

PR Play 5-5

“Write your first draft from your heart. Write your second draft from the head...then polish it.”

David Trottier – “The Screenwriting Center”

PR Play 5-6

Grazian’s Noun Checklist

1. Eliminate nouns with complex endings.
 - Look for nouns that end in *tion, tive, ability, ment, able, ness, ance*.
 - Change them to verbs, phrases or clauses.
2. Change general nouns into specific nouns.
 - Never use a noun referring to an entire group when you should use one pertaining to a member of that group.
 - Talk about *he* or *she* rather than *them*.
3. Change non-visual nouns into visual nouns.
 - Get rid of those abstract nouns and replace them with nouns that your reader can picture.
4. Look for nouns that can be changed into verb forms.
5. Eliminate weak adjectives.
 - Look for words preceding nouns.
 - Replace vague adjectives with precise adjectives.
 - Eliminate other adjectives by finding nouns that can stand alone.
6. Eliminate needless adverbs modifying adjectives.
 - Seek out the main offenders: *very, quite, rather*.
 - Eliminate them by using nouns that can stand alone.

Crafting News Releases

Like all copy produced by the PR specialist, news releases should be well written and error free. News releases are the backbone of a media kit. They must be mechanically sound, logically organized and credible. And they must also adhere to the accepted format. A well written news release is not unlike an “executive summary.” With minor variations, follow these suggestions for **news releases for the print media**:

PR Play 5-7

Publications and Other “Products” Commonly Produced By PR Practitioners

- news releases (both print and electronic)
 - media advisories (media alerts; news and photo memo; invitation to cover)
 - fact sheets
 - histories
 - backgrounders
 - feature articles
 - photo captions
 - public service announcements (PSAs)
 - letters to the editor
 - op-eds
 - pitch letters
 - position papers
 - counseling papers
 - newsletter copy (newsletters)
 - brochures
 - annual reports
 - issue ads
 - obituaries
 - visual presentations
 - speeches (Chapter 13)
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- Use company or organization letterhead (8½ x 11) – even if the release is being sent electronically. Your letterhead is your brand. If e-mailing, send the release both as an inline attachment (within the body of the e-mail) and as a regular attachment, which could be downloaded.
 - Include the name, phone numbers and e-mail of a contact person.
 - Put the date sent (Sept. 1, 2009) with the release date below it (for example, For Release: Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2009 or it might read For Release: Upon Receipt).
 - Assign a number to it for easy reference (Release No. 2009-36).
 - Headline. (There is no consensus on whether editors like headlines suggested by the release writer – some do, some don’t.)
 - Use a slug (one-, two- or three-word summary of story for quick identification by editors and reporters).

- Datelines are optional (see *Associated Press Stylebook*).
- Restrict copy to no more than two pages (typed or word processed), double-spaced (about 250 words per page). For traditional newspapers, 250 words equal approximately six column inches. In broadcast, 150 words equal about 60 seconds of air time. Some PR practitioners single space their releases. They would contain about 500 words or approximately 12 column inches of editorial copy. Whichever format is adapted, maintain consistency.
- Most times, use the “inverted pyramid” style. (According to Ken Blake, Ph.D. of Middle Tennessee State University, “To understand what the ‘inverted pyramid’ means, picture an upside-down triangle – one with the narrow tip pointing downward and the broad base on top. The broad base represents the most newsworthy information in the news story, and the narrow tip represents the least newsworthy information in the news story. When you write a story in inverted pyramid format, you put the most newsworthy information at the beginning of the story and the least newsworthy information at the end.”) Journalists and PR Practitioners are moving away from using the “inverted pyramid.”
- Do not split paragraphs at the bottom of a page or carry an incomplete sentence to another page.
- Do not hyphenate words at the end of a typed line (most computer programs will take care of this for you).
- If the story contains more than one page, print **MORE** at the bottom of each *non*final page (just below the completed paragraph).
- At the top of each succeeding page (remember, try to complete your story in two pages), type the slug on the far left followed by the phrase *page 1 of 2* (*page 2 of 2*, etc.), *add 1* or *page 2*. If you happen to go to a third page, it would read *the slug/page 3 of 3 or add 2*, or *page 3*. (Many editors prefer *page 1 of 3* format.)
- At the end of the release, type **30**, **###** or **end**.
- Print only on one side. (News people don’t usually look on the back of a sheet of paper. If your release is being sent electronically, this is not an issue.)
- Do not staple multiple-page releases (if mailed or hand delivered).
- Releases must be readable and legible (no script or italics fonts) – Times Roman, Univers and Arial are good fonts for news releases.
- Releases should be snail (regular) mailed, e-mailed, faxed or delivered in some other manner one week prior to the event. This gives the

PR Play 5-8

Preparing Your News Release

What's unique? What makes your event stand out? This is the hook that will catch an editor's eye. Keep the reader in mind: What does he/she need to know? Then use that theme in the narrative.

Put it in writing: Typed or typeset, please, double-space. E-mail is preferred. Always use your organization's letterhead. Write the release so it's clear in the first paragraph what's happening. Give information about the five W's and one H – who, what, where, when, why and how – by the third paragraph. Do not exceed one page. Use upper-and lower-case letters. Explain all acronyms.

Detail, detail, detail: Provide backup materials. For a speaker, provide a resume. Give directions to the event. Don't forget rain-date information. Double-check all facts in your release – spellings of names and places, dates, times, numbers, etc.

Think like an editor or reader: Always include a contact person's name, day and evening phone numbers and e-mail address. Also give a phone number at the event. A phone ringing in a closed office does no one any good. Even a beeper number helps. This information is critically important for evening, weekend or holiday events.

Get the reader involved: Is the contact phone number for the editor the same one for readers who want more information? If not, please provide it. Also helpful: an appropriate Web page and e-mail address. Consider who will get the calls – will the contact person expect them? Get permission before giving home phone numbers.

Listing Events

How to submit: The *Courier-Post* searchable Events Finder Calendar, available through www.courierpostonline.com, provides a direct route to our online and print calendars. Look for the calendar icon on the right side of the Web site and click on "Submit Event." Fill out the form and your listing will be posted as soon as the next day. If you want your listing to get into print, submit it two weeks in advance.

cont.

PR Play 5-8 continued

Submitting Photos

How to take the image: Facial photos have the best chance of being published. Group photos, check-passing and hand-shaking images are less likely to be used. Be sure to accurately identify people in the photos – double-check the spelling. To take the image, fill the lens by just shooting the head and shoulders of the subject. Avoid having something above someone. The object will look like it's coming out of the subject's head.

Email it: In the e-mail's subject field, give a brief description about the image, such as the event's title. Include all caption information, including a call-back number and name.

Technical details: Images should be at least 200 dpi (dots per square inch) resolution and compressed in a .JPEG file.

Avoid These Pitfalls

- Don't expect your release to be printed as submitted. We will edit for grammar, punctuation, spelling, libel, style and brevity.
- We get many requests to cover events. We are more likely to cover an event if we receive notice well in advance and the notice indicates the significance of the event to our readers.
- Don't be upset if we can't cover your event. We have compiled a list of readers' top interests that helps us prioritize. We particularly look for events that reflect diversity and that connect to readers' lives. Please let us know about your next event.
- Don't forget to keep a copy of the release for your records.

After Publication

If an error is published, immediately notify the appropriate editor.

Courier-Post – Camden, N.J. – Feb. 17, 2008

editor ample time to plan. (The same holds true for a **Media Advisory** or an **Invitation To Cover**.)

- Check with each newspaper, radio and TV station in your market to determine how each prefers to receive releases, media advisories, etc. (regular mail, e-mail with attachment or as part of a regular e-mail).

A practitioner who has ample time to write releases for the *electronic* media (see Broadcast News Writing later in *this* chapter) as well as *print* should follow the above mechanics for *broadcast writing*, plus:

- Try to keep it to one page. Radio and TV stations will carry the story as a short (a 15- to 30-second story read by the anchor) unless they choose to send a reporter or do a phone interview. (75 words equal 30 seconds.)
- Do not use quotes. Paraphrase, instead.
- When paraphrasing, place the attribution before the phrase. (After winning the British Open, Tiger Woods said it was the greatest day of his life. In print, it would be written “*It was the greatest day of my life,*” Tiger Woods said, after winning the British Open).
- Type in upper and lower case (14 or 16 point type). The days of typing in all CAPS for electronic media are gone.

PR Play 5-9

Common News Release Errors

- Improper formatting
- Failure to *slug* the release
- Putting *boiler plate* information in first paragraph rather than last graph (Always put *boiler plate* in last graph above the 30 or ####. Below the “end” mark would make it an “*Editor’s Note.*” [see page 101])
- Spelling errors
- Grammatical errors
- Punctuation errors
- Sentence construction errors – incomplete sentences or run-on sentences
- Too wordy – boil writing down to the least common denominator
- Lack of attribution
- Lack of a local “hook”
- Incomplete contact information
- Not being available when the media needs verification

PR Play 5-10
Typical Format for a General News Release
with Explanations

Today's Date: Sept. 1, 2009

Release No. 2009-36

Contact: M. Larry Litwin, APR, Fellow PRSA

856-555-1212 (Office)

856-555-1313 (FAX)

856-555-1414 (Home)

856-555-1515 (Cell)

larry@larrylitwin.com

Release Date: At once

Rules for Formatting News Release

(SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE/page 1 of 3)

GLASSBORO, N.J. – This is an example of what news editors look for when they receive professionally crafted news releases. They should be typed and printed on 8½ x 11 paper (or sent as e-mail inline attachments and/or e-mail attachments). Never print releases on both sides of the paper. They should be sent to the appropriate reporter, editor or news director via regular mail, fax or e-mail, depending on the recipient's preference. If the recipient is facing a deadline, choose e-mail, fax or hand delivery to expedite the process. Many in the media suggest a follow-up call to assure your release has gotten to its destination. Do not pressure the reporter or editor. Ask simply, "Do you have any questions about the news release I sent to you?"

SLUG: A one-, two- or three-word label used to identify a story for easy reference. The "slug" is also used for releases that go beyond one page. It should be included on the top of page 2, etc. at the upper left (slug/page 2 of 2, add 1 or page 2). The slug on this release is: SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE/page 1 of 3 and may be in parentheses.

DATELINE: The point of origin of a news story. It is directly under the slug.

CONTACT IDENTIFICATION: The name, address and phone number of the source (organization sending release) should appear at the upper left. The release should also include the name, phone numbers and e-mail of the contact person for more information. If company letterhead is used, contact information can be adjusted accordingly.

- MORE -

cont.

PR Play 5-10 continued

(SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE/page 2 of 3)

RELEASE DATE: The earliest date a release may be used. Most releases should be for at once or immediate. If not immediate, stipulate *Hold for release* or *Embargoed until Day, Date and Time*.

MARGINS: Use wider than normal margins. Most releases are double-spaced. However, the federal government single-spaces its releases, but double spaces between paragraphs. At least two inches should be left blank between the *Release Date* and the suggested *Headline*.

HEADLINES: While many editors and news directors prefer no suggested headline, a heading, such as the one above, helps provide a brief description of a release's contents. It is longer than the slug.

LENGTH: Try to keep news releases to one page, about 250 words. Use the "better writing through self-editing" principle. If your release goes onto a second page, never carry a paragraph from the bottom of one page to another. Under the last paragraph on a page, type the word **MORE** to indicate the release continues on the next page. On the top of page 2 type: Slug/page 2 of 2, add 1 or page 2 (see above).

STYLE: The easiest and most popular lead for a news release is the summary lead (who, what, when, where, why or event, date, time, place). To assure your copy evokes the intended response, make it lean, mean, punchy and stimulating – aimed at grabbing the reader. Most newspapers prefer releases be written in *Associated Press* style.

DOUBLE CHECK: Never trust your computer's spell check. Make sure your spelling and grammar are 100 percent correct. Proofread every original three times – once for content, once for spelling and once for grammar, syntax and punctuation. If your copy needs approval, get it signed or initialed. Quotes should be cleared with your sources.

END MARK: A code, such as "30" or ### or end – used to signify the end of a release (so the editor or reporter doesn't look for another page.)

- MORE -

cont.

PR Play 5-10 continued

(SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE/page 3 of 3)

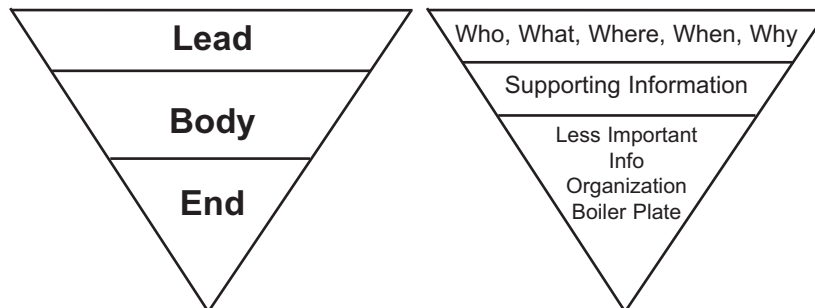
BOILER PLATE: A short piece of text, usually no more than a single short paragraph, describing a company, person, product, service or event. It is standard wording about an organization that usually appears near the end of organization- or company-issued news releases and always above the End Mark. Anything below the End Mark is not considered part of the release. Here is a sample boilerplate:

The Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority serves as the destination's principal marketing arm, stimulating economic growth through convention, business and leisure tourism development. The Authority oversees the management of the Atlantic City Convention Center and Boardwalk Hall on behalf of its parent agency, the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority.

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Almost always goes below *End Mark*. Contains extra information to guide an editor or a brief message. For example, this book's author would include in an editor's note to its readers: "Be sensitive to deadlines, know the definition of news, make certain your release has a strong lead and a 'hook,' is timely, relevant to readers and is factually correct. Be available for that all important fact-checking [verification] phone call.")

PR Play 5-11 Inverted Pyramid Style



PR Play 5-12
Sample Print Release

Communications Specialists



P.O. Box 692, Cherry Hill, NJ 08003/609-555-1212

Sept. 10, 2009
Release no. 36

For information call: Larry Litwin at 515-555-5555
larry@burwyn.com
Release: Upon Receipt

FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY HOSTS FIRST BLOOD DRIVE

(FIRST BLOOD DRIVE)

FAIRFIELD---Fairfield University is sponsoring its first-ever Green Cross blood drive on Monday, Sept. 22 from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. in Roberts Gymnasium on the campus.

"Our town is in desperate need of several types of blood, not only because of the current shortage, but on a regular basis," states Millard G. Roberts, university president. "It is our obligation to get involved with the Green Cross and with local residents in sponsoring such events as a blood drive."

Donors must be 18 years old to give blood. However, 16 and 17 year-olds may donate only if they have a letter signed by their parent. As an incentive to reach its 50-pint goal, donuts and beverages will be served. The University is giving donors a gym bag carrying the logos of the Green Cross, Fairfield University and a local sports shop. McDonald's will give each donor a coupon good for one Happy Meal. And, each will get two free tickets to watch Fairfield's Class A Falcons play baseball.

Anyone with questions or wanting more information may call the University's information office at 515-555-5555.

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PR Play 5-13
Sample Radio/TV Release

Communications Specialists



P.O. Box 692, Cherry Hill, NJ 08003/609-555-1212

Sept. 10, 2009
Release no. 36

For information call: Larry Litwin at 515-555-5555
larry@burwyn.com
Release: Upon Receipt

FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY HOSTS FIRST BLOOD DRIVE

(FIRST BLOOD DRIVE)

FAIRFIELD---Fairfield University is sponsoring its first-ever Green Cross blood drive on Monday, Sept. 21st from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. in Roberts Gymnasium on the campus.

University president, Millard G. Roberts says the town is in desperate need of several types of blood, not only because of the current shortage, but also on a regular basis. He states it is everyone's obligation to get involved with the Green Cross and with local residents in sponsoring such events as a blood drive.

Donors must be 18 years old to give blood. However, 16 and 17 year-olds may donate if they have a letter signed by their parent. As an incentive to reach its 50-pint goal, donuts and beverages will be served. The University is giving donors a gym bag carrying the logos of the Green Cross, Fairfield University and a local sports shop. McDonald's will give each donor a coupon good for one Happy Meal. Donors will also be given two free tickets to watch Fairfield's Class A Falcons play baseball.

Anyone with questions or wanting more information may call the University's information office at 515-555-5555.

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PR Play 5-14

Social Media Release Template

CONTACT INFORMATION:	Client contact Phone #/skype Email IM address Web site	Spokesperson Phone #/skype Email IM address Blog/relevant post	Agency contact Phone #/skype Email IM address Web site
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NEWS RELEASE HEADLINE
 Subhead

CORE NEWS FACTS
 • Bullet-points preferable

LINK & RSS FEED TO PURPOSE-BUILT DEL.ICIO.US PAGE
 The purpose-built del.icio.us page offers hyperlinks (and PR annotation in "notes" fields) to relevant historical, trend, market, product & competitive content sources, providing context as-needed, and, on-going updates.

PHOTO
 e.g., product picture, exec headshot, etc.

MP3 FILE OR PODCAST LINK
 e.g., sound bytes by various stakeholders

GRAPHIC
 e.g., product schematic; market size graphs; logos

VIDEO
 e.g., brief product demo by in-house expert

MORE MULTIMEDIA AVAILABLE BY REQUEST
 e.g., "download white paper"

PRE-APPROVED QUOTES FROM CORPORATE EXECUTIVES, ANALYSTS, CUSTOMERS AND/OR PARTNERS
 Recommendation: no more than 2 quotes per contact. The PR agency should have additional quotes at-the-ready, "upon request," for journalists who desire exclusive content. This provides opportunity for Agency to add further value to interested media.

LINKS TO RELEVANT COVERAGE TO-DATE (OPTIONAL)
 This empowers journalist to "take a different angle," etc.
 These links would also be cross-posted to the custom del.icio.us site.

BOILERPLATE STATEMENTS

RSS FEED TO CLIENT'S NEWS RELEASES

"ADD TO DEL.ICIO.US"
 Allows readers to use the release as a standalone portal to this news

TECHNORATI TAGS/"DIGG THIS"

PR Play 5-15

News Release Checklist

1. Is the lead direct and to the point? Does it contain the most important and most interesting aspects of the story?
2. Has the local angle been emphasized?
3. Have who, what, when, where and why been answered in the first few paragraphs?
4. Are sentences short and concise? Paragraphs short? Words common and concrete?
5. Has editorial comment been placed in quotation marks and attributed to the appropriate person?
6. Are quotations natural? That is, do they sound as though they could have been spoken?
7. Has newspaper style (AP or other) been followed faithfully throughout the release?
8. Are spelling, grammar, syntax and punctuation correct?
9. Have all statements of fact been double-checked for accuracy (fact checked and back checked)?
10. Has the release been properly prepared, typed and double-spaced?
11. Is inverted pyramid being used?
12. Have you thoroughly researched your subject? Do you understand its complexities and the precise meanings of the words and terms you are using?
13. Does your writing stay within the range of your knowledge?
14. Have you told readers only as much as they need to know to understand the point?
15. Have you used plain English as much as possible and avoided jargon?
16. Have you substituted common words for technical terms without losing meaning?
17. Are all technical terms which could not be avoided fully explained?
18. Has the proper format been used? That is:
 - Are contact names, phone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail address, etc. for further information included?
 - Is the release dated? Is release time indicated? (Release number if used)
 - Headline
 - Slug (on page one and all other pages)
 - Dateline
 - No hyphenated words at end of typed line
 - No paragraphs carried from the bottom of one page to another
 - (MORE) on the bottom of page before a jump
 - Slug on top left of pages two, three, etc.
 - - 30 -, ### or end after the final paragraph to signify the end of the release
 - If mailed in hard copy, do not staple multi-page releases

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Crafting Media Advisories

Media Advisories are sometimes referred to as *Media Alerts*, *News and Photo Memos* or *Invitations To Cover* (I-2-C). The recommendation is that the *Media Alert* be written first. It establishes the five Ws and – with the addition of a few quotes and narrative writing – transitions into the *news release*.

With minor variations, follow these suggestions for preparing *Media Advisories*, *Media Alerts*, *News and Photo Memos*, and *I-2-Cs* (for the most part, they are synonymous) that will persuade the media to bring their cameras and cover *your* event:

- Use company or organization letterhead (8½ x 11).
 - Include the name, phone numbers and e-mail of a contact person.
 - Put the date sent (Sept. 1, 2009).
 - Use either of the following formats:
 - Event
 - Date
 - Time
 - Place
 - Details (One paragraph summary, singled spaced. If a release has been written, refer to it either by slug or i.d. number if one has been assigned.)
 - Directions
- or
- What
 - Who
 - When
 - Where
 - Details
 - Directions

Other Vehicles

Writers who have mastered the release and *Associated Press Stylebook* can write for anyone. PR Play 5-17 is a list of items reporters might find in the typical *media kit*.

Cover memos serve as a table of contents, but without page numbers. It lists the media kit's components in order. The *media kit* could also include news conference participants and an event's partnering organizations.