



Writing a News Release: What's Newsworthy?

This lesson will define a news release and several of its components. You'll learn about the journalistic elements of news releases, as well as key components which help to make a news release effective.

What Is a News Release?

If you've ever heard the phrase 'Extra, Extra, Read All About It!' then you've been introduced to a news release.

A **news release**, also known as a 'press' or 'media release', is a form of communication designed to attract media attention to important or newsworthy events. A news release may announce various types of news including, but not limited to, local news, events, sports, concerts, weather, and crime.

The Five W's

Just what does a newsworthy news release entail? It's often said that a good news release contains elements of the **five W's**: the basic pieces of information required to understand an event or story. Let's look at each of the five W's: who, what, where, when, and why.

Who

The first 'W' is 'who': who is the subject of the press release? For example, the who could be John Doe, author and award-winning poet; it could be a company spokesman, or the company itself. When addressing the 'who,' it's important to remember to include not only the individual's name, but their title and organization.

What

The 'what' corresponds to the actual event or story that is taking place. The 'what' may refer to an art exhibit, a concert, or a local festival; it could be a new product launch, an innovation, or the bestowing of an award.

When

When is the event scheduled to take place? News releases are often intended to draw attention to an upcoming event, and the only way they can be effective is if the reader is given the event's time and date. It is important that as much information as possible be included, such as the day, the time, and the ending time.

Where

The location of the event or story is central to understanding its importance. Detail is important; in addition to identifying the city (and perhaps the neighborhood), an extra step should be taken to provide directions to the event or opportunity.

Why

Why is the event or story happening? In the case of company news releases, why does the company consider this event to be newsworthy? It could be to inform or educate, or perhaps because something new (like a facility or product) is being introduced to the public.



The five Ws are central to helping readers understand news.

Elements of an Effective News Release

Creating an effective news release takes the use of specific techniques and elements, such as:



A great headline can help entice readers to explore a news release.

Eye-catching Headlines

As we discussed, the phrase 'Extra, Extra, Read All About It!' is one that is used to catch the attention of an audience. One of the key elements of a news release is a **headline** that grabs the attention of its readers at the very beginning of the release. The objective here is simple: the catchier the headline, the greater the desire to know more about the story.

Can you recall some of your favorite commercial jingles or ads? How about the 'Snap, Crackle, Pop' of Rice Krispies cereal? What about 'like a good neighbor, State Farm is there?' These products are memorable partly because of the catchiness of their jingles or ads. A great headline can have a similar effect.

The Opening Paragraph

For a news release to be effective, the **opening paragraph** that follows the headline should lure readers into the news. If the headline is baiting the hook, then the opening paragraph could be considered casting the reel into the water.

An opening paragraph should begin with a question or statement that relates to the topic. For example, if the headline reads 'Large Tuna Fish Walks On Land,' then the opening paragraph could begin with 'What happens when the chicken of the sea walks on land?' The question acts as a lead-in, enticing readers to continue reading further.

Other Key Components

Now that we've addressed the elements of an effective news release, let's take a look at a few other things that help to make them even more impactful:

The News Should Be New

When presenting a news release, the news must be recent. Readers will want to know the impact it's going to have on their world and lives, and items that have been around for years won't be quite as interesting.

The News Is Timed Well

Timing is everything, as they say. Imagine that you are the manager of a business whose schedule runs Monday through Friday, from 8 AM to 5 PM. You have an important memo to forward to your employees. Would you choose to release the message on a Friday at 4:45 PM, when everyone is preparing to leave for the weekend? Probably not - you'd run the risk of people ignoring the message because they have already checked out mentally. A news release must be strategically planned so that its release reaches as many members of its target audience as possible.

The News Matters Outside of Your Organization

It is not news if your office just got a brand-new refrigerator in the break room - that's information which is only relevant to your organization. A news release must include content that's meaningful to a larger community of readers.

Lesson Summary