

# NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Today's date

## ***15,000 Do It Every Day*** ***Principles For Writing A News Release***

Rexburg, Idaho--A valuable but much-maligned device, the news release is the granddaddy of public relations writing vehicles. Most public relations professionals swear by it. Some newspaper editors swear about it. Indeed, PR Newswire, a paid wire service used by public relations people to distribute releases, issues about 1,500 news releases every day. The reason is that everyone uses the release as the basic interpretive mechanism to let people know what an organization is doing. There is no better, clearer, more persuasive way to announce news about an organization, its products and their applications than by issuing a news release. That's why the news release deserves special attention as a public relations writing vehicle.

A news release may be written as the document of record to state an organization's official position—for example, in a court case or in announcing a price or rate increase. More frequently, however, releases have one overriding purpose: to influence a publication to write favorably about the material discussed. Every day, in fact, professionals send releases to editors in the hope of stimulating favorable stories about their organizations.

Most news releases are not used verbatim. Rather, they may stimulate editors to consider covering a story. In other words, the release becomes the point of departure for a newspaper, magazine, radio, or television story. Why, then, do some editors and others describe news releases as “worthless drivel”? The answer, says researcher Linda Morton of the University of Oklahoma's Herbert School of Journalism, is threefold:

1. **Releases are poorly written.** Professor Morton found that most news releases are written in a more complicated and difficult-to-read style than most newspaper stories. “This could be the result of pressure from administrators as they review and critique press releases,” she reasoned.

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2. **Releases are rarely localized.** Newspapers focus largely on hometown or regional developments. The more localized a news release, the greater the chance it has of being used. “Practitioners may not want to do the additional work that localization requires.” This is a bad decision because research indicates that a news release is 10 times more likely to be used if it is localized.
3. **Releases are not newsworthy.** This is the grand dilemma. An editor will use a public relations release only if he or she considers it news. If it’s not newsworthy, it won’t be used. What determines whether something is news? Professor Morton suggests five requisites:
  - 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
  - Recognized title: the greater the title of the individual making the announcement—president versus vice president—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.

With these findings as backdrop, it is not surprising that research also indicates that less than 10 percent of all news releases are published.

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