



Part IV: Execution

Chapter 15: Public Relations Writing



Why is writing so important to PR?

- Even in the age of technology, writing remains the key to effective public relations.
- Most of us know how to write and speak, but PR professionals should know it better than their colleagues.
- PR practitioners are professional communicators, and communications means writing!



Writing for the Eye and Ear

Writing for a reader differs dramatically from writing for a listener. How so?

Readers:

- can scan material
- can study printed words
- can review passages
- can check the facts

Listeners:

- get only one chance to hear
- get only one chance to comprehend
- may tune out messages or speakers early



Fundamentals of Writing

- ❖ Few people are born writers! Writing takes patience and hard work. Here is a foolproof, four-part formula for success:
 - The idea must precede the expression. In other words, think before writing. This requires ideas.
 - Don't be afraid of the draft. Drafts enhance writing clarity; consider outlines as well.
 - Simplify, clarify.
Use standard English. Write tightly and cut unnecessary words.
 - Aim at a particular audience.
Think about who this is, and tailor your message to them.



The A's and B's of PR writing

Avoid:

- Big words
- Extra words
- Clichés
- Latin

Be:

- Active
- Simple
- Short
- Organized
- Convincing
- Understandable

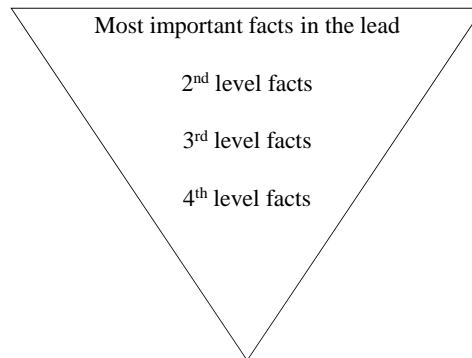
5

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The beauty of the inverted pyramid

- If readers lose interest early, they won't finish the story.
- The inverted pyramid places the critical facts up top.
- If the reader loses interest or the story is cut, the essential facts remain intact. Here's how it works:



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The news release

- The “granddaddy” of PR writing vehicles. Everyone uses them to publicize their organizations, products, and services.
- The overriding purpose is to influence a publication to write favorably about the organization.
- Practitioners distribute them via mail, e-mail, and websites.
- News releases are rarely used verbatim. Rather, they may stimulate editors to consider covering a story.

7

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Why do news releases fail?

- They are poorly written.
- They are not localized.
- They are not newsworthy.

Key news values:

- **Impact:** a major announcement that affects an organization, its community, or even society.
- **Oddity:** an unusual occurrence or milestone, such as the one-millionth customer being signed on.
- **Conflict:** a significant dispute or controversy, such as a labor disagreement or rejection of a popular proposal.
- **Known principal:** the greater the title of the individual making the announcement the greater the chance of the release being used.
- **Proximity:** how localized the release is or how timely it is, relative to the news of the day.

8

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Successful News Releases

- Release content must be newsworthy.
- It must interest editors and, more to the point, their readers, viewers or listeners.
- It must be written clearly and concisely.
- It must follow proper style set down by legitimate news organizations, such as the AP.
- It must address the facts quickly and completely.
- It should follow the inverted pyramid approach if it is for newspapers.



POSTAL NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 July 7, 1997

DOLLED UP POSTAGE STAMPS COMMEMORATE PRECIOUS COLLECTIBLES

WASHINGTON - Providing comfort and delight to millions of children of all ages for the past century, dolls not only continue to be favorite childhood playthings today, but the hobby of doll collecting has become an international pastime, surpassed only by stamp and coin collecting in this country and abroad.

The U. S. Postal Service will pay tribute to this collectible with the issuance of the Classic American Dolls stamps, featuring 15 special dolls that reflect the tradition, heritage, culture and artistic style from various geographical regions of this country.

Postal Service Governor LeGree Daniels and the president of the United Federation of Doll Clubs (UFDC), Patricia Gosh, will officially dedicate the stamps on Monday, July 28, at a 7 p.m. ceremony held at the Anaheim Hilton and Towers Hotel in Anaheim, California. This ceremony will be held in conjunction with the annual membership meeting of the UFDC and subsequent week long convention.

"These delightful, charming stamps illustrate the joys of collecting, appreciating and cherishing classic dolls," said Daniels. "I believe these images will recall memories of many sweet, tender moments of our youth."

The dolls featured on the stamps are identified by either the doll's maker, designer, trade name or common name and include:

"Alabama Baby" and Martha Chase. Ella Smith designed the cloth Alabama Baby doll with molded and painted features. These dolls were originally named "The Alabama Indestructible Doll" and were made from 1900-1925. The second doll was created by Martha Chase and is an all-cloth doll made between 1890-1925.

- more -

An example of news release format and writing style.



News release content

Again, the cardinal rule is newsworthiness. Consider the following lead:

MADISON, WISCONSIN – Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts will deliver a major address on capital punishment at 8 p.m. tomorrow in the Kohl Field House before the annual convention of the American Bar Association.

- Does it address all of the 5 W's and the H? Yes!
- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- Why?
- How? (less important in this case)

11

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Types of news releases

News releases can be written about almost anything.

Three frequent subjects are:

- The product announcement
- The management change
- The management speech

12

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News release style

- Writing style is nearly as critical as content.
- Most PR operations follow the style of major newspapers and magazines, utilizing style guides by the Associated Press and The New York Times.
- Areas to consult for style guidelines include (pp. 339-340):
 - Capitalization
 - Abbreviations
 - Numbers
 - Punctuation
 - Spelling

13

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News release essentials

In addition to being newsworthy, news releases must address these essentials:

- Rationale
- Focus
- Facts
- No puffery
- Nourishing quotes
- Limit jargon
- Company description
- Spelling, grammar, punctuation
- Brevity (short and concise)
- Headlines
- Clarity, conciseness, commitment.

14

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Internet news releases

- The Internet has revolutionized the news release writing and submission process.
- Today, companies regularly issue news releases merely to be included in online databases.
- Most journalists prefer to receive news releases via e-mail. In a recent survey, seven out of 10 said they read every e-mail news release they received.
- Reading on a computer screen is harder than reading on paper.
- Be brief and succinct.

15

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The pitch letter

- A pitch letter is much like a sales letter.
- Good pitch letters are catchy and entice the reader to cover your story.
- For success:
 - Write it to an individual person; use their name.
 - Grab attention at the beginning.
 - Explain why the story is newsworthy and relevant to readers.

16

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Other print vehicles

- The case history: frequently used to tell about a customer's favorable use of a company's product or service.
- The byliner: a story signed and authored by an officer of a particular firm. It positions executives as experts.
- The Op-Ed: an editorial written by an organizational executive and then submitted for publication to a leading newspaper or magazine.
- The roundup article: many publications encourage articles that summarize, or "round up," the experiences of several companies within an industry. Such articles are a good way for PR professionals to secure stories that mention the practitioner's firm in favorable association with top competitors.

17

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Writing for the ear

- The speech is the most important PR vehicle.
- Speechwriting is a highly valued PR skill.
- Speechwriters can use their access to management to move up the organizational ladder.
- A good speechwriter is a valuable and often highly paid person.

18

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Writing for the ear... (cont'd)

A good speech:

- Is designed to be heard, not read.
- Uses concrete language.
- Demands a positive response.
- Must have clear-cut objectives.
- Must be tailored to a specific audience.



The importance of editing

- Editing is critical. One misspelling or fact error can sink a good news release.
- Be judicious. Each word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph must be weighed carefully.
- Be gutsy. Use bold strokes to chop through bad writing.
- Organizing copy. One paragraph must flow to the next.
- ❖ Review Question:
 - If you expect to have success issuing news releases that are likely to be considered for placement, what should you remember?