

PRESS RELEASE POINTERS

A tip sheet for writing releases that get read

1. Contact information should be prominent. Include a phone number and email of someone who is available to answer any questions within a couple of hours. An editor who cannot find some crucial bit of information will assign a story from someone else's release.
2. On the left, above the headline, write in all caps: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE. Underneath, put the date you're sending the release (NOT the date of the event, etc.).
3. Keep headlines as short as possible, descriptive, and simple: "Puppies and children create art at library." Assume the person reading your release is doing so at the end of a long day.
4. Preceding the first paragraph, use a formal dateline to tell the editor exactly where something is happening. A dateline example: AURORA, Ill.—
5. Remember the 5 W's of journalism: Who, What, When, Where, and Why. In other words, who is involved, what are they doing, when are they doing it, where are they doing it, and why are they doing it. This should all be included in the first two paragraphs. Why does your event or item deserve notice, how is it different, and does it relate to a broader current issue?
6. Within the body of the release, keep language simple and direct. An editor who does not understand your point will reach for the Delete key or remove all but the most basic details.
7. When appropriate, include links to websites, YouTube videos, etc.
8. After writing your release, put it aside for a day or two. Fresh eyes and a fresh mind more easily spot errors and possible improvements.
9. Proofread. Check for typos, spelling, grammar, and accurate dates and times. Or risk looking unprofessional and creating errors reporters cannot check.
10. Research publications to make sure you're sending a release to those most relevant to your topic. Send your release to a specific person.
11. Send early. Stories may be assigned a day or two in advance during the week and several days ahead for weekends.
12. Do not send attachments because they may be stripped off by security filters. Copy and paste the release in the main email message.
13. Follow up. If you have had no response and no publication of your release, send a polite reminder. Your first message may have been buried in someone's inbox.
14. Think pictures. "Children and puppies creating art" is a natural for video or photos. Mention picture possibilities because reporters and photographers often work separately. One editor may use only your release but another may consider your event worthy of photos.
15. Nothing guarantees coverage. News is fluid. Plans change at the last minute, so don't be disappointed if no one appears to cover your event.

Questions? Need help? Feel free to contact any one of us:

Jeff Steele
scribsteel@ameritech.net
773-481-0010

David Steinkraus
david@davidwords.com
www.davidwords.com
262-995-9425

Laura Stigler
Shebang! Writing-2-Consulting
laurastigler@earthlink.net
www.laurastiglerwriter.com
773-248-0158

SAMPLE HEADLINES

1)

CLIENT: Rentokil Pest Control

PURPOSE OF RELEASE: To promote the company's business via a story, make them the go-to guys for pest control and to come across as providing a public service

Original head:

(Client requested to rescue this headline and release. Wanted it to be more consumer-friendly.)

**MAY IS NATIONAL ASTHMA AND ALLERGY AWARENESS MONTH
BREATHE MORE EASILY: INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT (IPM)
HELPS REDUCE ASTHMA AND ALLERGY SYMPTOMS**

Revised "consumer-ese" headline

**SUFFERING FROM ALLERGIES? ASTHMA ATTACKS?
CREEPY, CRAWLY CRITTERS COULD BE THE TRIGGERS**

2)

CLIENT: Stew & Donny Music

PURPOSE OF RELEASE: Promote specific product, trumpet its unique selling point, tie-in to upcoming holiday

Ineffective

(Who are Stew & Donny? Doesn't say "kids." Lays there.)

STEW & DONNY CREATE PERSONALIZED HALLOWEEN SONG

Much better

(More fun, personalized, mentions kids, sounds special, exciting, appeals to parents.)

**A HALLOWEEN SONG THAT HAS YOUR KID'S NAME ON IT:
WHAT A TREAT!**

3)

CLIENT: Independent Writers of Chicago

PURPOSE: Announce their upcoming meeting (event), targeting authors who haven't a clue as to how to get their book(s) published.

Ineffective

(There's a lot more to this event than meets this blah headline.
Nothing to see here. Move along, folks.)

**INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO (IWOC)
LEARN HOW TO GET THEIR BOOK PUBLISHED**

Very effective

(Piques interest with a fun question, then tells the whole purpose of the event in a neat nutshell.)

**ARE YOU "BOOK" SMART?
FROM WRITING TO MARKETING YOUR BOOK,
INDEPENDENT WRITERS OF CHICAGO (IWOC)
LEARN THE A-B-C'S OF GETTING PUBLISHED**

4)

CLIENT: DanceArt

PURPOSE: Tug at the heartstrings, create awareness of the organization, promote its public service

Acceptable

DanceArt: A COMMUNITY DANCE SCHOOL CATERING TO KIDS AT RISK

Even better

(More emotional, more poetic, befitting the artistic nature of the topic.)

**DANCING INTO THE SOULS
OF CHILDREN AT RISK**

The story of DanceArt