Guide to writing a press release

If you are used to dealing with the fine detail of scientific information it isn’t always easy to write a press release. Even a layman’s summary can sometimes fail to explain complex research. So here are a few tips to help you communicate your work to a wider and more general audience. The Communications team is here to help with press releases and we can draft them for you. However, if you want to have a go at the first draft yourself – and this can be very helpful to us – here are some of the things you need to think about.

The purpose of a press release

The press release is just one way of attracting the attention of the media. Despite the surge in social media the press release is still an effective way of publicising research, events, awards or news of any kind.

Targeting your release

Think about who is going to be interested in your story.

- Specialist correspondents
- Local, national or international media
- Specialist publications
- TV
- Print
- Radio
- Social media

What difference will it make to the man on the street?

Ask yourself this question before you start writing because it is what a news editor or programme maker will want to know. Is it groundbreaking, revolutionary, new, or innovative – how will it change people’s lives?

Keep it simple

Don’t assume specialist knowledge. Avoid anagrams and jargon. Technical words can confuse and bore.

Getting your release noticed

Journalists are busy people and your release will be one of many that drop into the inbox of editors, producers, reporters and planners every day so you have to make it stand out from the rest.
Don’t be afraid and bury the real story in the last paragraph of your release – this is a common complaint in newsrooms.

The headline

Start with the headline – the attention seeker. Make it catchy. Writing the headline will also help you focus on the main messages of the release. Then make sure the top three paragraphs are worth the read – getting this right can make the difference between your story being published and ending up in the bin.

Paragraph one

A new discovery by researchers at The University of Nottingham has ....
A revolutionary technique devised by scientists at The University of Nottingham has....
Ground breaking research could bring us a step closer to...

Paragraph two

How?
Why?
With funding from....
In collaboration with.....

Paragraph three

The quote – this can be from the lead researcher, supervisor or head of school. A good supportive quote explaining the significance of your story will add credibility and substance to your release.

Be prepared

Have something to offer journalists – make it easy for them.
Case studies are a good way to get a positive reaction from journalists and audiences.
Pictures and visuals – have good strong images that illustrate your story prepared.
Background information – research papers
Be available for interviews – make sure you are available on the day your release is published. There is little point in sending out a release if you aren’t available to talk to the media.

Handy hints

Provide some contact details, a name, telephone number and email address.
Don’t make your release too long. Journalists can always call or email you for more information.
Remember to let funders, collaborators and industrial partners know you are doing a release – they may want to produce their own version or add something to yours.
Always get your release approved before publication.
Take a look at the Communications website and look at other press releases – this will help you understand what kind of information is needed and how a release is put together.
For more information

If you need any further help or guidance please contact one of the Media Relations Managers in the Communications Department. We are here to help draft press releases and if possible we can arrange photography and podcast (audio and video) support.

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