

HOW TO WRITE

PERFECT
PRESS
RELEASES



THE WORKBOOK

Steven Lewis

This is a workbook available as a bonus with the book "How to Write Perfect Press Releases" by Steven Lewis. The book is available from Amazon.com, among other places.

Writing a perfect press release

Before you start writing the release

What is your goal for this release? For example, it's not "to get an article in *The Gazette*" rather "To get the readers of *The Gazette* to see Professor Jones as an expert in maintaining inland habitats."

The goal of this release is:

What are the three most important pieces of information you're trying to get across in this release:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Easy things first

Let's get the easy bits out of the way first. Your press release needs:

1. A date
2. Your contact details (the ones you can be reached on even when you're out of the office)

The headline

This is the most important part of your media release. It's probably the hardest part too. Don't be lulled into writing the headline quickly because it's only 10 words or so. Arguably, a headline is where you should spend the most time because it's the only part of your release that everyone who sees the release will read. Your headline is the advertisement for the rest of the release. If it doesn't interest people, they won't go further to see if it gets any more interesting from there.

Quick! Write whatever comes into your mind first as a potential headline:

Now ask:

1. Does it sound interesting to the target journalist without being too obscure?
2. Does it suggest the most important element of the story you're suggesting the target journalist will benefit from writing?
3. Is it short enough that enough of it will be visible on the recipient's phone or computer when the headline is used as an email subject line?

The first paragraph

Don't think of this as the first paragraph. For now, think of this – together with the headline – as being the entire release. Between the headline and the first paragraph have you pretty much told your whole story? Refer to your key messages. Are at least the top two covered here?

If in doubt, try it out on someone who doesn't know what you're writing about. Read the headline and the first paragraph to that person then ask them what they have taken from it. (If you're not in doubt, you might not be taking this seriously enough.)

Quick! Write whatever comes into your mind first as a potential headline:

The first quotation

Typically the second paragraph of a release is the first quotation. This would be from someone in the organisation whom you would like the media to see as the spokesman on the topic in question.

The purpose of the quotation is:

1. To give a journalist something to use in case a quotation from a release is enough
2. To give a journalist a flavour of what that person will be saying if interviewed
3. To give a journalist who does interview the person quote a neat quotation in case they need one even though they've done an interview. (Real life quotations are seldom so tidy as the ones crafted for a media release.)

Don't quote someone you don't intend to make available for interviews. Why create an interest in a person by suggesting he or she has interesting things to say on a topic if the journalist is never going to get to find out.

In the structure of the release, the quotation should advance your key messages. We're talking about the second paragraph. This is prime real estate in your release, third only to the headline and the first paragraph.

What is your first quotation:

As yourself, which key messages does this quotation advance?

- 1.
- 2.

Remember, the media story doesn't have to (and most likely won't) follow the outline of your media release. If this quotation stands on its own in a media story, does it still advance your agenda? If not, rewrite it.

The rest of the release

The release of the release should follow the pattern laid down in *How to Write Perfect Press Releases*, i.e. information should flow in descending order of importance.

The About us section of the release

Like the headline, this is another area of the release where it would be easy to get lulled into a false sense of security. The hard work is done: the headline is written, the rest of the release is finished, all you need to do know is dash off a few words describing your company. Wrong.

The About us section is a secondary opportunity to present your expertise, the reason you're the people the journalist should be speaking to about this story. Are you a major player in the field? Are you widely published on this topic? Have you been speaking on this topic at all the right conferences? Are you the biggest, the best, the shiniest? Have you gone from zero to 60 yourselves using the information you're presenting in the release?

Not all of that sort of information would have been central to the story. If you're promoting, say, a research report, it might not fit in the main body of the story to say that you employ 27 per cent of the world's researchers in this area. But it's a nice thing to mention in your About us section because it lends credibility.

What are three reasons you are the right people to speak to about a story like this?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now use those in your About us section rather than cutting and pasting the generic blurb you have on your website. The blurb on your website has to work for everyone visiting the site. The About us section in your press release has only to impress the journalist receiving the release, so you can be specific.

Refer to step one

It's easy to digress when writing a release, especially because you're probably close to the material, which is why you're the one writing it. That's why you wrote out your goal and your key messages at the beginning.

Refer to them now then read the draft of your release. Did you nail the goal? If this release ends up in a publication, does it do what you wanted it to do? Are your three key messages clear in the release? If you show this release to a friend

and ask him or her the three biggest things he or she took from the release, would those things be your key messages?

Need help?

If you want the best possible result for your release, I'm available for coaching. I'll review your angle, your story, your key messages and edit your release, so you'll have a press release your target journalist can't resist. Email me at steven@taleist.com