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# How to write a press release



Tips...

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# Press release

- The main tool by which a press office communicates with the media
- Concise text containing “news”
- Short but complex document to write
- Journalistic writing: headline with news, main lead message, then a series of information addressing different aspects of the topic



## One in a thousand makes it...

Why most press releases end up in the trash:

- Do not contain real news
- Are badly written
- Delivery is “in the pile”



## First and foremost, a piece of news

Press releases must always contain news (... what is the piece of news?)

The hook: the news must always be at the top of the press release (without premises or introductions)

Journalists do not read beyond the fourth line

# how to find the news...

[how to make interesting what you want to communicate]

Focus on the reader and not on the writer

Take off (temporarily) the student's cap and put on the reporter's cap

Look for the *tip that stings*: research data, survey results, document conclusion, the most effective joke of a comment, the consequences of a decision...

Start at the *tip...* without dulling it

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# EXAMPLE 1

## General description

The 36<sup>th</sup> edition of SMAU, the international exhibition of Information & Communications Technology, ended today in Milan, with great public success. The event confirmed itself as an essential forum to understand the sector's technological, scientific and cultural trends and to access the broad Mediterranean market...  
Numbers from the event, at-a-glance...

## Press release

490,000 visitors (+18,000 compared to last year) and 3,000 exhibitors, on a 107,000 square meter exhibition area: these are the initial numbers of SMAU, the 36<sup>th</sup> Edition  
  
of the Information & Communications Technology Exhibition that wrapped up yesterday at Fiera Milano

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# EXAMPLE 2

## General description

The 8<sup>th</sup> edition of EITO, the European Information & Communications Technology Observatory, was presented today at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan. EITO was born of a SMAU idea, made possible by the participation of the major European fairs and sector associations, and funding from the European Community. According to EITO 2000, the European market recorded a positive growth trend in 1999, compared to the US and Japan. The forecast for 2000 is also positive...

## Press release

The Information & Communications Technology (ICT) market increased in 1999 by 12% in Europe, 8% in the US and 4% in Japan. The growth percentage in Europe is higher than the world average (+9.3%). Italy is growing faster than the European average (+13% and +17% in the field of telecommunications)...

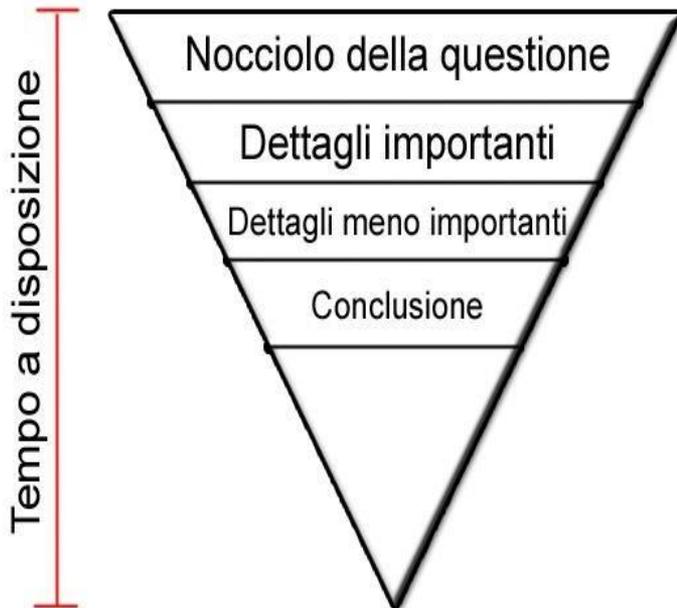
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# What should a press release always contain?



# The inverted pyramid



di Carlo D'Angiò

## Selection of information

- The most important (= news items)
- The most “positive” (= functional)
- Others to follow, ...but not all (!) should be selected
- “Negative” news sandwiched in the middle

## Information hierarchy

- What follows can never be more important than what precedes it
- Avoid giving too much space to marginal elements
- Do not “jump” from one point to another in a discontinuous manner (consistency)



# No title, No news

Uppercase and bold, centered or justified, font 14

Short, strong, incisive and calibrated on the news

Introductory subhead (one line)

Explanatory summary (one line or longer, agency take model)

Preceded by "PRESS RELEASE"

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# style examples

[declarative]

Agency model: context, subject,  
news

JAPAN: EXPLOSION OUTSIDE A  
U.S. BASE NEAR TOKYO

NATIONAL BUDGET: BANKITALIA,  
RECORD DEBT IN NOVEMBER

CLIMATE: LEGAMBIENTE, TAX  
DISCOUNTS FOR THOSE WHO  
SAVE ENERGY

[exemplary]

Declarative slogan model:

OBAMA DREAM

BACK TO THE FUTURE

CICCIOBELLI COSE

BRIGHT DARKNESS

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# Document opening and closing

Name and logo of the association, organisation, company

Address of the main office (telephone and fax)

Website and email address

Place, date and time of issuance

Name, surname and contact details of employee/press office:  
“Text distributed by”, “For information, please contact”

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# Document structure

Objective: to facilitate reading

- Simple and linear graphic form
  - No graphics, images, frames in the text (insert them at the bottom or as attachments or via links)
  - No longer than a page (A4)
  - Simple no frills fonts (Arial)
  - Body 11 or 12
  - Write complete paragraphs
  - Paragraphs of up to 5 lines
  - Sentences of up to 3 lines
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# Text style I

- Linear and simple syntax: subject, verb, object, time reference, and other complements.
  - The most important things must be at the beginning and end of a sentence and a period.
  - Short periods of pure information.
  - Never use the first person.
  - Comments always attributed to “third parties”
  - Simple, clear and precise language (enemies: vagueness and rhetoric).
  - No superlatives and self-congratulatory adjectives
  - Use adjectives sparingly (if possible, avoid adjectives like “innovative”, “advanced”, and “avant-garde”)
  - Avoid dialects, jargons and technical lingo
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# Text style

- No superlatives and self-congratulatory adjectives
  - Use brackets as sparingly as possible
  - “Law of proximity”: subject, verb and object. Noun and its adjective. Preposition and its object
  - Avoid long sentences
  - Avoid compound sentences
  - Avoid gerunds, especially when at the start of a sentence
  - If you have a lot of information to convey, don't try to pack it all in a single sentence (or paragraph)
  - Prefer concrete to abstract
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# Style example

## Description

It is likely that the problem of communication between State (understood both as a central apparatus and as a complex network of peripheral nuclei) and citizens may find a solution within a few years...

## Press release

By 1999, all the central and peripheral offices of the Italian Public Administration will be able to communicate with each other and provide a quick and efficient service to citizens

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# How to disseminate a press release

- Abuse wears out impact
- Simultaneous and targeted delivery (email)
- Always in the morning (before 12:00 pm)

ATTENTION: Sparingly: a phone call made to the journalist to inform him/her of the delivery of the press release (alert), or to make sure that he/she has received the press release and ideally seen it (feedback on interest aroused, if any)

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# Email delivery

- Put the release directly in the email body (the journalist is not forced to open the attachment)
- Go for a linear and clean graphic solution (not everyone reads in Html)
- Attach the press release also in Word format
- Stay away from large mail size (max 500 KB)
- All addresses hidden in “BBC”
- Send from an institutional account (always the same one)
- Copy the release title in the “Subject” line

ATTENTION: the request to the editors not to disseminate or publish a news item before a certain time and date, must be clearly communicated at the top of the press release

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