ASSIGNMENT 4 (in-class)  Assmt. Weight: 5%

News Releases - Some Helpful Hints

DUE DATES: Work on in class (type in computer lab). News release due. Extra Credit radio release due no later than.

INTRODUCTION

Much publicity about events and programs (especially in the public and private non-profit sectors) is delivered via the news release (or press release). Recreation and natural resource professionals often use news releases sent to local media outlets to announce schedules of activities, programs, and special events. In this project you will write a news release for the Lansing State Journal. For extra credit, you may write a second one for radio, either for WVIC or WITL radio. The news release will be written for something (an event or other important news) relevant to your base team's target organization (relevant only for public or non-profit organizations, not commercial enterprises). Assume you want to publicize the event but do not have money for a paid advertisement. Read this instruction packet, then write your draft news releases.

OBJECTIVES

When working on a news release, you will demonstrate the ability to:

1. organize the facts for your story (i.e., the traditional "who, what, when, why, where, and how" of news writing, all of which should be written in the first one or two paragraphs);

2. prepare a newspaper release (and, optional for extra credit, a radio release) that conforms to accepted standards of style, neatness and spelling;

3. apply the Fog Index to produce copy easily understood by persons with a specified educational level.

ASSIGNMENT (TO BE WRITTEN IN CLASS)

1. Prepare a release for the Lansing State Journal describing the program or event to be conducted by your base team's organization. The release should be geared toward a general community audience and should incorporate a level of reading difficulty corresponding to the eighth through tenth grades. NOTE: The news release should be at least two pages so you can demonstrate knowledge of proper format for releases of more than one page. To be able to calculate the Fog Index, it must also be at least 100 words long.

2. On a separate piece of paper, show your Fog Index calculations for the newspaper release. If the release is above the proper reading level, revise it so it meets the recommended standards OR justify the final calculation and explain why you would/could not revise it.

(Note: You will work on writing this news release during a class period. You may type it in the Natural Resources Bldg. computer lab. Be prepared to hand draw or computer draw a masthead or logo at the top of your paper after you print the document. Be sure to leave space at the top.)
EXTRA CREDIT
You may choose to prepare a second release on the same subject for WVIC or WITL radio. This release should take no more than 15 to 30 seconds to read aloud and should be written in a different style (more informal, personal).

STYLE REQUIREMENTS
News releases vary somewhat in style. However, certain stylistic points are standard. (Note that proper protocol for anything is continuously changing, particularly as the line between electronic and print media becomes increasingly blurred. For example, some places may accept electronic [email] versions of news releases. Some may, in trying to be environmentally considerate, accept releases printed on the front and back of paper rather than only on the front. Always check for preferences of your local media.)

For this assignment, use the following "traditional" format guidelines when preparing your release(s). (Remember that you should always work with your local media to find out their preferences and peculiarities for news release format.)

1. **TYPING:** Your news release should be typed double spaced, with triple spacing between paragraphs.

   *A handwritten release is a dead giveaway that you are an amateur. Remember, every action makes an impression. A handwritten release damages your credibility as a reliable news source, and will end up in the "circular file."*

2. **MARGINS:** Leave generous margins of one and one-half inches on either side of the text.

   *Double spacing and wide margins allow room for the editor to make various corrections and additions to the copy. (On computers, you might want to use 1.25 inches on each side.)*

3. **PAPER:** The news release should be typed on good quality paper (white preferred) and typed on one side only. It generally should be no longer than two pages. *Erasable bond is not acceptable because it smears and produces sloppy-appearing type. (Because you are using plain paper rather than letterhead, please design and sketch your own "letterhead logo" or "masthead" at the top of the first sheet of paper.)*

4. **INDICATING THE SOURCE:** In the upper left-hand corner of your release, after the word "Contact," put your name, the address, telephone number, email, www address, TDD number and other relevant contact information of your organization.

   *This information tells the reporter who can be contacted for additional information on the story, or for verification of the story.*

5. **DATING THE RELEASE:** Every release should be dated. Place your date just below the contact information in the upper left-hand corner of the release.

   *When you use a date within a story, specify the whole date. Instead of saying "The program will be held next Monday," say "The program will be held Monday, December 5." Sometimes releases are kept for several weeks before use, by which time "next Monday" has come and gone.*

6. **PROVIDING RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS** (when the news release should be printed or broadcast): This line, which is usually in caps and often underlined, indicates your preferred release time.

   *Unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise, write FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.* The release instructions are usually located several spaces below the contact information, and may be centered on the page.
NOTE: Sometimes it is desirable to hold the release of the story for a specific time and date. When this is done, you should write (HOLD) FOR RELEASE, MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, P.M. If you do this, don't leave too long a lead time. That increases the danger of the release being lost or the deadline being missed.

7. WRITING THE HEADLINE: The headline is placed between the release information and the body of the story. It should be short and summarize the content of the story.

Headlines for news releases are considered optional because many editors prefer to write their own. However, for small-town papers with small staffs, the headline may be particularly helpful. When a headline is not used, leave the space between the release information and the body of the story blank. (A headline is required for this assignment.)

8. NUMBERING PAGES: If your release runs to a second page, write "- more -" at the bottom center of the page, a double space below the last line of text.

- more -

Succeeding pages should be numbered with an identifying headline or subject reference, either centered at the top of the page or aligned at the left margin, top of the page:

Nature Play Day -- 2

When you come to the end of the release, use the following symbol, centered on the page just below (double spaced) the last line of text (not at the bottom of the page), to indicate the text is complete:

- 30 -

(sometimes you will see ### instead of - 30 -)

The origin of this usage is clouded, but it is widely accepted as the way to indicate the conclusion of a news release.

(It is a good idea to complete sentences--and, if possible, paragraphs--before indicating a move to the next page. Otherwise, if the pages get separated, you could end up with a strange sentence.)

9. WRITING THE RELEASE: The accepted journalistic style for news stories is the "inverted pyramid." The first paragraph (the lead paragraph) should tell the most important fact(s) in the story, and should be a maximum of four lines long (three is preferred). (Remember the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" from high school English?) The next paragraph should present the next most important facts, and so on through the release. In editing the release for publication, the editor usually will start eliminating at the end and work his/her way toward the beginning of the story. Your release should make sense and tell its story no matter where an editor cuts it off.

SEE DIAGRAM NEXT PAGE.
10. **WRITING STYLE:** Use short, simple words. Avoid long words and long sentences. Use the active voice, "the bull ran into the wall," rather than the passive, "the wall was run into by the bull." Avoid clichés, jargon, misspelled words, and poor grammar.

11. **PROOFREAD!!!!!!!** Use spell check to help, but also proofread yourself. (Yes, proofread even if you are using a computer. Use a **dictionary** to check the spelling or meaning of any questionable words.)

**Calculating the Fog Index**

The Fog Index is simply a "quick check" tool to assist you in assessing the "readability" (loosely linked to expected grade level readability) of your writing. It is based on sentence complexity and length as well as word complexity. If the calculated index number is too high (higher than 8th or 9th grade reading level for local newspapers), you should review and revise your writing, as is possible. Things you might do include: splitting compound sentences into two or more; using simpler words (if appropriate) for multiple-syllable words; changing descriptive phrases into two-word elements (e.g., "colors of the rainbow" becomes "rainbow colors").

1. Select a writing sample of close to 100 words (use complete sentences; use a section that provides as close to 100 words as possible) from your news release. (Visually IDENTIFY [hand-mark with brackets] which part of the news release you used.)

2. Find the average number of words per sentence by dividing the total number of words in your sample by the number of sentences.

3. Count the number of words having three syllables or more per 100 words in the section you have identified (no more than 100 words). Do **not** count: (a) proper nouns, (b) combinations of short, easy words such as "timekeeper," (c) verbs that become three-syllable words by adding "ed," "es" or "ing" (such as "collected," "trespasses" or "visiting"). Numerals (such as "1998") count as single words having less than three syllables.

4. Add the answers from 1 and 2 above.

5. Multiply sum from #4 above by 0.4.

6. The resulting figure corresponds roughly to the number of years of schooling a person would require to read the passage with ease and understanding. If the number is "9" or more, describe how you would revise your news release.

*See the next page* for an example of how to "mark" your news release for calculating the Fog Index.
In working on the news release, mark the section used as follows:

Place brackets [ ] around the 100-word section you used.

Place a forward slash / through the period at the end of each sentence in the section. Place a small number over the top of each to indicate "sentence counting."

Underline each appropriate 3-syllable word (see guidelines in assignment).

NOTE: You may mark the copy (text) with pen or pencil; it does not have to be done on the computer.

EXAMPLE:

LANSING, MI-- [ Mackinac State Historic Parks Director Carl R. Nold has announced the appointment of Susan Smith as Assistant Educator.1] Susan was selected from many outstanding candidates.2

As Assistant Educator Smith will support the Mackinac State Historic Parks education program, including developing classroom materials and promoting and coordinating out-of-area outreach programs.3 Smith also will research Americans with Disabilities Act issues and recommend compliance procedures.4 During the summer months, she will assist in training interpretive staff and in evaluating interpretive activities.5

Smith holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in history and secondary education from the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.6 102 words Additionally, she has completed course work at the Cooperstown Graduate Program in History Museum Studies at Cooperstown, New York.

For additional information about news releases, press releases and public service announcements (and to look at an example of a news release adhering to assignment requirements), see pages 78-92 in Reader. See sample news release.

EXTRA CREDIT (optional)

You may choose to also write a radio version of the same story for public broadcast. In most ways, particularly related to format of submissions (except that you may not need to use two pages), radio releases are written the same as newspaper releases. However, radio releases are different from newspaper releases in the following ways, and your release should reflect these differences:

12. SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR RADIO: In addition to its shorter reading length (maximum of 15 to 30 seconds when read out loud), releases written for radio should be presented in a more conversational and friendly tone. Difficult words or unusual names should be given phonetic pronunciations.

Spell out everything--dates, dollars, numbers! Remember that these have to be read aloud. It is disconcerting to hear the inexpert announcer for a small radio station talk about "World War Eleven." (WWII).
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MACKINAC STATE HISTORIC PARKS NAMES NEW ASSISTANT EDUCATOR

LANSING, MI--Mackinac State Historic Parks Director Carl R. Nold has announced the appointment of Susan Smith as Assistant Educator. Susan was selected from many outstanding candidates.

As Assistant Educator, Smith will support the Mackinac State Historic Parks education program, including developing classroom materials and promoting and coordinating out-of-area outreach programs. Smith also will research Americans with Disabilities Act issues and recommend compliance procedures. During the summer months, she will assist in training interpretive staff and in evaluating interpretive activities.

Smith holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in history and secondary education from the College of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. Additionally, she has completed course work at the Cooperstown Graduate Program in History Museum Studies at Cooperstown, New York. Smith has worked as an interpreter and visitor research interviewer for the Minnesota Historic Society and has held positions with the Farmers' Museum in Cooperstown, and with Old Sturbridge Village in Sturbridge, Massachusetts.
Mackinac State Historic Parks--a family of "living history" parks and museums--was established in 1895 to preserve the historic and natural resources of the Mackinac region. Four sites--Fort Mackinac and Mackinac Island State Park on Mackinac Island, and Colonial Michilimackinac and Historic Mill Creek in Mackinaw City--welcome over 1.2 million visitors annually. The Parks offer historical and educational programs, colorful interpretive activities and numerous special events to help travelers discover the rich heritage of Mackinac. Mackinac State Historic Parks will open for the summer season on Friday, May 14, 1999.