good Tip Sheet Example (Another Format)

June 18, 1996, MSU Tip Sheet

• Boys Staters ‘learn by doing’
  More than 700 young men from Michigan high schools are learning about state
government firsthand at the 59th annual Michigan American Legion Boys State.
Boys State activities, which run through June 22, are being held at MSU’s Brody
Hall. Students take part in mythical city, state and court elections; hear from elected
representatives and other officials; and “learn by doing.”
  “The idea is to give students a better understanding of our government, and
through that understanding, a better appreciation of our system of government,” says
Tom Stahr, Boys State program coordinator.
  Elections for governor and lieutenant governor are set for today. Inauguration
ceremonies are scheduled to take place at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 19, on the steps
of the State Capitol if the weather cooperates or in Brody Hall if the weather is
inclement, Stahr said.

Contact: Tom Stahr, Boys State, or Jim McIntyre, assistant director at Brody Hall,
(517) 353-4371, or Kristin Anderson, Media Communications, 355-2281.

• Kids count in Michigan
  Michigan’s composite score on the 1996 national Kids Count report moved up to
30 from 31 in 1995, giving the state “a lot to feel good about,” says an MSU
professor.
  “We’re doing better that 20 other states, and only 9 percent of our teen-agers age
16 to 19 were not in school or working, placing us 22nd on the list,” says Gerald
Faverman, clinical professor of political science. “Additionally our state’s violent
death rate among 15- to 19-year-olds fell 3 percent from 1985 to 1993 while the
national rate rose 10 percent.”
  Faverman adds that with 184,000 Michigan children still living in poverty and
half of them in single household families, Michigan still has a long way to go toward
improving the quality of life for children.

Contact: Gerald Faverman, College of Social Science, (517) 332-6600, or Ron
Collins. Media Communications, 355-2281.

-- more --

We’re On-line!
Michigan State University
Media Communications
The Latest MSU News and Information
http://www.msu.edu/dept/univrel/media

June 18, 1996, MSU Tip Sheet Page 2
• Grave concerns

Jill Crane has “meandered around in cemeteries for years,” and now she’s inviting other folks to go along.

Crane, a secretary in the MSU Department of English, will be the guide for a walking tour of Lansing’s Mt. Hope Cemetery, being offered by the MSU Museum in conjunction with its current exhibit on “Death in America: Ritual and Memorial.”

Tour participants are asked to meet in the museum parking lot at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, June 22. Round-trip bus transportation will be provided.

“Gravestones are a reflection of culture,” says Crane, who earned a master’s degree in American studies from MSU in December. “This takes in so many disciplines -art, history, sociology.”

Contact: Jill Crane, College of Arts and Letters, (517) 355-7570; Scott Casselman, MSU Museum, 432-3357; or Carla M. Freed, Media Communications, 355-2285.

• Radio, TV booze ad ban on the rocks

Other liquor companies are likely to follow Seagram’s off the wagon and advertise on television and radio.

Bonnie Reece, associate professor of advertising, says that Seagram’s television advertising campaign will probably boost top-of-mind awareness and sales, so competitors may feel compelled to advertise on air too.

“The ads probably will help Seagram’s sales and unless there is a consumer backlash, more liquor companies will advertise on television,” Reece says. “These companies will benefit from 20 years’ worth of broadened First Amendment rights. The Supreme Court point of view is more and more favorable toward companies that want to advertise their products.”

Contact Bonnie Reece, College of Communication Arts and Sciences, (517) 359-5571, or Karen Twigg, Media Communications, 355-7981.

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A Good Tip Sheet Example (Another Format)

Public Relations Student Society of America
Michigan State University Chapter

September 15, 1995
Contact: Jackie Gardiner
(517) 332-2170
Monica McGrath
(517) 337-4661

TIPSHEET
PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1995

Many students underestimate the importance of a solid, polished resume. Lansing area professionals are here to help PRSSA members by providing professional advice on do’s and don’ts of resume building at a resume workshop in the Union Iowa Room on October 4, 1995. For more information contact Jackie Gardiner at (517) 332-2170 or Monica McGrath at (517) 337-4661.

An interview can make or break a job-seeker. To help ease the anxiety, Lansing professionals will offer PRSSA members tips on how to interview well at a mock interview session on October 11, 1995 in the Union Iowa Room. For more information, contact Jackie Gardiner at (517) 332-2170 or Monica McGrath at (517) 337-4661.

How do you get to perform at Carnegie Hall? Practice. The same goes for public relations, which is why we guarantee that each member will obtain an internship through PRSSA. For more information on how to obtain an internship, please contact Jackie Gardiner at (517) 332-2170 or Monica McGrath at (517) 337-4661.

PRSSA members will help the American Red Cross publicize its 2nd annual MSU vs. Penn State Football Donor Challenge on November 7 and 15. For more information contact Jackie Gardiner at (517) 332-2170 or Monica McGrath at (517) 337-4661.

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Briefing Sheet

There are times when it is appropriate to send your news formatted as a briefing sheet. Briefing sheets are a bullet point list of characteristics of an individual, organization, group, product, service, etc. Briefing sheets uses include public relations, education and general information delivery.
Purpose
In order to better understand and prevent child abuse and neglect, the Children’s Trust Fund of Texas Council (CTF) sponsored a statewide telephone survey designed to measure the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and practices of Texans with respect to child rearing...

Sponsoring Agency
The Children's Trust Fund of Texas Council was established in 1985 by the Texas Legislature to prevent the abuse and neglect of our children...

Study Methods
This study consisted of 2720 telephone interviews conducted with a representative sample of Texas adults, including both parents and non-parents...

Key Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incidence of abuse is underestimated</th>
<th>When asked to estimate the number of confirmed child abuse and neglect cases in Texas, seventy-five percent (75%) of the respondents…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One in four Texans witnessed child abuse in the past year</td>
<td>One in four Texan adults had witnessed an incident of abuse or neglect in the past year…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Peggy B. Smith, PhD, Chair Person • Janie D. Fields, MPA Executive Director
8929 Shoal Creek Blvd., Suite 200 • Austin, Texas 78757-6854
(512) 458-1281 • Fax: 458-9471
Email: inquiries@ctf.state.tx.us
©1996 Children’s Trust Fund of Texas Council, Site developed by MicroAssist, Inc.
Web Page Last Revised: 02/11/98
Lastly Through the Eyes of a News Director

Press Release Checklist

- Know the name of the person you should send your press release to. Example: A release about a cookbook you wrote for diabetics should go to the features department or food writer, not sports. Call and find out to whom you should send your release.

- Look for a “hook”- how your information relates to current events. Example: An outstanding student you're hoping the newspaper, station or radio station will feature has a parent serving in Somalia.

- Include day and evening phone number of other contacts. Example: If your release is on a high school marking band that has been invited overseas, include (with permission) the name and phone number of the music teacher and of an outstanding student in the band. Make sure the contacts are not just personal friends, but are verbally inclined and knowledgeable.

- Don't make the reporter or editor guess. Make sure the essential information is included, including why the information is significant. Reporters and editors don't get tantalized when they get incomplete information. They tend to move on to the next press release on their desks.

- If there is any photo possibility, mention it and send a copy to the news organization’s Photo Department. Sometimes they'll shoot a picture or picture package even if they don't send a reporter.

- Keep it short and simple. Your writing doesn't have to be fancy. Journalists prefer a straightforward news release. Leave out irrelevant details. Example: Sonya Kennedy will be recognized by a professional banking organization for becoming the first female and youngest bank president at Lucky Penny Bank. Women Bankers of America will honor her on Tuesday at the bank's lobby. Kennedy's hobbies include horseback riding and mountain climbing. She was voted most likely to succeed by her high school classmates 12 years ago.

- Lastly, remember to TOOT YOUR HORN! Convince the newspaper or TV station that your event or idea is worth being told to thousands of readers and viewers.

Keep in Mind

- Remember most reporters and editors work cram hours. There is no such thing as 9 to 5. Therefore you never know when the best time is to catch someone in the newsroom. Deadlines for different news operations differ.
• Get to the point, don't apologize for calling and don't back into your reason for calling. Reporters and editors are not God, so don't be afraid to speak.

• Have your information - dates, times, contacts and phone numbers - at your fingertips.

• Unless you're President Clinton don't have your secretary or an underling call. When reporters and editors pick up their phone and hear, "Please hold for Ms. so-and-so, they may be turned on or may not be available to “hold.”

• If the reporter, editor or news director can’t talk long when you call, don't take it personally. They may be under severe deadline pressure. Mail follow-up information or ask if there's a more convenient time to call or someone you may speak with.

• If you get voice mail, please leave your name, phone number and a message. Reporters receive several calls a day concerning a variety of issues and rely on phone messages. Example: This is John and I have some information you may want. This will not cut it. This tells a reporter nothing.

• Never start your call by being negative. Example: I don't read your paper or watch (listen to) your station because you never get anything right But I think you may be interested in... Believe it or not, journalists are human too and much more likely to lend a receptive ear to folks who are familiar their work and pleasant to talk to.

• If WE call YOU, please get back to us as soon as possible. Typically we're on deadline and may be trying to contact you for a quotation to include in that days product, or, to verify information. If you don't get back to us quickly it may be too late. Just like airlines, we rarely "hold up" for anyone.
Practice News Release Exercises

You have gathered the lists of facts below. Write news releases based on them, using either a summary lead or an impact lead. Also, write using the inverted pyramid style, so the editor can cut your release from the bottom up.

Notes for Release A

1. A bluegrass group called the “Nimblewood Creek Boys” will perform.

2. The date is Sunday, June 18.

3. St. Martin’s Episcopal Church will sponsor the event.

4. This is the annual steak and corn roast.

5. This is the sixth time the church has held the event.

6. They will hold the event from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Patriarch Park.

7. Patriarch Park is located at the corner of Saginaw and Alton in East Lansing.

8. You can get tickets for $5.50 per person. You can get them from members of the parish or at the door. The tickets include food and entertainment only.

9. More information is available by calling the parish office at 555-2681. The address is 400 Fine Oak Drive, East Lansing, MI 48823.

10. Organizers will sell soft drinks and beer, but this is extra.

11. The money raised will be used to fund St. Martin’s Home for Runaways.

12. The meal includes cornbread, coleslaw, roasted corn, and rib-eye steak. You can get your steak cooked to order. They mill coat your corn with melted butter if you want it.

13. Tell the papers to print the information on June 13 and after.

Notes for Release B

1. The Lansing Civic Players Guild will put on “Macbeth” using uniforms and dress styles from Stalinist Russia of the late 1940s.

2. “Macbeth” is by William Shakespeare and is about ambition, betrayal and murder.
3. A well-known Broadway actress, Melanie Argent, has a special engagement with the Civic to play Lady Macbeth.

4. To get tickets you can call the box office at 484-9191. You can also reserve seats.

5. The box office is open from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. The play will be performed at the Lansing Civic Center in Lansing, Michigan.

6. Donald Rider, a Lansing actor, will play Macbeth. He has won many awards for his acting.

7. Concerning the costumes, director David Helms said, “Some people may find the costumes jarring when they first see the actors come on stage. But that’s what we want. Shakespeare used timeless themes. That’s why his work continues to speak to us down through the centuries.”

8. Actress Melanie Argent just finished playing the role of Eleanor of Aquitaine in the Broadway production of “Lion in Winter.”

9. Ticket prices are $12.50, $18 and $22. Students can get tickets for $7.50 if they have an ID. These are for student seats only.

10. Performances start at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. There are matinee performances, too, on Saturday and Sunday, which begin at 2 p.m. The play runs through April 1. The play opens March 8, which is a Wednesday.

11. Get this in the newspapers as soon as possible. The contact number for the media is different from the box office number. The contact number is (517) 484-9115. The address of our business office is 2300 East Michigan, Lansing, MI 48912.