

# How to write a news release

**PR PLACE GUIDE**



**Author:** Richard Bailey

## How to write a news release

**Author:** Richard Bailey



### ABOUT THIS GUIDE

- What you will learn: how to write a press/news release and what makes news
- Who the guide is for: anyone new to PR or wanting a refresher in new release creation.

## Introducing news release writing

### WHY 'NEWS' RELEASE?

'Press release' is still widely used, but it sounds old-fashioned. Are you really just targeting print publications - and not the broadcast and online media, nor the public?

'News release' describes what's needed (something new to say) and doesn't specify the ultimate audience. It's released because traditionally organisations did not determine what was news; that was the job of the media. So we release news stories and journalists and editors decide which to report.

Clearly, in a world in which every organisation is a media company<sup>1</sup>, organisations can report their own news. But when everyone is a publisher, who are your readers? PR practitioners recognise the potential for stories to be amplified by the news media, and recognise the value of backlinks<sup>2</sup> - so we keep releasing them.

## News release writing in more detail

### KEY INGREDIENTS

There are five essential ingredients of a news release (plus some optional extras):

1. **News**
2. **Date**
3. **Objectivity**
4. **Opinion**
5. **Contact details**

### WHAT IS NEWS?

#### 'Is it new, or is it surprising?'

That's a good working framework. News should be something new (i.e. not already known). If it isn't strictly new, then it needs to be unusual (surprising). Otherwise, why are you writing the release? Why are you contacting the journalist?

Academics have studied what makes news, and trainee journalists learn about so-called 'news values'. In 2010, Tony Harcup and Deirdre O'Neill critiqued Galtung and Ruge's famous taxonomy of news values and updated it for a world of celebrity and entertainment news<sup>3</sup>.

Continued...

They proposed ten revised news values:

1. **The power elite.** Is the story about powerful individuals, organisations or institutions?
2. **Celebrity.** Does it concern people who are already famous?
3. **Entertainment.** Does the story contain human interest?
4. **Surprise.** Stories that have an element of surprise or contrast.
5. **Bad news.** 'If it bleeds, it leads' is a famous saying amongst journalists.
6. **Good news.** News outlets need to report light as well as shade.
7. **Magnitude.** How many people are affected?
8. **Relevance.** Does the story resonate with the publication or channel's audience?
9. **Follow-up.** Journalists tend to follow-up on stories that are already in the news.
10. **Newspaper agenda.** Does the story fit the newspaper's own agenda?



## DATE

News, like bread, needs to be consumed while fresh. What's news today can be old hat tomorrow (and the daily news cycle only applies to some newspapers, not to broadcasters or online publications). So for the PR practitioner, timing is everything.

It's good practice to date an approved news release with a date in the near future and then contact journalists to offer them sight of it before it goes on general distribution. It's bad practice to release the news to everyone on the list and then contact them to ask:

### 'Did you get my press release?'

This question wastes time and risks damaging relationships.

Once you have an approved news release, you have three options:

1. Release it now ('**For immediate release**')
2. Release it now, but under **embargo** ('not for broadcast or publication before...')
3. Release it as an **exclusive**

For immediate release does not need stating. All that's needed is the date and journalists can work out the rest.

**Use embargoes sparingly:** if they're to protect a big, time-sensitive announcement, then what's to prevent a journalist reporting the story early? If it's to 'big up' an otherwise weak story, then much better to go back and prepare a more valuable story. An embargo can be useful to give journalists time to prepare detailed "packages" about your story, for example if you are releasing research data.

Exclusivity is usually negotiated verbally; some publications value exclusives, but you should honour your promise. How long is it exclusive for?

Continued...



## OBJECTIVITY

You should write about the organisation like a journalist, reporting it 'outside in'. That means 'Company X has today launched product Y' and never are 'We pleased to announce...' because... who cares?

Objective reporting, in the language of a news story, helps the journalist. Objectivity also requires you to seek evidence for your claims and to avoid meaningless hyped-up claims ('revolutionary'). Indeed, try cutting out ALL adjectives and see if you still have a story.

The one exception to the objectivity rule follows.

## OPINION

Objective, adjective-free news can seem austere and it will be lacking in colour and personality. Inject these by allowing a human to express an opinion about the news. But do try to retain the 'outside in' perspective, otherwise all your PR quotations will begin:

**'We are delighted...'**

You write this because you're asking the wrong question. Rather than asking what the company thinks of its announcement, ask what the announcement means to the groups affected. So a car company announcing an electric car could say:

**'This model will mean cleaner and safer air in our cities as well as lower running costs for drivers.'**

So always include at least one quotation, and say who it's from (name and title). Journalists may not lift your quotation, but they may ask to speak to the spokesperson. Remember that the purpose of a news release is not to appear word-for-word in the media, but to help a journalist to do their job.

## CONTACT DETAILS

You want a journalist to follow up on your release. So always provide contact details of a member of the PR or press office team who can answer questions and provide access to spokespeople, photographs etc.

## WRITING THE NEWS RELEASE

Keep in mind that a news release simply needs to cover the news. It shouldn't be a promotional piece and it isn't an advertorial. So the news release should be as short as possible, ideally just three or four paragraphs including a quotation.

## WRITE THE NEWS IN ONE SENTENCE

The most important sentence in a news release is the first one. This needs to cover the essentials of the story. The first sentence is usually the first paragraph (learn to write like a news journalist and follow the inverted pyramid principle in which the most important information is presented first).



### Figure 1: inverted pyramid of news

Journalists are trained to answer the following questions:

- **Who?**
- **What?**
- **When?**
- **Where?**
- **Why?**
- **How?**

But that may lead to too much information for one short sentence, so you can answer these questions in your news sentence:

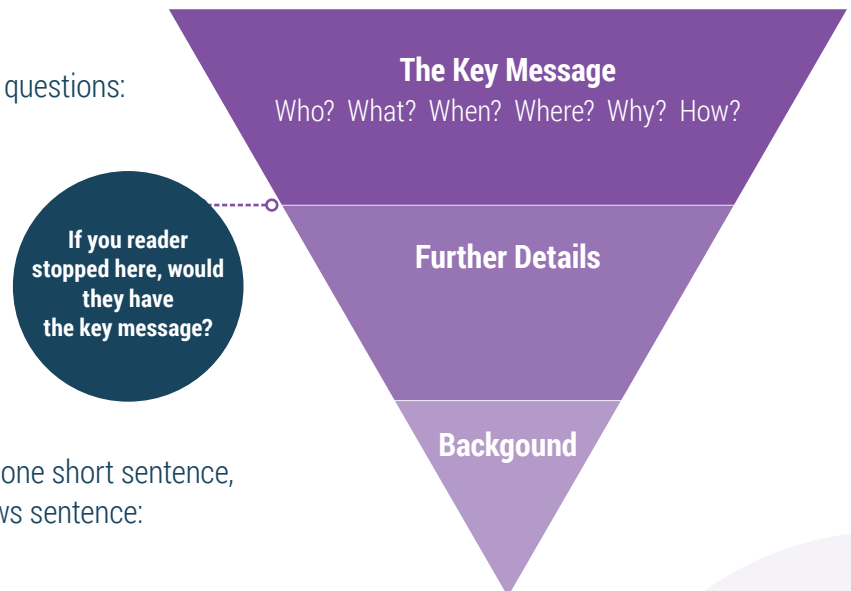
- **What happened?**
- **So what?**

This forces you to think of news as an event that happens. No event, no news. No news, no news release.

The 'so what?' question helps give perspective on the news. Companies are motivated to think that everything they do is important and they put pressure on their PR teams to create news from nothing. So they've opened a branch office in Glasgow. So what? You might discover an angle about Scotland and Brexit<sup>4</sup> but the story almost certainly isn't just about business expansion.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

Notes can follow your news release. Strictly, they should be notes about that story, not generic information about the company, though a standard paragraph about the business is better hidden here than in the news itself. So the notes could provide supporting evidence of the market research cited in the story, or further technical information about the product announced.



## Learn more

### ONLINE:

Friends of the Earth: [How to write a killer press release](#)

The Guardian: How to write an effective press release

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

### SUGGESTED BOOKS:

The PR Masterclass (2014) by A. Singleton. Published by Wiley

Practical Journalism: How to Write News (2006) by H. Sissons. Published by Sage

## TOOLKIT: TEMPLATE NEWS RELEASE

### YOUR SHORT TITLE HERE

Title should describe the story: write it last!  
Keep it descriptive -  
Consider SEO

#### Date

Your first paragraph should tell the whole story in outline. Keep it short, with minimal punctuation.

The next paragraph(s) should provide further information in support of the news story. Write objectively and stick to the facts.

"A quotation – from a named person – provides opinion and colour. Try explaining why this news matters to affected groups."

"You can add a further quotation from an independent expert."

#### Notes to editors

- Provide sources for any research cited.
- Provide supporting information on the product or service described in the news release.
- Provide useful links to e.g. company website.

#### For further information:

Your name, email address and phone number (are you contactable out of office hours?)

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.everycompanyisamediacompany.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backlink>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14616700118449>

<sup>4</sup> Brexit is the term used to describe the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

## ABOUT PR PLACE

PR Place is PR Academy's online community and resource hub. It is where public relations and communication practice meets scholarship, where insight is derived from evidence, and where questions of career development and professionalism are explored. It is a resource to help practitioners become more effective and assist with the completion of professional and academic assignments.

PR Academy was established in 2007. It is the largest teaching centre for qualifications awarded by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. It offers qualifications online, face to face in London or through blended learning.

**Discover more:** <https://pracademy.co.uk/insights/>

**For PR Place content ideas and comments, email:** [editor@prplace.com](mailto:editor@prplace.com)

**To find out about our courses, email:** [courses@pracademy.co.uk](mailto:courses@pracademy.co.uk)

## Want to know more or get signed up?

**FIND OUT ABOUT OUR COURSES**

Call Shelley on: +44 (0)20 3862 6910

Email: [courses@pracademy.co.uk](mailto:courses@pracademy.co.uk)