

For Immediate Release – [DATE]

## **Headline: aim for 6-10 words**

*Subheading (optional)*

CITY/TERRITORY – **Paragraph 1:** Introduction. Contains a summary of the key information, including answers to the five Ws (who, what, where, why, when).

**Paragraph 2:** Provide more details about the information introduced in the previous paragraph. Include the most important points – including your “hook” – at the top of the release.

**Paragraph 3:** “Include a quote from the primary spokesperson to add opinion, credibility or an argument. Use more casual language, like you would use if you were speaking. Include attribution and title with proper punctuation,” said [Name], [Title] at [Organization].

**Paragraph 4:** Add other relevant information, expanding on the previous quote or incorporating key facts or background info.

**Paragraph 5:** “Include an additional quote, either from the same spokesperson or a second spokesperson. Bonus points if it’s catchy or includes a great analogy,” he said.

**Paragraph 6:** Conclusion. End the press release with any additional necessary background info or a general statement summarizing the key points. This can also include forward-looking statements about what comes next. Additional paragraphs and quotes may be added if necessary, but aim for your press release to fit on one page.

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### **For more information, please contact:**

[Contact Name] | [Title], [Organization]  
xxx-xxx- xxxx, email@email.org

### **Additional resources:**

Include links to relevant documents, photos and/or b-roll footage for media (if applicable)

## **Press Release Tips + Best Practices**

### Planning/preparation

- Before writing, plan your “hook” – What makes this issue/event/development newsworthy? Is it timely/relevant? Is there anything “new” that we’re saying? Do we need to be on the record about this? Will anyone actually care?
- Timing is key – Releases reacting to announcements or events should be put out as soon as possible following the event. For planned releases, it is helpful to send in the morning (preferably by 9am when many newsrooms have daily editorial meetings). Unless absolutely necessary, avoid sending out releases on weekends, after 3pm on weekdays or on Fridays. These times are less likely to get coverage.
- Look out for major events, government announcements or other news that is happening on the day you want to send a release – you will be competing with other important news events for coverage.
- Try to tie in your news with other local, regional or national trends – but only if it works well and doesn’t seem forced or like too much of a stretch.
- When possible, gather photos and video footage (b-roll) to distribute to media using links at the end of your release.

### Writing

- Write a punchy, attention-grabbing headline – this is what reporters will see in their inbox and decide whether to open it or ignore.
- Aim for headlines to be 10 words or less. They should be engaging and easy to understand, and should accurately reflect the content of the press release.
- Use subheadings when more detail is needed to explain the topic of the release.
- The first paragraph (also known as the “lede”) should only be 1-2 sentences and should answer all the reporter’s questions: who, what, where, when and why?
- Use the first paragraph to explain that somebody (eg. your org) is doing something (eg. hosting an event, calling on the government for action, releasing a report, etc.) for a reason (eg. to raise the alarm about a key issue, to uphold rights, etc.).

- When crafting the lede, think about how you would explain to a friend or family member why the news in the press release is important. This paragraph must convey all the key points, since many reporters won't read past the second paragraph. The rest of the release is for supporting information and quotes.
- Ask yourself how your story would be introduced in a 5-6 second radio headline – that should give you an idea for your lede. For example:
  - *Local environmental groups are calling on the provincial government to enact a biodiversity law, following the release of a major report on endangered species.*
- Keep press releases short – aim for length between 250-500 words. The complete release should fit on one page, maximum two pages for more complicated issues.
- Avoid using jargon and technical language, and don't assume too much knowledge. Reporters do typically understand more than the average member of the public, but they are often trying to keep up with a wide array of issues and you want to make your content as easy for them to comprehend as possible.
- Proofread before it goes out! Get someone else to look at it to ensure there aren't spelling or grammatical errors – they impact the organization's credibility and make it harder for reporters to take you seriously.
- Include colourful and personable quotes from relevant spokespeople – use more casual language as you would if you were speaking. Analogies work well in quotes.
- Be sure to attribute quotes to the appropriate spokesperson. Include their full name and title in the first mention, and use only the last name in the following mention(s).
- Use the quotes to express opinions and include more subjective language. Tell the reader how you feel about the issue/event/recent development.
- Text outside of spokesperson quotes should be factual and more objective, written in the third person.
- Avoid hyperbole or "overkill" (eg. using too many adjectives).
- Include key words that readers would typically use when searching for information on the topic of your release.
- Be careful of potential for defamation – don't suggest an opinion about an individual, company or project as if it is a fact, soften language when necessary. Think about whether what you're saying could be considered "fair comment" or a belief that could be reasonably held based on the available evidence.

### Common errors and edits in drafts

- Long/overly wordy headlines – keep them short and punchy!
- Overly wordy or unclear ledes and top paragraphs – these need to be easy to read and understand.
- Buried ledes – not putting the most important hook or the “what, why, who, when and where” in the top paragraph.
- Exaggeration and/or harsh language about opponents.
- Opinions or “subjective” points stated between quotes, which should really be inside quotes.
- Assuming knowledge – leaving out explanations of jargon/technical terms, not spelling out acronyms in first mention, etc.
- Inaccurate facts/stats – fact check!!
- Very long sentences that need to be broken up, as well as long paragraphs (should be 2-3 sentences max.). Check readability score: <https://readability-score.com/>

### Delivery

- See point above on timing.
- Choose which regional media lists to send the release to based on relevance (eg. don't send a press release about a BC government announcement to Ontario reporters if it's only relevant to a BC audience).
- Be ready for media. Don't burn reporters by putting out a release and then not being available to take their calls or return their emails. Make sure that when a release is delivered, the spokesperson/media contact(s) are available to take calls.