

Customize a Press Release/Pitch Letter

How to Write a News Release

In this section, we will discuss what a news release is and how to write one.

Before we talk about how to write a news release, please heed one warning: News releases are like garlic--they produce better results when used in moderation. Not everything an organization does is worthy of a news release. In addition, news releases should not be used as a type of "haven't talked to you in a while, just wanted to make sure you remembered us" correspondence to reporters and editors. Nothing gets thrown in the trash can or recycling container faster than a news release with no news.

Note the usage of the word "news" in "news release." Simply put, a news release is a vehicle to release news to the press. If there is no important news in a news release, the chance of sparking the interest of the press is at best minimal.

Here is a checklist of tips to help you write a news release:

Put the most important information at the beginning.

Unlike a novel or short story, where you don't learn what happens until the end of the story, a news release should be written to give the most important information at the beginning and the least important information at the end. This technique, known in journalism and public relations as the "inverted pyramid style" of writing, means putting the who, what, when, where, and why/how in the first one or two paragraphs. Why is this done? Studies have determined that the average reporter or editor will read a news release for about eight seconds. If it does not interest them in this time, it will almost certainly end up in the trash.

Use the active voice when possible.

For example, "Pei's unerring sense of proportion creates the ideal environment for Alexander Calder's huge mobile" is a much more interesting sentence than, "An ideal environment was created by Pei for Alexander Calder's huge mobile." Remember that verbs, not adjectives, give powerful writing most of its punch.

Be concise.

There is not a standard length for news releases. Most often two pages can do the job; however, some news release may require additional pages. The key is to be as concise as possible.

Save the flowery writing.

Reporters and editors don't want to read prose. They want to read news. If it takes too long to get to the point, it could end up in the trash can.

Check for accuracy.

A news release needs to be accurate and factual. Check your information thoroughly, especially spelling. Have the person who is the subject of the news release or an expert in the area review it. It can be a nightmare to have a wrong phone number published in a newspaper or have a reporter attribute a work of architecture to the wrong architect.

Write a headline for your release.

This helps the reporter quickly identify the topic of your news release.

Make sure your component's name, phone number, and address are on the news release.

Additionally, make sure it has the name of a press contact for your component. If a reporter likes the idea in your news release, he or she will most likely call you for additional information.

Put in slug lines.

This is Journalese for such terms as "more," which appears at the bottom of a news release page if there is more to follow, or "###," which signifies the end of the release.

Make sure your news release is dated and has a dateline (city of origin).

The reporters and editors will want to know when and from where the news release was distributed. In addition, you should designate the release as "For Immediate Release" or "Embargoed Until..." to tell the reporter when this information can be used. An embargo is a request by the organization issuing the news release asking reporters not to publish the information until a certain date. Most press representatives honor such requests; however, it should be noted that this is not a legal agreement, so the press can publish this information if they wish.

How to Write a Pitch Letter

One of the first steps towards media coverage is writing a letter that introduces you or your story idea to a reporter. The "pitch letter" often determines whether the reporter or editor pursues a story. The letter should be short (no more than one page), to the point, and full of information. Pitch letters are best used when targeting specific reporters/journalists, who might be interested in your story idea. They are much more personal than a standard press release, and should be tailored to meet the outlet's editorial focus. See the "Customize a Press Release/Pitch Letter" area below to view samples and customizable pitch letters.

Customize A Press Release/Pitch Letter

Do you have an awards program you'd like to promote? Get the word out about a new staff member? Are you interested in developing a relationship with a local reporter but don't know the first step? The AIA National media relations team has developed a repository of customizable press releases and pitch letters to help you accomplish all of these tasks and more!

Press releases and pitch letters are available on a variety of topics, and include "holes" for you to simply fill in with your relevant information.

Once you have created your press release or pitch letter, visit the [Guide To Media Relations](#) page to learn how to maximize your release or pitch letter.