

WHAT MAKES NEWS? CRITERIA CHECKLIST

The media reports information that editors believe is of interest to readers, viewers, and/or listeners. This is different than what is interesting to us. Stories that we pitch to a journalist need to be attention-getting and substantive. You can sell a story by answering the questions: What's new? And so what?

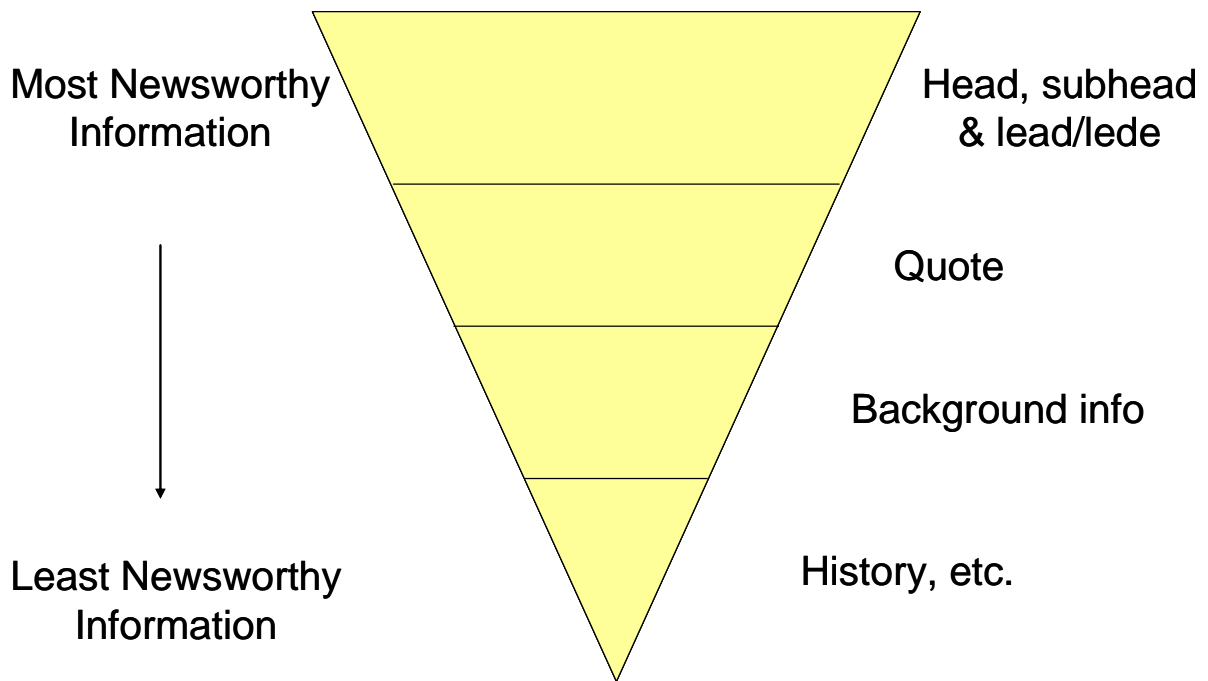
Editors are inclined to cover stories that meet one or more of the following criteria. Use this as a checklist when you are preparing to send something to the media:

- Timely:** does it relate to current events or breaking news?
- Offers new insight or data.** The media loves **numbers!** Use statistics, polling data, and other objective information to sell stories.
- Unusual, unexpected or shocking:** is something out of the ordinary happening?
- Celebrity or prominent figure.** If a high-ranking public official or celebrity is involved, media will be more likely to cover the story.
- Local impact:** People want to know news that will directly affect them. Is it localizing a national or regional story?
- Dollar amounts:** impact of smoking translates into X million dollars a year to society/lost worker productivity.
- Contains action:** Meetings are not interesting to reporters. They need something that will entice readers.
- Defines a trend:** Reporters love to cover trends because the stories usually speak to a lot of people.
- Creates an extreme:** highest, biggest, lowest, smallest, most, least, record-setting are all selling words for a journalist.
- Anniversaries** such as the anniversary of September 11, the Smoke-Free Air Act.
- Service oriented** – news you can use, i.e., special events or something readers/listeners can take action on.

Adapted from M+R Strategic Services and Michael Anstendig

INVERTED PYRAMID

The Inverted Pyramid Style for Writing Press Releases



Source: Michael Anstendig

PRESS RELEASE EXAMPLE

[Always use company or agency letterhead]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

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N.Y.U. INSTRUCTOR ANSTENDIG ISSUES WRITING GUIDELINES

FISHKILL, N.Y., April 11, 2007 – Consultant Michael Anstendig, the instructor of Media Training 2.01 – Written Communications Tools, presented by the Tobacco Control Training Project of Cicatelli Associates, today issued guidelines to be followed by students when preparing class assignments. In addition to press releases, the formatting specifications apply to other writing assignments as well.

“It’s important that students take their class assignments seriously and prepare those assignments in a professional style,” said Anstendig. “While I’m aware that every organization has its own style and conventions that students must follow on their jobs, for the purpose of uniformity, I’ve established a style that I expect students to adhere to during this course.”

All press releases, as well as other assignments, are to be typed, double-spaced, left-margin justified. “The fully-justified style creates unnatural spacing between words and makes documents difficult to read,” Anstendig said. In addition, all press materials should be printed single-sided, to facilitate faxing if requested by the media.

In addition, students are to use a letterhead. Whether it is actual letterhead or

- more -

invented information, a letterhead gives the release a more professional look and establishes a pattern of ensuring that everything is in the right place. The guidelines further specify that there should be one-inch margins all around, indented paragraphs and a 12-point font size. The font style should be Arial or a similar sans serif style.

“Press materials should look like a press materials. By practicing good habits here and learning how to consistently stick to a style, the students will be able to adapt more quickly to real-life working conditions,” said Anstendig. “I expect that the materials students hand in should look like the release they are reading right now.”

The Tobacco Control Training Project (TCTP) is funded by the New York State Department of Health’s Bureau of Tobacco Use Prevention and Control. The goal of the TCTP is to increase the capacity of Bureau funded partners to change tobacco policies and social norms.

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PRESS RELEASE - TEMPLATE

[On Letterhead]

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Names and phone #s (at least one cell)

HEADER

Sub-Head (Sub-Head is Optional: Can use it to call out details or additional info that are not in the headline)

1st Paragraph: Text in 12 pt sans serif font:

Location and Date in Bold (i.e., FISHKILL, N.Y., April, 11, 2007) — One - two sentences that cover the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How of the event.

Description

Quotable quotes from newsworthy speakers.

At bottom of 1st page – put:

- more - (center justified)

At the top of 2nd page: identify your organization, the page numbers and the date of the release. Try to write releases to no more than 3 pages.

At the end of the release: include your organization boilerplate – a sentence or two summarizing your agency's mission.

At the very end of the release put:

(center justified)

MEDIA ALERT – TEMPLATE

[On Letterhead]

MEDIA ALERT
(Date – Month, Date and Year)

HEADLINE
(Summarizes the event with catchy language)

Sub-Head
(Optional if have a strong headline and lead paragraph)

Paragraph: Provides background information on the event and why it is newsworthy.

WHAT: One or two lines explaining the nature of the event.

WHO: Newsworthy speakers, sponsoring agency

WHERE: Location information. Should be central, meaningful or easy to locate.

WHEN: Day of week, Month, Day, Year, April 18, 2007
Start time to end time

CONTACT: Name, phone and email. Always include a cell number.

Organization boilerplate – a sentence or two summarizing your agency's mission.

PRESS KIT

The elements of the press kit **must** include:

- A two-pocket folder to physically contain the contents of the press kit. The right pocket should contain the press release, bio and Q & As. The left pocket should contain the backgrounder and fact sheet.
- A one-page pitch letter offering your client for interview by the media, which should be paper-clipped to the front of your press kit folder. Make sure the salutation includes the editor's name, title, publication name, etc., even if it is imaginary.
- A press release, minimum two pages and maximum three pages.
- All press releases you have sent out for the past six months.
- Past media coverage, clippings and placements.
- A one-page backgrounder about your organization.
- A one-page bio on your spokesperson.
- A one-page fact sheet describing your services, etc.
- A set of 10 Q & As for the media.

Please remember that all press kit contents must be formatted properly, e.g., Arial 12-point font, one-inch margins, etc.

Source: Michael Anstendig

ASSOCIATED PRESS STYLEBOOK CONVENTIONS

(Information derived from *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*,
Edited by Norm Goldstein, Perseus Publishing, 2000)

The Dateline

It contains the name of the city where the news originates (usually the headquarters town of the entity issuing the press release), the date, followed by an emdash, namely two dashes. For example, **BINGHAMTON, N.Y., April 11, 2007—**. The entire dateline is in **bold**.

Domestic datelines

For domestic datelines, the city name, e.g., **BINGHAMTON**, is followed by the abbreviation for the state name, which is also **bolded**, e.g., **N.Y.** These are not the same as postal abbreviations. See the following:

State Name	Abbreviation		
Alabama	Ala.	North Carolina	N.C.
Arizona	Ariz.	North Dakota	N.D.
Arkansas	Ark.	Oklahoma	Okla.
California	Calif.	Oregon	Ore.
Colorado	Colo.	Pennsylvania	Pa.
Connecticut	Conn.	Rhode Island	R.I.
Delaware	Del.	South Carolina	S.C.
Georgia	Ga.	South Dakota	S.D.
Illinois	Ill.	Tennessee	Tenn.
Indiana	Ind.	Vermont	Va.
Kansas	Kan.	Washington	Wash.
Kentucky	Ky.	West Virginia	W.
Louisiana	La.	Va.	
Maryland	Md.	Wisconsin	Wisc.
Massachusetts	Mass.	Wyoming	Wyo.
Michigan	Mich.		
Minnesota	Minn.		
Mississippi	Miss.		
Montana	Mo.		
Nebraska	Neb.		
State Name	Abbreviation		
Nevada	Nev.		
New Hampshire	N.H.		
New Jersey	N.J.		
New Mexico	N.M.		
New York	N.Y.		

Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah are never abbreviated in datelines or within the press release text. To help remember these exceptions, these state names have either four or five letters or are beyond the confines of the continental U.S.

Some cities appear in the news so frequently that the state names are omitted. They include:

ATLANTA, BALTIMORE, BOSTON, CHICAGO, CINCINNATI, CLEVELAND, DALLAS, DENVER, DETROIT, HONOLULU, HOUSTON, INDIANAPOLIS, LAS VEGAS, LOS ANGELES, MIAMI, MILWAUKEE, MINNEAPOLIS, NEW ORLEANS, NEW YORK, OKLAHOMA CITY, PHILADELPHIA, PHOENIX, PITTSBURGH, ST. LOUIS, SALT LAKE CITY, SAN ANTONIO, SAN DIEGO, SAN FRANCISCO, SEATTLE and WASHINGTON.

Foreign datelines

For foreign datelines, the convention is to use the city name, followed by the country name, e.g., **PHNOM PENH, Cambodia**. As with domestic datelines, both names are in **bold**. As is the case with some domestic U.S. cities, there are some cities so synonymous with their countries, that the country name is omitted. They include:

BEIJING, BERLIN, DJIBOUTI, GENEVA, GIBRALTAR, GUATEMALA CITY, HAVANA, HONG KONG, JERUSALEM, KUWAIT, LONDON, LUXEMBOURG, MACAU, MEXICO CITY, MONACO, MONTREAL, MOSCOW, OTTAWA, PARIS, QUEBEC, ROME, SAN MARINO, SINGAPORE, TOKYO, TORONTO and VATICAN CITY.

In addition, for press release issued from the U.N., use the dateline **UNITED NATIONS**. Do not use **N.Y.**

Dates in the Dateline

Use the name of the month, followed by the date in Arabic numbers (without “st,” “nd,” “rd” or “th” following) a comma and then the year in Arabic numbers, e.g., **April 11, 2007.**

Note: Do not use other formatting conventions like 4/11/07, April 11th, 2007, 11 April 2007, etc. These might be perfectly acceptable in other contexts, like business correspondence, etc., but

Spell out months with four or five letters, e.g., **March, April, May, June, July**, but abbreviate the longer months using the following convention: **Jan., Feb., Aug.,**

Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. Within the text of the press release, spell out the full name of the month if it is just being used with the year, e.g., February 2008, but do not bold the name.

Other Conventions

Time of Day

Use a.m. and p.m., e.g., 10 a.m. or 5:30 p.m.

Do not use AM and PM. AM in AP Style refers to the radio term “amplitude modulation,” as in AM radio (as opposed to FM radio).

Numbers

Spell out numbers 0 through 9, e.g., zero, one, two, three, etc. Use Arabic numbers for 10 and above, e.g., 10, 11, 500, 10,000. For example, “we bought two orange, three apples and 25 kiwi fruits.”

For ordinals, spell out first through ninth and use Arabic numbers for 10th and above. For example, “He was ranked fifth in algebra, but 25th in geometry.”