

## The voice of the Voluntary Arts

# How to... write a press release

The press release is the most basic and cheapest tool for getting your organisation to the attention of the media. It is a page of newsworthy information you prepare and send to the newspapers. Press releases are usually sent out to the papers to let them know about a story that will be happening in the near future – for example, the opening of a new building, or the first night of a performance – so the paper can cover the story. You can also use a press release to send in a story that happened recently (i.e. in the last couple of days).

A press release gives the editor of the paper all the information they need to publish the story, or follow it up with a reporter. It answers the questions **who, what, when, where** and **why** in the opening paragraph and gives a contact name and telephone number for further information. It is usually short – about 250 words – and made up of short paragraphs of short sentences. It finishes with information on who to contact for more information.

Don't be daunted by the prospect of writing a press release; simply convey the essential information in a clear and well presented way, following the guidelines offered below.

### Structure and content

- **Impact matters** – you need to make your release stand out from all the others that land on the reporter's desk. The first 30% of the page is the most important. It is vital that you use this space to catch the journalist's attention.
- **Headline:** Think of a clear, catchy title, no more than six words long, that is punchy, to the point and tells the reader what your story is about.
- **The first paragraph** should grab the reader's interest and summarise the whole story. Ask yourself if it would stand alone if nothing else were published.
- **The five W's:** the introduction should cover the important facts:
  - Who, What, Where, When, Why? Re-read what you have written and ask yourself these questions. Can you answer them?
- **The facts** should be in descending order of interest because newspapers cut stories from the bottom up, to make them fit the space available. If they do this then you might find that the most interesting or newsworthy fact about your story may be removed! (This is called the 'Inverted Pyramid' style of writing.)
- **Include a quotation.** These can be used as the verbal form of photographs and can add interest and reality – but make sure that they extend the information in some way and not just give a bland blessing. Ensure that you cite whoever said it and always put quotation marks around quotes.
- **Always date your press release.**



- **Always include a contact name and number** and make sure the contact person is easy to get hold of and is fully briefed about the story. Include a home telephone number.

## Presentation and layout

This is also important – you want to make your press release as easy on the eye as possible to make sure that it gets read.

- **Always type it up:** there is no such thing as a hand written press release.
- **Double-space your text** and keep it left aligned not centred – so it is easier to read and easier for the newspaper to edit.
- **Use wide margins** to allow for editing and for the reporter to write notes and instructions for the subeditor.
- **Use a readable font** – something plain and simple like Times New Roman or Arial. Never use anything fancy like *Lucida handwriting*, or too informal like *Comic Sans*.
- **Don't make the text any smaller than 12 point.**
- **Number your pages at the bottom.**
- **Always write ENDS at the end.**
- **Never type on both sides of a sheet of paper** – a press release should always be single sided.
- **Use your headed notepaper for the top sheet**, but plain white paper for any additional pages.
- **Never split a sentence over two pages**, and preferably never split a paragraph over two pages.
- **Staple the pages of your release together:** paperclips can come undone.

- **Finish by putting the contact and a contact number at the end**, and the name of the person/organisation who issued the release at the top.

## Language and tone

- **Keep it clear and simple** – use language that is plain, economical and confident.
- **Use short sentences** and keep the whole press release to 250 words or less if you possibly can.
- **'Write for your neighbour rather than a colleague'** – i.e. someone who knows nothing about your organisation and doesn't use your jargon. Ask yourself if the ordinary reader could understand what you mean.
- **Avoid jargon.**
- **Write from the reader's perspective**, not your own. For example, don't start your story with a longwinded explanation about how hard you worked to get funding from a particular charitable trust for an activity – start with telling the public about the activity that they can take part in!
- **Any story you send to a paper will only be used if the editor feels it will be of interest to their readers.**
- **Don't use acronyms** unless you explain them in full first.
- **Avoid clichés.**
- **Be truthful and accurate** – it wins you credibility. Beware false claims such as the 'first', the 'only' and the 'biggest'. Incorrect press releases could get you a bad name and come back to haunt you.



## An example press release

**Date:**  
top of the page.

1 December 2003

**Headline:**  
bold, short and tells what the story is about.

# Greenfield Potters celebrate silver anniversary

**First paragraph:**  
essential information in first paragraph  
Who, What, Where, When, Why.

The Greenfield Potters Club will be holding a special event at the Wellington Art Centre next weekend to celebrate the group's 25th anniversary.

**More detailed information:**  
in the middle paragraph(s) including quotes from people involved.

Children and adults are all welcome to try their hand at making their own clay pot. Many of the group's ceramicists will be giving demonstrations of using a potting wheel and other techniques. Throughout the weekend there will be other hands on activities including face painting, felt making and marbling. There will be several craft stalls selling hand made items and some live music on Saturday night by a local folk band, the Celts.

Dave Winchester, one of the founder members of the group said, "*we hope the weekend will give people a chance to try something new and see how fun being creative can be. Our membership has grown from just six of us when we started back 1977 to now over fifty members and we hope that the event will encourage more people to join in our workshops in the future.*" Mr Winchester has exhibited work in the V&A Museum in London and many other galleries throughout the UK and Europe.

The Potters regularly organise workshops and masterclasses in various venues in Greenfield, for people of all ages and abilities. They also hold group exhibitions four times a year showcasing their wide range of styles and techniques.

**Concluding paragraph**

The event takes place on Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th December, from 10am – 6pm, with a performance from the Celts on Saturday between 6-8pm. Admission is free.

**Contact name**

For more information contact Dave Winchester, Secretary of the Greenfield Potters Club – **telephone: 01230 123456** or mobile: 07711 223344.

-ENDS-



## Images

If you send an image with your press release be sure to:

- **add 'with picture'** under the headline of the release;
- **include a 'photocaption'** at the end, giving the names of people in the picture so they can be easily identified (write down who they are when you take the picture, otherwise you may get confused);
- **give the ages of any children** included in the picture;
- **attach a label to the back of the photo** identifying exactly what the picture is of, in case it gets lost;
- **use a good, clear image** with a strong, simple subject;
- **check with the journalist what size and format they will require** (e.g. jpeg, tiff, eps) if you are sending digital images. Many papers now prefer to receive images via email or on disc, but these must be of a high standard and resolution;
- **say if you want the photo or disc back**, and include a stamped addressed envelope and a protective card for photographs.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### VAN publications

This document forms part of a set of briefings about marketing and publicity issues, which includes:

- **No. 73: Writing for the web**
- **No. 74: Publicity explained**
- **No. 75: Planning a marketing campaign**
- **No. 76: A guide to good design**
- **No. 77: How to... write a press release**

Other relevant VAN Briefings include:

- **No. 14: Writing words that work**
- **No. 53: Creating clear print: reaching the blind and partially sighted**

All VAN Briefings can be downloaded from our website [www.voluntaryarts.org](http://www.voluntaryarts.org) in the 'publications' section, where you will also find a list of briefings written specifically for the web. You may also like to have a look at the 'Marketing & Publicity' page on the 'Running Your Group' section of the VAN website.

### Acknowledgements

This is an updated version of **VAN Briefing 11: Get into Print! Working with the Press** and as such replaces that document. Help was also gratefully received from Peter Thomas Media Training – email: [peter@ptconsultants.co.uk](mailto:peter@ptconsultants.co.uk)

---

**Disclaimer:** We have taken reasonable precautions to ensure that the information contained in this Briefing is accurate. However, the document is not intended to be legally comprehensive. We recommend you take legal advice before taking action on any of the matters covered herein.



Do you need this publication in a larger or alternative format?  
Contact Charlie **T: 029 20 395 395**  
E: [charlie@voluntaryarts.org](mailto:charlie@voluntaryarts.org)

First issued with Update 35

---

The Voluntary Arts Network, PO Box 200, Cardiff CF5 1YH

**T:** 029 20 395 395 **F:** 029 20 397 397 **E:** [info@voluntaryarts.org](mailto:info@voluntaryarts.org) **W:** [www.voluntaryarts.org](http://www.voluntaryarts.org)

The Voluntary Arts Network is registered in Scotland as Company No. 139147 and Charity No. SC 020345.  
VAN acknowledges funding from the Carnegie UK Trust, the Arts Councils of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.