



WRITING NEWS RELEASES AND MEDIA ADVISORIES

MEDIA ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

(ALSO CALLED PRESS RELEASE OR MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT)

News releases are used to release information or announce an event to attract media coverage. Releases should be written so they could be reprinted directly or with few changes. A news release differs from a media advisory by providing detailed, specific information on the issue or event you want covered. If you are launching a new campaign or holding a press conference on a specific issue, the news release would be distributed on the day of the launch or event. It should be no longer than two pages, because media are often limited in how much they can use and print.

STARTING YOUR PRESS RELEASE

Be sure to use the title NEWS RELEASE and include contact information in case the media have questions, need additional information, or want to follow up with someone. Also, make sure you note FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE at the top so editors understand it can be printed as soon as it is received. If you want to send the release out early, but don't want it to be printed until a certain date, you can note that at the top with EMBARGOED UNTIL [DATE YOU ARE RELEASING THE INFORMATION].

GUIDELINES FOR HEADLINES

Compose a short phrase that conveys the most significant benefit your reader will derive from the news.

- Ask yourself if your statement is meaningful to someone not closely involved with your business. Better yet, ask a few people outside of your organization to read your draft headlines and give you feedback on what they mean to them.
- Try to achieve the greatest impact using the fewest words.

Your headline does not have to be as dramatic as newspaper headlines often are. Editors are looking for information in the headline, so try to at least include who, what, and why. Whatever headline you use, it must accurately reflect the content that follows.

Examples:

Area Senior Citizens to Walk a Mile in Celebration of Older Americans Month

New Fitness and Nutrition Program for Older Americans Promotes Long-Term Living

Don't forget, a little spice can make your news release stand out from the crowd.



FIRST PARAGRAPH

Your first paragraph will sell the story (or not). It is often the only part an editor has time to read before deciding to continue reading or throw it away. Who, what, when, where, why, and how are the six critical ingredients of all news releases. Therefore, your first paragraph should start with the city of origin and date, and contain the five "W's" and the "H." Keep each paragraph relatively short—two to four sentences. This will make it easier for editors to quickly extract the information they may want to use in a news story.

Example:

White Plains, May 4, 2005. Area seniors kicked off Older Americans Month by walking a mile in the downtown convention center. The walk was led by Mr. Jones and his mother, Mrs. Jones, who is celebrating her 82nd birthday this month. The walk emphasized the importance of maintaining and improving physical fitness and the quality of life as we age. Area senior centers have a number of other activities planned during May to help Older Americans learn more about resources available to live longer, healthier, more engaged, and more independent lives.

MIDDLE PARAGRAPHS

Because most editors read through releases quickly and often not to the end, you must consider what additional information is most important, and position it after the opening paragraph. This is called "pyramiding." You can add credibility to your news release by providing a statement from your spokesperson explaining the importance of your issue, or the key finding from a study that supports your actions. You may also want to include additional information about health and fitness as it relates to older Americans.

Examples:

"Providing a better quality of life for our seniors should be one of our most important community goals," said Mr. Jones. "We can improve our health with something as simple as a walk around the block."

Next year, some baby boomers will be the first of their generation to turn 60—a generation that exceeds 78 million people. Many individuals are aging well and living longer than at any time in history, but still far too many people remain inactive and sedentary. According to a study done by the National Institute on Aging, only 1 in 3 people over the age of 65 regularly engages in exercise.

THE END

To indicate that the news release has ended, journalism traditionally has used the designations "###" or "-30-." It does not matter which one you use.

See "Sample News Release."

WRITING A MEDIA ADVISORY (ALSO CALLED MEDIA ALERT)

A media advisory alerts the media to an upcoming event such as a press conference, an event to release new information, or an event to honor individuals in your community. Usually, media advisories simply list the who, what, when, where, and why, as opposed to news releases, which give more context and detail about events.

Your media advisory should go out 3 to 5 days before the event to alert the media that it is coming. This allows them to save the date and be available to cover it. You may also want to send it out a second time—2 days before or the day before—just as a reminder. This is when your media list comes in handy because it allows you to send releases and advisories directly to reporters who have covered or shown an interest in your issues in the past. (See "Identifying Media Opportunities.") Use your media list to follow up with phone calls the day before the event as a courtesy reminder. This can also help you learn how much media to expect at your event.

A media advisory might look like this:

MEDIA ADVISORY

Contact: Elizabeth Taylor, (222) 555-5555

What: Kick-off for Older Americans Month

When: May 6, 2005

Where: Roundtree Mall

Who: Mr. Jones will lead a walk for seniors, grandparents, parents, and children to celebrate Older Americans Month.

Why: The President has designated May as Older American's Month to celebrate long-term living.

Today's older Americans are healthier than ever before. As the population ages, we need to ensure that we reduce the causes of disease and disability so that older persons can remain healthy, active, independent, and engaged for as long as possible.