

Writing a media release - checklist

- Establish the message you want to convey, by answering the five 'Ws' - who, what, why, when and where. The how should also be covered in the release,
- Identify the most interesting aspect of these five to form the lead (opening sentence) of your release. Usually either 'who' or 'what' tend to be the most interesting.
- For example, 'what' may be the fact your site has established a water garden, or 'who' could be a student or teacher winning an award.
- Make the lead punchy. The media should be able to learn what the release is about in the first paragraph. Journalists want to know what's new about your story/event, or the benefits it will bring about for the school or wider community - so say this upfront.
- Avoid hype and unsubstantiated claims. Stick to the true facts and provide specific information - don't exaggerate the worthiness of the story.
- Use the other 'Ws' to support your lead. For example when was the water garden built, why has the student won the award. These are facts journalists need to establish quickly and should be included within the first few sentences.
- If you are trying to publicise a forthcoming event, stating when and where it will happen is crucial.
- Stick to the one sentence per paragraph rule. This is journalistic style and easier for journalists to pull out the relevant facts about your event or program, rather than wading through text-heavy paragraphs.
- Keep your language simple. Avoid using acronyms, abbreviations, or technical language that may not be understood by everyone.
- Use quotes. Sometimes a news organisation won't be able to send a journalist to cover your event, but they may still run the story if the press release has colour and contains key quotes from the people involved. This saves them interviewing time, and often smaller news organisations will run the release verbatim if it already reads like a news story.
- Make sure you attribute quotes by using quotation marks and including the name of the person who has made the statement. This is especially important if you are including quotes from more than one person (eg. a comment from a student and the principal).
- Don't quote more than two people as it starts to get confusing.
- Keep it to one page. A short, simple release is most effective. Extra pages on a fax end up getting lost.
- Provide a contact name and number at the foot of the release so more information can be obtained if necessary.
- Proofread your release for accuracy and typographical errors. Give it to someone else to double-check it for you. Proofread it again!
- Check for double meanings. As part of the proofreading process, consider any possible negative connotations to the release/story, such as funding problems or lack of parent support for the initiative. If in doubt contact the Public Relations Unit.