

Tips on Writing a News Release

1. What's the Story?

Newspaper editors and the media want to know what's going on in their communities. An engaging press release with an interesting 'hook' or angle is an excellent way to gain exposure for your ADA Anniversary Celebration or event. The objective of a news release is to capture the attention of your audience and educate them about the event, your organization and the DBTACs. What are you doing in your region to deserve attention now? It's not enough to say "Hi! We're here!" at regular intervals throughout the year. Do not send a release out for the sake of just sending one. Make sure your press releases contain valuable information. Make every word count! What's significant about your work and the partnerships you have formed to date? Briefly tie in related community issues as appropriate. Develop local angles for stories. Don't just compile a list of newspaper names and addresses or local television stations — study them to understand local concerns.

2. Remember the Five W's and the H

Editors are inundated daily with press releases. Catch the editor's attention right away. They almost always edit news releases or use them as springboards for stories. Editors cut material from the bottom up, so make your copy stand out. Your goal is to communicate your event using every day language, so avoid overusing technical jargon and acronyms. Leave the technical details for a phone call or a follow-up email. Once an editor contacts you, you will be allowed to give an interview and go into more depth on your event.

Once you have decided on the message, you will get an editor's attention quickly if you include the following information in the first paragraph. Answer these questions:

- **Who** is the story about?
- **What** is happening?
- **When** will the event take place?
- **Where** is it?

Your One-Stop Resource for Information about the Americans with Disabilities Act

This material is provided by the DBTAC National Network of ADA Centers. The DBTAC's are funded by the National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation and Research (NIDRR), the US Department of Education (Grant # H133A060085), to provide technical assistance, training, and materials on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The information, materials, and technical assistance provided are intended solely as information guidance and are neither a determination of your legal rights or responsibilities under the Act, nor binding on any agency with enforcement responsibility under the ADA.

- **Why** am I reading about this now?
- **How** do I get more information?

3. Focus

Pick the one most important issue to talk about in each release. For example, ADA training courses in your area would cover one release. The ADA Anniversary is a separate activity, and requires another release. If you are sponsoring or participating in a county-wide job fair, write another release to announce that activity.

The point of a release is to entice the reader or journalist to contact you for additional information. A well written press release does not need to be a novel. In fact, shorter press releases (usually between 175 – 300 words) tend to receive more exposure. Why? Because many journalists may be looking for a short informative piece of information to fill a spot within a magazine, newspaper or web site. Have you ever seen short snip-its on one side of a magazine, or down the side of a web page? Guess where the information comes from?

4. Style and Voice

To make the best impression, the release should be typed double-spaced on letterhead, giving the editor space to make comments. Indent paragraphs. Have one-inch margins all around, and make sure it is free of errors, smudges, or smears.

Write in the active voice, using vivid verbs. Spell out the name of an organization the first time you use it, and enclose its acronym in parentheses. Use the acronym on second reference. Don't overuse descriptive phrases, such as "wonderful," "fabulous," "greatest," and so on.

Make sure everything is true and factual. Include meaningful quotes from your staff, representatives, business leaders, local politicians, and other individuals as necessary, and include the DBTAC toll-free number—1-800-949-4232 (V/TTY).

NOTE: Having permission to use a quote is extremely important. If you want to quote copyrighted information within your press release, obtain written permission to use this information. If you personally know the individual, verbal permission may be all that is required. If you are unsure, it is best to receive permission in writing.

If you are using facts and statistics to enhance your story, make sure that you provide source attributions to add credibility.

Many people, when they see or hear the word "disability," automatically think of charity or health concerns. Make sure you are sending the desired message—that the ADA is a business, economic, and civil rights issue, and that your organization and the DBTACs are a resource for everyone.

5. Format

Here are some basic guidelines:

- Center “News Release” at the top of the page, just below the logo, and put it in bold type. The contact information should appear at the top, with FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE or RELEASE BY and the current date on the left, and the contact name, phone number, FAX number, and e-mail address on the right. Insert two blank lines before beginning the headline.
- Prepare an action headline. Center it and put it in bold type. Insert two more blank lines. Before beginning the body of the release, make the text flush left and indent paragraphs.
- Put the dateline first—city and state, with appropriate abbreviations. The Associated Press Stylebook is the standard manual for newspaper reporters, copy editors, and section editors. It is helpful to adopt their style, and it costs less than \$20 at professional bookstores and well-stocked independent and chain bookstores.
- After the dateline, include the lead paragraph, and then develop the release in a logical sequence. Put the most important facts first, and gradually put information of lesser importance in succeeding paragraphs, in case it is cut. Before the end of the first page, center the word -MORE-. Continue with the second page, if necessary, and include a page number. A news release should be no longer than two pages.
- You may want to say whether photos or interviews are available. Put this information in all caps, and use phrases like PHOTOGRAPHS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST or INTERVIEWS WITH [NAME OF PERSON] ARE BEING SCHEDULED NOW.
- At the end of the release, type -30- or ###, and center it. Any information after -30- or ##### will not be published.

(This material was summarized from Kay Borden's *Bulletproof News Releases: Practical, No-holds-barred Advice for Small Business* from 135 American Newspaper Editors published in 1994 by Franklin-Sarrett Publishers.)



How to Write and Format a Press Release for E-mail Distribution

E-mail press releases are usually shorter in length than their print counterparts. The majority of electronic press releases sent are 400 words of text organized into five, short two to three sentence paragraphs.

E-mail software allows the user to set limits on the size of messages it will download. Since many individuals do not change the default limit on their e-mail software, long messages can be truncated. For this reason it is discouraged from sending extremely lengthy electronic news releases.

Information such as photographs and other supporting documents usually included in a printed media kit may be published online where reporters may access them easily at their convenience and the URLs for screen shots of your Web site may also be included in the news release.

Some reporters have limited online access. As a courtesy, always include a contact method for reporters who prefer to have materials mailed to them by conventional means.

Source: **Xpress Press News Service** (www.xpresspress.com/PRnotes.html)

Additional Information about Press Releases:

How to Write a Great Press Release: A Sample Press Release Template

www.publicityinsider.com/release.asp

How to Write a Press Release

www.lunareclipse.net/pressrelease.htm

Writing a Release

www2.marketwire.com/mw/services_pr_write

10 Essential Tips to Ensure Your Press Release Makes the News

www.press-release-writing.com/10_essential_tips.htm

Tips, Guidelines and Templates for Writing an Effective Press Release

www.prwebdirect.com/pressreleasetips.php