

You write a press release when you want to make it as easy as possible for the media to reproduce your message. In order to do this you should first know what your message is! Knowing what you want to say is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for getting your ideas across. There are at least seven requirements that you should take into account, and which should increase the chances of your message being published or broadcast.

1 Consider the *audience* you are aiming at:

- well-informed;
- general audience.

Depending on your target audience, your press release poses different questions. And depending on the medium that you target, the message may also need to be phrased differently. If you send the press release to well-informed audiences or editors, it can be more detailed and/or technical.

2 Always *write from a journalist's perspective*. Use the style of writing normally used in newspapers, in order to enable the journalist to use the text with as little effort as possible:

- Use the third person singular; never write 'I', 'we' or 'our organisation'.
- Use quotation marks when you quote yourself or someone else.

Read your target newspaper or magazine carefully to ascertain what the editorial style is.

3 The first sentence(s) of your text should make the content of the text clear immediately. Journalists use the rule of thumb that you begin by answering the five 'W' questions: **Who**, **What**, **When**, **Where** and **Why**. These questions are solidly scientific. When combined with the 'How' question, these same five 'W' questions are the so called 'organising questions' for bargaining theory (Cf. Raiffa, 1982). The 'W' categories also cover the questions you pose when you try to formulate an appropriate research question (⊕A5). To illustrate the powerful effect of starting with these questions, consider the following exemplary articles, which were taken from the front page of the Financial Times.

**Two examples of opening lines**

	<i>Who</i>		
<i>Who</i>	<b>Sinn Féin leader to meet Clinton on US fund-raising visit</b>	<b>Yen's rise forces up Japanese computer chip prices</b>	<i>Where</i>
<i>What</i>	<b>By Jurek Martin in Washington</b>	<b>By William Dawkins in Tokyo</b>	<i>What</i>
<i>Where</i>	'Mr Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin leader, is to meet President Bill Clinton next week at a White House reception on St Patrick's day after being granted a three-month US entry visa.	Japan's top two semiconductor producers yesterday warned they were considering an increase in their dollar-denominated export prices to the US to compensate for the impact of the recent rise of the yen.	
	<i>Why</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>When</i> <i>Why</i>


Source: Financial Times, March 10 1995 (Both articles on front page)

4 Try to limit the message to *one page* (spaced one-and-a-half). Journal editors receive dozens of press releases every day. You cannot expect the journalist to spend much time reading the release. If you want to write the article yourself, contact the editor, and ask whether they are interested in the article.

- 5 Propose a *clear title* that covers the content of the release. It is generally considered to be the editor's prerogative to come up with a 'catchy' heading for the article, so only summarise the article in the title. Perhaps you can suggest some alternative headings (⊕B18 for titles).
- 6 Spend time finding *illustrations*, if they are relevant to the article. The editors of most journals are very keen on combining written and visual information. A good illustration or a photograph considerably increases the chances of getting your press release published.
- 7 Give clear information about where the journalist can obtain *additional information*: the name of a contact, telephone number and address of the institute at the top or bottom of the press release.

**Tips:** When you write a paper, a policy memo or a summary of your thesis outline (⊕B16), try to think of the contents of an imaginary press release. What would be the most interesting part of your research for a wider audience? This can help you find out what your *message* should be, and to emphasize it throughout your writing, even if there is not going to be a press release! This should at least help you to formulate a powerful first line.

#### Format of a press release


(logo)

[Name of the organisation]  
 [Street Address]  
 [City, Postal Code]

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**For immediate release**

Wednesday, 14 February, 2007

[City] -- [Type information here]

**For further information:**  
 [name contact person]  
 [telephone and extension number]