

The best way to use the media is writing a news release...

Format

- Use your organisation's letterhead marked clearly "News Release". You could also head it - Press Invitation or Photo Opportunity.
- Date and the words "embargoed until time and date" or "for immediate release".(see below for more details)
- Keep it short – one A4 page maximum – typed 1½ or double-spaced.
- Add a word count at the bottom
- ALWAYS include one or two "contacts for further information". These people MUST be (a) available and (b) able to answer journalists' enquiries. This can make the difference between your story being used or not. A busy newsdesk will simply not be able to phone three times for the right person
- Notes to Editors. These can include:
 - A short description of your work or background information
 - Any photo opportunities you have
 - Statistics about your organisation
 - Any additional details they may need to cover an event eg parking etc.

Content

- A short snappy headline needs to catch the journalist's/editor's attention. Your release needs to stand out from the rest and signal that your information is newsworthy.
- The first paragraph is absolutely vital. It must be short, to the point and newsworthy and must contain the WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHERE, WHEN and HOW of your story. (A good check is to see if your news release will stand being chopped, paragraph by paragraph, from the bottom up. Your first paragraph should tell the whole story.)
- Follow this with another (short) paragraph providing more details or additional information.
- Include a quote from someone, eg an 'expert', a celebrity or local politician, someone with personal experience. This will make it easier and save the reporter time if they want to use your story.

The quote needs to add a new dimension to the release, not simply repeat what is stated. Make sure the person being quoted knows, is contactable, and can elaborate on what they say.

- Additional short paragraphs can, if necessary, add to the above.
- Remember to always assume no knowledge on the part of the reader – include very basic information in your release – perhaps in the Notes to Editor section.
- Finally, get someone else to check it for you for spelling errors, typos etc.

Distribution

Based on the content of your release, decide who you will send it to (bearing in mind most of the time you'll be using your local press contacts).

Now decide the best method of distribution. If you have enough time (sending invitations, or a release with photo) mail it. If time is short, e-mail or fax.

Follow-up

This is as important as the release itself. It's a chance to make contact, make sure your media release has arrived, put your case, and offer more information.

ALWAYS PHONE to follow up any media contact. Make sure you are speaking to the right person.

As one sub-editor says:

"If I am sitting with three releases of equal interest, it'll be the one who phones who'll go in. I can very quickly get just that bit more information on the phone, or another angle, and besides, it's much more difficult to say 'no' when you're talking to someone!"

Embargoes

An embargo is put on news to stop it being reported before a particular time, or event. For instance, if you are sending out releases about the publication of startling new findings, the information will be embargoed until your launch.

There are two schools of thought on embargoes. Some experienced press officers would say, 'don't use them unless you have to', e.g. a launch of something, the publication of

something, an opening. Embargoes for no apparent reason only serve to alienate your media contacts.

On the other hand, some say embargoes can be a useful device to give journalists plenty of time to work on a story and ensure maximum coverage. You can use an embargo to get the timing you want, for example, Sundays and public holidays tend to be very slow news days, so you may want to send out information in advance and embargo for these days.

It is up to you to decide which would be best, depending on your story.

