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How to Write a Press Release

A press release is a short, factual document you write to give news outlets the facts of something new, changed, or happening, in a form they can use quickly. It is not an advertisement, not a flyer, and not a letter to your supporters. It is a tool with one job: to state real news so clearly and honestly that a busy editor, reporter, producer, or community calendar keeper can understand it in under a minute and decide what to do with it. When a release does that job, it can earn coverage you could never buy. When it does not — when it hypes, buries the news, or leaves out basic facts — it is deleted, and the next release from the same sender is deleted faster.

This topic helps small business owners, nonprofit leaders, event organizers, artists, and anyone launching something real: a new service, an opening, a free program, an award, a partnership, a milestone. You do not need a public relations firm to write a competent release. Newsrooms receive releases from one-person organizations every day, and the ones that succeed are not the fanciest. They are the clearest. They answer who, what, when, where, and why it matters in the first few lines, they quote a real person saying something human, they give exact details a reporter can verify, and they make contacting you effortless.

Why does this skill matter beyond the hope of coverage? Because writing a release forces the most useful discipline in all of public communication: deciding what your news actually is. Many launches feel big inside an organization and mean nothing outside it. The release format exposes that honestly, before you spend money or make promises. It also creates a clean, dated, public record of your facts — the same facts your website, your social posts, and your answers to questions should match. Even when no outlet picks a release up, the document itself serves you as the single true version of the announcement.

One honest limit belongs at the start. Sending a press release guarantees nothing. Editors choose news by their audience's needs, not by your effort or your hopes, and most releases, even good ones, do not become stories. This set teaches you to write releases that deserve consideration, to send them professionally, and to follow up without becoming a nuisance. That is the whole of what a sender controls — and it is more than most senders ever do well.

What You Will Learn

- How to tell whether you actually have news, and how to find the honest news angle when the first idea is weak.
- How to build the standard release structure: contact block, headline, dateline, lead, body, quote, boilerplate, and end mark.
- How to write a headline and first paragraph that carry the whole story for a reader who stops there.
- How to write quotes that sound like a person, not a brochure, and add something the facts cannot.

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- How to include exact, verifiable details and avoid hype words that make editors stop trusting you.
- How to send a release to the right people, at the right time, in the right format.
- How to follow up once, helpfully, and how to be ready if a reporter calls.

Lesson 1 — Start With Real News

Every press release begins before any writing, with a hard question: what happened, or is about to happen, that people outside your organization have a reason to care about? News is change that affects people beyond your own walls. A new location opens. A free service starts. Prices drop in a way that helps a neighborhood. A local person wins something. An event happens on a date, in a place, open to the public. An organization reaches a milestone that changes what it can offer. These are news because a stranger can answer the question "why does this matter to me, or to people I know?" If only you and your team can answer that question, you do not yet have a release. You have an internal celebration looking for a costume.

The most common weak releases share a shape: they announce that something exists, in glowing terms, with no change, no date, no public benefit, and no event. "Local company proud to offer excellent services" is not news; it is an advertisement asking for free placement, and editors treat it that way. The fix is rarely to hype harder. The fix is to find the real news inside the situation. The company may have no news in existing — but it may have news in opening on Saturdays, in hiring five local apprentices, in offering a free monthly clinic, in reaching its tenth year, or in moving to a street that is rebuilding. Each of those has a date, a place, and a benefit to people who are not you. Dig for the change, the first, the free, the local, or the human story, and build the release on whichever is genuinely true.

Timing is part of news. A release about an event sent the day after it happened is history, not news. A release about a launch sent three months early gives editors nothing to do with it and will be forgotten by launch day. As a working rule, events usually deserve a release two to three weeks ahead, with the exact date prominent, and launches deserve one on the day or the day before, unless you are offering an outlet early access under an agreed embargo — a promise that they prepare the story but publish nothing until the time you both named. Embargoes are real professional tools, but they only work with outlets that agree to them; never stamp "embargoed" on a mass email and expect strangers to honor it.

Finally, be honest about scale. A neighborhood paper, a community radio station, a local news site, and a national magazine judge news by completely different measures, and the same release can be a strong local story and no story at all nationally. Most first-time senders should aim locally and specifically: the outlets whose audiences live where the news happens. A well-aimed local release that becomes a real story beats a hopeful blast to two hundred national addresses that becomes nothing, every time.

The Steps

1. Write your news in one sentence with a change in it: what is starting, opening, ending, launching, or happening, and when.

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2. Test it as a stranger: why would someone with no connection to you care? Write that answer down. If you cannot, keep digging for the real angle.

3. Look for the strongest honest angle: the change, the first, the free offer, the local benefit, the milestone, or the human story — and pick one as your lead angle.

4. Check your timing. Events: send two to three weeks ahead. Launches: send on the day or the day before, unless a specific outlet has agreed to an embargo.

5. Choose your realistic level: which local or specialist outlets serve the exact audience this news affects? List those, not the whole internet.

6. If there is genuinely no news yet, do not send a release. Wait for the date, the opening, or the milestone that makes it news.

A Worked Example

Angela runs a small tailoring shop and asks for help with a release "announcing our quality alterations services." There is no news in it, and a release like that would be deleted everywhere. Talking it through, the real facts surface: in three weeks Angela begins free Saturday morning mending classes for teenagers, teaching them to repair their own clothes, in partnership with the library next door, and the first class has twenty seats. That is news — free, local, dated, with a partner and a human benefit. The release is rebuilt on that angle: the headline names the free classes, the lead gives the start date and the library, and Angela's services appear once, factually, as background about the shop. The neighborhood paper runs a short piece, the library shares it, and the first class fills. The shop got its publicity — by leading with the news that served the reader instead of the advertisement that served only the shop.

Common Mistakes

- **Announcing existence instead of change.** "We offer great services" is an ad. News needs something happening, starting, or changing, with a date.
- **Hiding weak news under strong hype.** Editors read hype as a signal that the facts cannot carry the story. They are usually right.
- **Sending at the wrong time.** After the event, it is too late. Months before, it is forgotten. Match the release to the news calendar.
- **Aiming at the wrong scale.** A street-level story sent only to national outlets will fail. Start where the news actually lives.

Lesson 2 — The Structure Every Editor Expects

A press release follows a standard shape, and the shape is not bureaucracy. It exists because editors process hundreds of documents under time pressure, and a familiar structure lets them find facts fast. A release that hides its contact details, wanders for three paragraphs before revealing the news, or never says where the event is, costs the editor work — and work is the one thing an editor will not spend on your story when the next release in the pile is clear. Follow the structure exactly. Creativity belongs in your news and your quote, never in the layout.

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From top to bottom, a standard release carries these parts. At the very top, your contact block: the name of a real person who can answer questions, their phone number, and their email. Below that, the release timing line: "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" for news that can be published now, followed by the calendar date of the release on its own line — because social posts and reposts show only relative time, the written date is what keeps the release anchored later. Then the headline: one line that states the news. Then the dateline and lead paragraph: the city in capitals, the date, and a first paragraph that answers who, what, when, where, and why it matters. Then the body: a few short paragraphs of supporting detail, in order of importance. Then a quote from a named person with their title. Then the boilerplate: a short standard paragraph about your organization. Then the end mark — three hash marks, ###, centered — which tells the reader the release is complete and nothing is missing. Contact information appears again, or a "for more information" line, below or above the end mark depending on house style; what matters is that it is present and easy to find.

Each part has a discipline. The body is written in inverted pyramid order: most important facts first, least important last, because editors cut from the bottom when space is short. If your last paragraph can be deleted without hurting the story, your structure is correct. Keep paragraphs short — two or three sentences — because releases are skimmed on screens. Keep the whole release to one page when you can, two at the very most; a release that needs three pages is usually carrying background that belongs on your website, linked in one line.

Write the release in third person, as news is written: "the bakery will open," not "we are thrilled to open our bakery." The one place first person belongs is inside quotes, where a named human speaks. Keep tenses simple and facts checkable: names spelled correctly, titles accurate, numbers exact, addresses complete. A single wrong date or misspelled name does not just embarrass you — it tells the editor that every other fact in the document may also be wrong, and fact-checking your release is work they did not budget for. Accuracy is the entire currency here.

The Steps

1. Put the contact block at the top: a named person, a phone number that will be answered, and an email that is checked daily.
2. Write "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" and the calendar date of the release on its own line beneath it.
3. Write the headline in one line. Then the dateline: CITY, date — followed by the lead paragraph answering who, what, when, where, and why it matters.
4. Build the body in most-important-first order, in short paragraphs of two or three sentences each.
5. Add one quote from a named person with their exact title, written in first person inside quotation marks.
6. Close with your boilerplate paragraph about the organization, then the end mark ### centered on its own line.
7. Proofread names, dates, times, addresses, and numbers against a source document, character by character. Then proofread once more, aloud.

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A Worked Example

Consider a release from a community kitchen announcing a new free Saturday lunch program. Its contact block names the coordinator, Rosa, with her direct phone and email. "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" appears with the date. The headline reads: "Riverside Community Kitchen Begins Free Saturday Lunches for Families on March 8." The dateline and lead follow: "RIVERSIDE, March 1 — Riverside Community Kitchen will serve free lunches to families every Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. beginning March 8 at 214 Elm Street, with no sign-up and no questions asked." In one paragraph an editor has the whole story. The body adds, in order: who the lunches serve and how the program is funded, the menu approach and volunteer cooks, and the background of the kitchen. Rosa's quote adds the human note. The boilerplate describes the kitchen in four sentences, and ### ends it. An editor can cut the last two body paragraphs and still publish a complete, accurate item — which is exactly why items like this get published.

Common Mistakes

- **Burying the contact details.** If an editor cannot reach a human in ten seconds, the story dies at the moment it became interesting.
- **Saving the news for paragraph three.** Background first is how essays work. Releases work the other way: news first, background last.
- **Writing in first person outside quotes.** "We are so excited to announce" reads as advertising. Third person for facts, first person only inside quotes.
- **Skipping the end mark or the date.** Small omissions signal an amateur document and make reposts impossible to date accurately later.

Lesson 3 — Headlines and Leads That Carry the Story

Most people who encounter your release will read only the headline. Of those who continue, most will read only the first paragraph. Professional writers accept this and build for it: the headline must state the news on its own, and the lead paragraph must contain the whole essential story, so that a reader who stops at either point still leaves with the truth. Everything after the lead is support. This is not a lowering of standards. It is respect for how busy readers — editors first among them — actually read.

A working headline names the actor, the action, and the most newsworthy detail, in plain words, usually in ten words or fewer. "Maple Street Bakery Offers Free Baking Classes for Teens Starting June 14" tells a complete story. Compare the headlines that fail: "An Exciting New Chapter Begins" says nothing; "Bakery Announces Initiative" uses the empty word "initiative" to hide that nothing was actually said; "The Best Bakery in the County Launches Amazing Program" spends its words on claims an editor must delete. Editors distrust adjectives and trust nouns and numbers. Put the strongest concrete detail you have — free, first, a date, a number of people served, a place — into the headline, and cut every word that is praise rather than information. Write the headline last, after the release exists, because only then do you know what the news truly is. Many writers draft five or six headlines and choose; the first one is rarely

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the clearest.

The lead paragraph then does the disciplined work of the five questions: who, what, when, where, and why it matters. Aim for one or two sentences and roughly thirty to forty words. Long leads usually mean the writer tried to include background, history, or a second piece of news; move all of that down into the body where it belongs. Read your lead aloud and check each question off with a finger. Missing "when" is the most common failure in event releases, and missing "why it matters" is the most common failure in business releases. If your lead cannot say why it matters, return to Lesson 1 — the angle is not found yet.

A useful test for both headline and lead is the forwarding test. Imagine the editor forwards your release to a colleague with no comment. From the headline and lead alone, can that colleague say what is happening, where, when, and why anyone should care? If yes, your release will survive the way newsrooms actually work, where stories are pitched in hallways in one sentence. If no, no amount of excellent detail in paragraph four will save it, because paragraph four will never be read.

The Steps

1. Draft the release body first, then write at least five candidate headlines and choose the most factual one.
2. In the headline, name the actor, the action, and the strongest concrete detail — free, first, a date, a number, a place. Cut all praise words.
3. Write the lead in one or two sentences. Check off who, what, when, where, and why it matters, one by one.
4. Keep the lead near thirty to forty words. Move history, background, and second announcements down into the body.
5. Apply the forwarding test: headline plus lead alone must tell the whole essential story to a stranger.
6. Read the headline and lead aloud. If you stumble or need a breath mid-sentence, shorten them.

A Worked Example

Marcus coordinates a tool-lending library and drafts this headline: "A Groundbreaking New Initiative for Our Community's Future." It contains no actor, no action, and no fact. His lead is no better: "In today's challenging times, many families struggle with the costs of home maintenance, and our organization has long been committed to helping." Nothing has happened yet in either line. Working the steps, he finds his concrete details: the library opens March 22, membership is free for residents of two named neighborhoods, and the collection starts with 300 tools. The new headline: "Free Tool Library With 300 Tools Opens March 22 for Eastside and Northgate Residents." The new lead: "The Eastside Tool Library will open Saturday, March 22, at 88 Canal Street, lending 300 home-repair tools free to residents of Eastside and Northgate, the city's first lending library of its kind." An editor reading only those two lines knows the story, the date, the place, and the angle — and Marcus's release gets a call instead of a deletion.

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Common Mistakes

- **Headlines built from praise.** "Amazing," "exciting," and "groundbreaking" tell the editor your facts are weak. Replace praise with a number, a date, or the word "free" when it is true.
- **The slow, throat-clearing lead.** Background about "today's challenging times" wastes the only paragraph most people read. Start at the news.
- **Two stories in one lead.** An opening plus an award plus a new hire is three leads. Pick the news; the rest goes in the body or a later release.
- **Writing the headline first and forcing the release to fit it.** The headline is a summary of finished facts. Write it last.

Lesson 4 — Quotes, Details, and the Boilerplate

If the facts are the skeleton of a release, the quote is its voice. Editors keep quotes because a quote does what neutral facts cannot: it shows a human caring about something, in words a machine or a brochure could not have produced. That is also why most quotes in amateur releases fail. They are written like advertising copy and attributed to a person who would never say them aloud: "We are thrilled to leverage this exciting opportunity to serve our valued customers moving forward." No human talks like that, editors know it, and the quote is cut or — worse — the whole release loses credibility. A good quote is short, specific, and spoken-sounding. It adds feeling, reason, or a concrete detail the factual paragraphs did not carry.

Write quotes by asking what the person would actually say to a neighbor. "My daughter learned to fix her own bike in our first class. That's why we run these — a repaired bike is a kid who can get to school," says more in two sentences than a paragraph of mission language. Keep quotes to one or two sentences each, and use one quote, two at most, from people with a real stake: the founder explaining why, a participant describing the effect, a partner confirming the collaboration. Every quote needs a full name and an accurate title after it, and the person quoted must have actually approved the words. Never invent a quote, never put words in the mouth of a partner, official, or customer without their clear agreement, and never quote yourself saying something you do not believe — a quote is the part of the release most likely to be printed word for word, under your name, permanently.

The body details follow the same law as the quote: concrete beats grand. "Serving the community" is a claim. "Serving 120 families each Saturday" is a detail. Editors and readers believe numbers, names, dates, prices, and addresses, because those can be checked and because liars avoid them. Include the details a reporter would otherwise have to call you for: exact dates and times with time zone where it matters, full street address, cost or the word free, how to sign up or attend, age limits, languages offered, accessibility information, and what to bring. Every unanswered basic question is a reason for an editor with twenty other releases to choose a clearer one.

The boilerplate is the short standard paragraph at the end that says what your organization is: when it began, what it does, whom it serves, and where. Write it once, carefully, and reuse it

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unchanged across releases so your description stays consistent everywhere it appears. Three to five sentences is enough. It should be factual, current, and free of claims you cannot support — no "leading," "premier," or "#1" unless an independent source actually named you so. Update it when facts change, and only then. Below or near the end, many releases add a simple "For more information" line with a website. That line, your contact block, and your boilerplate together mean an editor never has to hunt for the basics — and hunting is where stories go to die.

The Steps

1. Draft the quote by writing what the person would say to a neighbor. Keep it to one or two sentences, with one concrete detail or feeling in it.
2. Read the quote aloud. If it sounds like a brochure, rewrite it until it sounds like speech. Remove "thrilled," "leverage," "valued," and "moving forward."
3. Get the quoted person's explicit approval of the exact words, and confirm their name spelling and title.
4. Sweep the body for claims and replace each with a checkable detail: numbers served, dates, times, address, price or "free," sign-up method, accessibility.
5. Write or refresh your boilerplate: three to five factual sentences — founded when, does what, serves whom, based where — with no unsupported superlatives.
6. Add a "For more information" line with one website address, spelled exactly, and confirm the page at that address is live and matches the release.

A Worked Example

Lena runs a small literacy nonprofit and drafts a quote for its director — herself — reading: "We are excited to announce this innovative program that will empower our community through the transformative power of reading." She applies the neighbor test and rewrites it as she would actually say it: "Half the adults who come to us are hiding that they can't read a bus schedule. This class is private, it's at night, and nobody has to tell their family they're here." The second quote is printable because it is true, specific, and human. She then sweeps her body text: "serving many adults" becomes "two classes of eight adults each, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6:30 to 8 p.m., at the Main Street library, free, no ID required." Her boilerplate settles at four sentences and stays fixed for the year. The local paper prints her quote word for word — quotes written like speech usually are — and three new students tell her the quote is why they trusted the class enough to come.

Common Mistakes

- **Quotes that sound like advertising.** If no human would say it across a fence, no editor will print it. Write speech, not slogans.
- **Inventing or polishing quotes without approval.** A quote is a promise that a named person said those words. Get their yes on the exact text.
- **Claims where details belong.** "Serving the community" convinces nobody. Numbers, dates, addresses, and prices are what belief is built from.

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- **A boilerplate full of superlatives.** "The leading provider" without proof makes editors doubt the checkable facts nearby. Keep it plain and current.

Lesson 5 — Sending, Following Up, and Being Ready

A finished release still has to travel, and how you send it decides much of its fate. Build a small, accurate list of recipients: the specific reporters, editors, producers, and calendar keepers whose actual audience matches your news. Read or watch what each one covers before you send. A release about a children's program goes to the education reporter and the community calendar, not to the sports desk and not to a national magazine that has never covered your town. Quality of aim beats quantity of addresses in every newsroom. A sender who respects beats earns reading; a sender who blasts everything to everyone earns a filter.

Send the release in the body of the email, not only as an attachment. Attachments get blocked, go unopened on phones, and force extra work; the standard professional practice is full text pasted into the email, with a clean PDF or document attached only if the outlet's guidelines ask for one. Your subject line is a second headline and should behave like one: factual and specific — "Free tool library opens March 22 in Eastside" — never "Press release" alone, never in all capitals, never with hype words. Send on a weekday morning when newsrooms are planning, unless the news itself dictates another time, and never send the same release twice to the same person as if it were new. One release, one sending, to each recipient.

Follow up exactly once, briefly, and helpfully. Wait two or three working days for non-urgent news, then send one short message: who you are, what you sent and when, the one-line news again, and an offer to provide anything missing — a photo, a visit, an interview. Then stop. Repeated follow-ups, phone calls demanding to know if they "got it," and messages to multiple people at the same outlet about the same release mark you as a burden, and the mark outlasts the story. If an outlet passes, accept it without argument. News judgment is their job, and a graceful sender gets read next time.

Finally, be ready for the good outcome. If a reporter calls, they are usually on a deadline and need three things: confirmation of the facts, one human voice — often the person you quoted — and possibly a photo or a visit. Keep your release beside the phone so your answers match it exactly. Answer promptly, speak in the same plain sentences you wrote, and never say anything to a reporter that you would not want printed, because the safe assumption is that everything can be printed. If you do not know an answer, say so and offer to find out fast, then do it. After any coverage appears, check it for factual errors: thank the outlet for the coverage, and correct only real factual mistakes, politely and with the right fact — never complain about tone or emphasis. Then save the coverage, note which outlets responded, and let that list teach you where your news truly fits next time.

The Steps

1. Build a targeted list: name the specific people and outlets whose audience matches this news, and confirm what each one covers.

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2. Paste the full release text into the email body. Add an attachment only if that outlet's guidelines request one.

3. Write a factual subject line that works as a headline: the news, the place or date, in plain words, normal capitalization.

4. Send on a weekday morning unless the news demands otherwise. Send once to each recipient.

5. Follow up one time after two or three working days: one short message restating the news in a line and offering a photo, visit, or interview. Then stop.

6. Keep the release by the phone. If a reporter calls, confirm facts from it, offer the quoted person, answer promptly, and treat everything you say as printable.

7. After coverage, thank the outlet, correct only genuine factual errors with the correct fact, and record what worked for your next release.

A Worked Example

David sends his first release for a free home-repair workshop series. His list is eight names, chosen slowly: two neighborhood paper reporters, the community calendar editor, a local radio producer who runs a Saturday home show, the library system's newsletter editor, and three hyperlocal news sites. The release goes in the email body on a Tuesday morning, subject line: "Free home-repair workshops start April 5 at the Canal Street Library." On Friday he follows up once with each, adding one useful thing — two clear photos of last year's workshop, free to publish with credit. The radio producer books him for a five-minute segment because the photos made the segment easy to picture. One site runs the calendar item; the neighborhood paper sends a reporter to the first workshop. Three outlets do nothing, and David sends them nothing more. Two months later his second release goes to the same eight names — and is opened quickly, because his name is now filed in their minds under "sends real news, doesn't pester." That reputation, built in one cycle, is the real asset sending well creates.

Common Mistakes

- **Blasting hundreds of unresearched addresses.** Editors can tell. Aim at the few whose audiences match, and you will outperform every blast.
- **Attachment-only sending.** If opening your news takes extra steps on a phone in a hallway, it will not be opened. Put the text in the email.
- **Following up repeatedly.** One helpful follow-up is professional. Three are a warning label attached to your name. Send once, then stop.
- **Being unprepared or careless when a reporter calls.** Contradicting your own release, or chatting as if off the record, can undo a good release in one conversation. Answer from the document, promptly and plainly.

Try It

Write a complete press release for something real: a launch, an event, a new free offer, or a milestone from your own work or a project you know well. Begin with Lesson 1 on paper — write

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the one-sentence news with a change and a date in it, then write the stranger's answer to "why would I care?" If you cannot write that answer honestly, change the angle until you can; do not proceed on hype. Then build the document in the standard structure: contact block with a real person, "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" with the calendar date beneath it, a headline, a dateline and lead, a body in most-important-first order, one approved quote, your boilerplate, and the ### end mark. Draft at least five headlines and pick the most factual. Check your lead against the five questions with a finger on each. Read the quote aloud and rewrite it until it sounds like a person talking to a neighbor. Sweep the body and replace every claim with a checkable detail — a number, a date, an address, a price.

Then do the editor's proofread: names, dates, times, addresses, and numbers checked against a source, character by character, twice. Finally, prepare the sending without sending: build a list of five to eight real, well-matched recipients, write the subject line, and draft your single follow-up message, including one useful extra you could offer, such as a photo or a visit. Keep the release, the list, and the follow-up together in one folder. You now hold the complete professional package — and the next time you have real news, your only job is to repeat a process you have already proven you can do.

Fortress shares what I learned, not professional advice. General info only, not legal / HR / financial advice.

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