

TEACHER'S NOTES**ACT NOW****PUBLICITY****CONTENTS**

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PRESS RELEASE GUIDE**INTRODUCTION**

Media coverage of a citizenship event you have organised can be very beneficial. As well as ensuring publicity for your school/youth group etc, it will also raise awareness of the issue itself.

If you've had some outside help with your project e.g. from a government body or a community group then they will also appreciate recognition of their work. It's also a good way of giving yourself a pat on the back for your own efforts.

Before writing your press release sit down and think about what you want to say and who you want to say it to.

- **What is the point of your project?**

Maybe you want to raise awareness of a certain issue or to raise money for a good cause.

- **Who needs to know about the event?**

Is it an event for people of a certain age or members of a certain local community? Which media reaches them?

Once you have answered these questions you will know what to put into your press release and who to send it to.

The next question is how do you write it?

While everyone in your group will contribute to the organisation of your event there is undoubtedly one person in charge, maybe a teacher or a youth leader. It should be the same with a press release – let everyone come forward with ideas at the beginning but the person who writes the press release is the boss and they have the final say. Some of the worst press releases are written by committee.

GUIDE TO WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Press releases are easy to write but it is very important that you use the correct format. Local newspapers and radio/TV stations receive lots of press releases every day so you need to make sure that your release isn't ignored.

After reading this guide you'll have some idea of the 'rules' for writing a press release. These rules come

from an understanding of what journalists and editors are looking for in a story. As often as possible you need to stand back from your work and try to see it through their eyes. It's they who stand between you and the publicity you want.

Before you begin you need to think about the style of writing. Journalists and editors are busy people so they will be looking for something which already fits into the style of their publication. If you're not sure how to write something 'newsy' then take a look at the papers to see how they do it. Remember – you're not writing an English essay!

Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you write:

- It's important to keep your sentences short. Look at an article in your local paper and calculate the average number of words in a sentence – it won't be more than about 15.
- Keep your paragraphs short. Have just 2 or 3 sentences per paragraph and none with only 1.
- Be fair. Newspapers are supposed to be impartial so don't use words you wouldn't expect them to use, e.g. don't talk about your 'wonderful, magical event'.
- Use correct grammar and spelling. You need to sound professional and remember – every mistake means more work for the journalist.

Try to keep your press release to one typed A4 page with double spacing. In the bottom right hand corner type ENDS unless you really need to use a second page – then ENDS goes on the second page and MF ('More Follows') on the first.

PRESS RELEASE CONTENTS

I. Headline

'Short' is the best way to describe a good headline. Make it as short as you can and don't use long words. Keep it simple and don't try to be funny because it's unlikely that whoever reads it will have the same sense of humour.

Remember that local media editors are looking for something interesting and with a local flavour. Write a headline that appeals to them.

Try to use a verb or 'action word'. This will give the headline more energy and make the story appear more interesting.

You may find it easier to write the headline after you have written the main body of the press release so let it be the last thing that you write – but make sure not to forget about it!

II. The first paragraph

This is the most important part of the press release. A catchy title only creates interest but the first paragraph needs to give all of the relevant information. A journalist will be looking for answers to the questions: **Who, What, When, Where, and Why?**

Try to include this information in one or two sentences. If you're unsure about the style of writing then have a look at your local newspapers to see how they do it.

III. The following paragraphs

You should still have space now for a few more paragraphs. Think about the other event information that you want people to know and then arrange it in order of greatest importance.

Remember to try and look at your press release through the eyes of a news editor. An editor will be looking for something new and unusual AND will want to know how it affects their readers. Make sure that you include enough information to answer an editor's questions and don't provide information which raises new ones.

A quote can really bring a press release to life so include one if you can. Make sure that the quote sounds like someone actually said it. The quote should also provide something new to the press release – don't repeat something which has already been said.

IV. Contact details

If a journalist wants to write a big piece on your event, or cover it when it's taking place, then the information in a press release won't be enough. Make it easy for the journalist to get further information by including a contact name and telephone number.

It's important that the person whose details you supply knows all about the project, can be reached at all times and is willing to talk to the press about it.

V. General presentation

At the top of your A4 page you might want to include a logo. You could use the name of your youth group or your school badge – something which represents the group you're organising the event for. If you have a partner in the project they may want their logo attached also. It's common for 'Press release' or 'News release' to appear at the top of the page along with the date of writing.

When you have finished get someone else in your group to check the press release. They should be looking for several things:

- Clarity – is everything included? Are there any unanswered questions?
- Accuracy – is the information given correct?
- Grammar/spelling/punctuation – this must all be perfect if you're to appear professional and make it easy for the journalist to cover the story.
- Repetition – have you wasted any space saying the same thing twice?

You can use this guide as a checklist if you like.

SENDING THE PRESS RELEASE

If you want the press to cover your event you need to be organised. Newspapers like to have two weeks notice of upcoming events while a week is normally enough for TV and radio stations.

There are many ways to send a press release. You could send it by fax or by email but the most reliable method is the traditional one, by post. Always use first class stamps and never put anything extra in the envelope – you want the press release to be taken seriously in its own right.

The press release should be sent to the Editor, News Editor, or the Education Editor. Try to find out their name and include that with the address also.

HOW TO BE A GOOD INTERVIEWEE

If the press are interested in your story they may wish to interview you. Whether the interview is for newspaper, radio or television, these tips will help you to be a good interviewee.

Before the interview

Who should be interviewed?

You should choose someone knowledgeable about the event and the issues it is addressing. This person should also have the authority to talk on the subject, for example someone heavily involved with the event's organisation or someone who is an expert on the issue.

What does the journalist want?

In this type of situation the journalist wants the same as you, a story that will get people interested. Make sure you know how to make it interesting and relevant to their publication/broadcast.

What will the journalist ask?

You should be able to predict some of the questions you'll be asked. Take some time to prepare answers to them and decide on which answers are best at getting your point across. Good preparation will ensure you come across as informed and confident.

Can I read out prepared answers?

No. If you read out your answers for television or radio it will sound very unnatural. What you can do is make some notes and use them to help you. Having a list of key-words will also help you remember all the important points, particularly if you're nervous.

During the interview (radio, TV, and print newspapers)**How should I sound?**

Any questions of style can be answered by looking at the interviewer's work. Check out their newspaper articles or broadcasts to get an understanding of what they want. Essentially the journalist wants a conversation to be friendly. Don't be afraid to show your enthusiasm in your answers – but be careful not to sound flippant if the subject of your event is very serious.

What do I do if I don't know the answer?

You should listen carefully to every question. If you don't know the answer just say so – don't try to bluff it.

How much do I need to explain?

Let the interviewer be your guide with your explanations. If they don't understand something they should ask further questions. Don't over-explain; if you patronise the journalist you will patronise their audience.

What shouldn't I say?

Don't say anything to the journalist that you don't want published or broadcast **at any time**. There's no such thing as 'off the record'. Avoid any habits you may have such as saying *Right* or *OK* each time you answer a question. If you pause mid-sentence avoid saying *Mmmm* as you think.

Don't say more than you need to say. Try to avoid repeating your answers and don't speak just to fill the time. Take your cues from the journalist who will ask another question if your answer wasn't clear.

What shouldn't I do?

When participating in an interview for radio or TV broadcast don't make extra noise. Don't fiddle with a pen or drum your fingers on the desk. Don't wear jewellery that makes a noise when you move. Equipment like fridges and computers make a noise when they are on so avoid being interviewed too close to them. Be aware of all background noise such as wind or traffic.

What if I make a mistake?

Don't panic. If you stumble mid-sentence or say something which isn't correct just begin over again.

PHOTO CALL

The photo call release

Photographs are an excellent way of telling a story. They can be used to generate interest and get your message across. Anything which enhances the story will interest the press so it is very worthwhile organising a *photo call*.

A *photo call* is an opportunity during the course of your event for the press to interview some of the participants and guests, as well as take some photos or footage for local television news.

A *photo call release* is even shorter than a press release so it is very easy to write. It only needs to contain the following information:

- **Who:** your school/youth group, community partner. Maybe you have an important guest you wish to be included. Make sure that you have told all of these people in advance that they might be photographed.
- **What:** the name of the event.
- **Where:** the location of your event. Also include any extra information which you think might be necessary e.g. directions and information on parking – anything that makes it easier for the journalist to arrive, do his/her job, and leave again.
- **When:** the time and date. Think about when you'd like the photograph to be taken and invite the press for about 15 minutes before. Perhaps you want to choose a particularly interesting time during the event to take the picture, but make sure that the people you want to be interviewed will be free to talk.
- **Why:** the reason for the event. What you are trying to achieve.

Once again you have to make sure that this information is set out in the correct way. Here are some tips on presentation.

- I. Use A4 paper. One side of the page is sufficient for what you need to say.
- II. Have Photo call printed clearly at the top of the page.
- III. Information such as the time, date and address should be highlighted in some way.
- IV. Contact details need to be included at the bottom in the same way as a press release.

The photo call itself

There will be more than one opportunity to take pictures at your event so it's a good idea to take time in deciding which one is best.

Ideally you want a picture that, once captioned, can stand alone in a newspaper and convey your message. There are several things you need to think about.

Time

As well as choosing the best time for you and the organisers it is also worth considering what is most convenient for the press. It's important to remember that journalists work to strict deadlines so choose a time that makes it easy for them to do their job. Some time between 10.00 am and 11.00 am is recommended.

Location

Do you want the picture to be taken indoors or outdoors? What is the best way to show the event's participants in action? If any of the guests or participants is physically disabled make sure that there is disabled access.

Content

Who and what is going to be in the picture? The best way to find out what sort of picture a newspaper wants is to ask them. Call the picture editor of your target newspapers and find out what works for them.

It's recommended that you avoid the typical 'grip and grin' handshake picture. Much in the same way that you should include a verb in the headline of your press release, you should try to have people doing something in your picture. Activity means energy that is sure to make the picture much more interesting.

If you decide on an 'activity shot' make sure to keep it simple and, if it's appropriate, encourage the participants to smile.

Do you have any logos that need to be included? You should also check with your community partner to see if they have anything that should be included as part of the background.

Props can sometimes be used to make a photograph more interesting. If you can find something that conveys your message then, if the photographer and participants agree, use it to liven up the picture. Don't use anything too tacky though.

As you're planning the photograph think of a suitable caption to go with it. You'll also need to give the photographer the names of the people in the picture. Make sure that these are spelt correctly and that they are listed left to right with the person's name followed by their title, for example:

Bill Smith, Education Officer for Help the Aged; Bryan White, local volunteer; Monica Brown, Local Youth Officer.

Be prepared to take your own pictures. It's possible that the photographer will be called away to cover another story on the day of your event so have a camera ready to do the job yourself. The pictures could be used for your own material or could be sent out to the newspapers with the press release again.

Sending the photo call release

The photo call release should be sent to the picture editors of your target newspapers about a week before the event.

A few days later follow this up with a phone call to check that it has arrived and that the details have been put into the photographer's diary. If they haven't, send the information again.

This is also an opportunity for you to highlight the reasons why this is an important story for their newspaper and ask what sort of photograph they would be interested in. Prepare what you're going to say in advance because you want this conversation to be quick and to the point.