



# Engaging the Media: Writing a succinct media release

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Media releases offer the opportunity to promote and publicise details about your work to the media. When written well, media releases will provide all relevant information about your work and highlight key messages in a way that is immediately interesting and eye-catching to the journalist. This fact sheet highlights what to consider when writing a media release.

## Planning the media release

### Researching media, journalists and audiences

It is important to do some research about the media and journalists that you want to convey your work through when planning your media release.

- Think about what it is you want to communicate and the best medium through which this can be done.
- If it is a visual concept, TV, online and print media (newspapers) would be most interested.
- Facts, quotes and general information are suited to radio while graphs and figures would be appealing to both print and online media.
- Identify your audience and determine which medium/s they respond to.
- Target journalists who have published or reported on similar and related topics. Use social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs) to follow the work of select journalists to determine who would be most interested in covering your research.
- Develop an email contacts database of specialist publications and journalists (e.g. health correspondents) that you think your work would be of most interest to, based on the audience/readership of these publications. Target your media release to this list.
- Use social media to monitor what other research, events etc in your field are currently prominent in the media.
- Once you have decided upon your story and angle it is time to write your media release. Your organisation may be able to help you with this through supplying a media release template or guide<sup>1</sup>.

### Twitter Tip

Don't forget to share the article on your social media pages after it has been published.

## Writing the media release

### Structure – verb tense, language, style and presentation

- Use present or future tense in your media release.
- Promote information about your work as 'up-to-the-minute' as possible.
- Always write the media release in the third person, unless quoting someone.
- Appeal to a wider audience by simplifying the language through minimal use of jargon and technical terms.
- Always spell out acronyms in full the first time, using brackets () to display the abbreviated version.
- Highlight your key messages using the 'inverted pyramid approach'<sup>2</sup>: make the first paragraph a succinct and clear outline of the central ideas of your work, follow with supporting facts including quotes and end with brief general information. Editors often edit (cut) a media release from the bottom up, quoting verbatim only the first two or three paragraphs.
- A media release should contain only bite sized pieces of your study supplemented with quotes. If one of the lines doesn't say something interesting/useful, then lose it or redo it.
- The main body should be no longer than one page, with an additional page of background notes to editors detailing the finer elements of your work. Make sure to include a range of contact details for media enquiries, such as phone, email, web address and professional social media pages.
- Think of visuals to enhance your story and improve its appeal to journalists—post these on your website and social media pages, and send a hyperlink to them in your media release, or invite journalists to take some themselves as enticement for media attention.
- Date your media release and mark it with either 'For immediate release' or 'Embargoed until 00:01' with the date the embargo is lifted. This indicates to editors whether they have time to follow up on a story before its public release date (commonly used for publications, announcements or events yet to be published) or if they can run with it immediately.
- Don't include a quote from someone who is unavailable or unwilling to speak to the media – obtain their consent to the quote (which you can draft on their behalf), their contact details and availability in case you get media requests for interviews.

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## Headline

- The headline should be short, catchy and relevant to the subject matter.
- The headline needs to grab the journalist's attention, convey the main messages of the media release and entice the journalist to read on.<sup>3</sup>
- The first sentence of the media release should also draw on this headline, making it clear why this headline was used and how it sets the context for the 'story'.

## Content—Employing 'The 5 Ws (and one H)' and using quotes

- The technique comprises six questions, answered in the first paragraph of the media release<sup>4</sup>:

**Who:** is this story/media release about (your work)?  
**What:** are you promoting (your project/work/event)?  
**Where:** is the event/this work occurring (venue/city/institution)?  
**When:** is this event/work being held/launched (date/time)?  
**Why:** is this work being conducted (include one key message about its significance/ importance here)?  
**How:** is this work of interest/benefit to the journalist and their audience (think about the 'angle' to promote your work from here; how does your work relate to the interests and demographics of the media and its audience(s)?)

"Journalism purists will argue your story isn't complete until you answer all six questions. It's hard to argue this point, since missing any of these questions leaves a hole in your story."<sup>5</sup>

## Distributing media releases

By email

- Ensure you have an up-to-date contacts media list and target only those most likely to take a bite.
- Ensure the subject heading of the email is the same as the headline used in the media release.
- Don't send a blank email with only an attachment of the media release. Instead, copy and paste a plain text Word version of the media release into an email and attach the formatted version.

## Timing and frequency

- Be sure to send your media release out early in the day of the activity or as an embargoed release prior, as media organisations need to work to tight deadlines<sup>1</sup>.
- Don't saturate media organisations by sending media releases about everything you're working on; it will dilute your credibility and their inclination to cover your stories.
- Do send well-constructed media releases updating previously released aspects of your work. This will help establish your profile as a proactive researcher, who engages well with the media.
- Time your media release to coincide with a relevant event/ announcement that could enhance the currency of your work. Known as 'piggy-backing' on another organisation's news, this opportunity acts as a 'hook' for baiting the interest of journalists.

- To find out if your media release has been published you could sign up for Google Alerts<sup>6</sup>.

## Resources

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- PHCRIS Getting Started Guides: How to... Write a succinct media release [http://www.phcris.org.au/guides/media\\_release.php](http://www.phcris.org.au/guides/media_release.php)
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