WRITING A NEWS RELEASE

A news release is a public statement issued by a company or institution with the intent to inform and promote. The statement may promote a new product or initiative, announce an important hire, or respond to some public controversy. Although the initial audience usually is a news organization, the institution ultimately intends that the statement be distributed to a wider audience of news consumers. The document should emphasize those elements that give the statement news value. The goal is to interest news organizations in the topic and to make it easy for news reporters and editors to produce a story on that topic.

Format: A typical news release follows the format of a news story, starting with a headline that announces the news in bold type. The body of the document starts with a dateline. This is simply the name of the city from which the statement or the news originates. The dateline is followed by a dash, after which the writer begins the first body paragraph. The first paragraph generally states the main point of the news release.

Content: The content of news releases varies:

1. May include quotations from company officers (who review and approve the quotations before the release is issued)
2. May also include facts, statistics, or examples to support the company’s positions
3. Should provide a context that links the company’s statement to some current concern. This connection (sometimes called a “news peg”) is designed to make the statement relevant to the audience of news distributors and news consumers
4. May be accompanied by a background briefing paper or by photographs

Contacts: News releases typically end with contact information so news organizations can call with follow-up questions for the writer or to arrange interviews with company officials.

Writing Characteristics: News releases may promote company positions or products, and thus are often persuasive in nature. It is important, however, to be truthful and ethical. News releases, as with other documents, should reflect the values and goals of the company or institution that issues them. Paragraphs generally should be short, for easy reading, and organized in a way that mimics a news story, with the most interesting or newsworthy material coming first. Writing should be clear, concise, and coherent.

Caution: Before you write a press release, think about the “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” and “why,” but remember that while you may want to provide the valued information, you may not want to provide all of the details. If there has been an unfortunate incident at your company or college, you want to get the press release out but you don’t want to promote gossip or add flames to a volatile situation. When handling company or college information, discretion should be used with sensitive information. Likewise, remember that the press release will land on a journalist’s desk, and he or she will need to know why this information is news worth, so you must provide enough information to spark interest and to make the journalist’s job less complicated.