

PRESS RELEASES

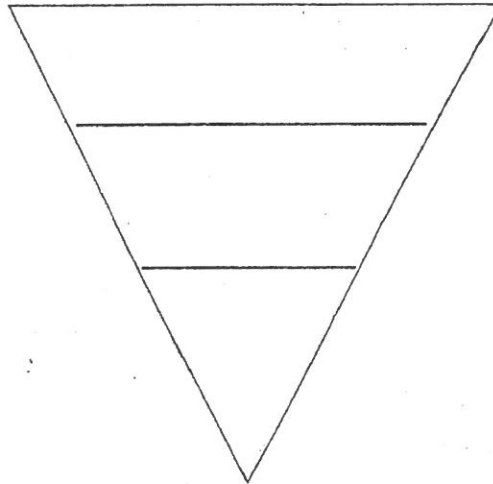
an excerpt from *A Guide to Professional Writing in the Arts*

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- Make sure your news is newsworthy.
- Project the sense that you're the type of person with whom an editor would want to work.
- Edit press releases carefully to help create a positive impression
- Distribute press releases only to a select and targeted audience.
- Update lists often to account for any turnover on the receiving end.
- Make sure you use each organization's preferred form of contact.
- Know deadlines and publishing schedules and plan accordingly.
- Think carefully before following up the press release with a phone call.

THE BASICS OF THE INVERTED PYRAMID



PUTTING IT ON THE PAGE

An effective press release encompasses more than just organizing around the inverted pyramid, however. Part of writing a strong press release includes conveying the information through a standard look or format. Press releases are not formatted haphazardly. Each element of the layout has a specific purpose. Editors expect to find specific information in certain locations, and if they don't find it, they are more likely to toss the release than they are to read through the

whole thing and hunt for the information that should be found easily. As with other forms of writing, there is no one way to format a press release. Different sources will have slightly different recommendations about page layout, but generally speaking, the required content always remains the same. Below you will find three slightly different ways to format press releases (two for printed releases, one for electronic releases). Select the one that works best for you and your organization and follow it whenever you write press releases. Even though you may write releases months apart, remember that you want to project a consistent image for your organization, meaning that unless you have a compelling reason for changing, the press releases should always follow the same basic format. If your organization has a press release template it prefers, follow that.

All press releases need to contain the same seven essential pieces of information. Without them, no press release is complete. As you construct and edit your press releases, make sure you:

- **Place FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, in all caps (bold optional), in the top left of your press release (below your letterhead).** These words inform the recipient that the information is ready to be shared with the world. In the case that your release *isn't* meant to go out quite yet, you may substitute the words FOR RELEASE ON JUNE 9, 2006 (or whatever date) in its place. Generally, though, writers intend for press releases to be shared immediately.
- **Double check the accuracy of your contact information.** Without complete information reporters may not be able to contact you to learn more about your event or activity. Providing *all* contact information is crucial: name, phone numbers, fax, and email. (including your official title is optional). Since editors and reporters often work past regular business hours, you may wish to include your cell or home number. Contact information is generally found at the top right of a press release.
- **Craft an attention getting headline.** Entice your readers through a headline that goes beyond the mundane. "A New Season for Denver Ballet" is pretty boring; "Denver Ballet Leaps into 25th Season" is a bit more descriptive and lively. Whatever your headline, capitalize all major words (or all words if you prefer) and bold and center it on the page.
- **Provide the *where* and *when* in the dateline.** Before beginning the body of the press release include the city, state, and date of origination, followed by a dash. Boston, MA, December 30, 2007--. An acceptable variation of this approach is to put the city and state before the body of the press release and move the date to just below "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE."
- **Answer the reporter's questions in the opening paragraph.** *Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How Much* should all be addressed in this first section (the announcement section of the inverted pyramid).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 30, 2008

Contact: Maggie Hawthorne
555/709.2557—work
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mhawthorn@arts.org

INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED PERFORMER JOINS ANYTOWN SYMPHONY

(Anytown, PA)-- Symphony Hall will form the backdrop for a concert by Internationally acclaimed violinist Emily Calhoun. Ms. Calhoun, named the 2006 Rising Star by the National Orchestral Association, joins the Anytown Symphony on November 14 for an evening of Hayden, Mozart, and Beethoven. Tickets range from \$30 to \$75 and are currently available at the Symphony box office, online at anytownsymphony.org, or by phoning 555/709.5149.

Emily Calhoun has performed to sold out houses in Europe, Japan, and the United States. This concert provides an outstanding opportunity to enjoy Ms. Calhoun's work first-hand as she joins the Anytown Symphony in performing Haydn's Symphony No. 102, Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante* and Beethoven's acclaimed Symphony No. 7. Newcomers to classical music, as well as life-long patrons, won't want to miss this opportunity to see one of the world's finest young violinists interpreting the masters.

Tickets are on sale now, but are going fast. Be sure to reserve your tickets for the November 14 performance of the Anytown Symphony with special guest Emily Calhoun. Phone 555/709.5149 to reserve your tickets for this evening to remember.

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- **Flesh out the details on the event or activity.** In the development section of the inverted pyramid, provide any pertinent background information, plot summary, show description, etc. to help readers decide whether your event is worth covering. You might stress principal performers and artists, what is new or exciting about the event, who might be interested in attending, and what they can hope to take away from the experience. Stressing ties to the community can often increase the news value of your piece.
- **Wrap up with a quick summary of essential points.** Finish your piece by restating contact information, ticket prices, location of the event, duration of run, and so on. Doing so is a courtesy to the readers whose interest you may have piqued with your carefully crafted development section.

With the exception of electronically distributed press releases, all releases also follow the same formatting conventions. They are printed on only one side of 8 ½" x 11" letterhead (unless the release runs two pages, in which case the first page is letterhead and the following page is plain white paper). With the exception of some of the header information, press releases are double-spaced with at least one inch margins all around. They are concise and waste no time getting to the point. They feature bold headlines (in order to grab attention) and use white space effectively. If press releases run more than one page, the word "more" appears inside dashes at the bottom of the first page. On page two appears an abbreviated title, again in bold, followed by "Page 2" in parenthesis. Finally, all press releases end with three number signs (###) or similar indicator, signaling the end of the transmission. The use of ### is especially helpful when faxing information so that the recipient knows he or she has received all parts of the message.

