

How can you get a news release published?

The two most important factors to remember when writing a news release for the media are to keep your article brief and local.

One of the most difficult skills to learn is to write a brief release about something you enjoy. When you write the first version, make it brief. Then, rewrite it to shorten it even further.

It is essential to demonstrate how your story or event is of local interest. If possible, include a local angle in your release and, of course, a local contact. With local names and other information your releases are more likely to be published.

To increase your chances of getting media coverage, take advantage of the “VQT Formula.”

Volume. The more material released, the more chance of having *something* carried. Media outlets won't use every story you send. But, don't forget, volume alone can destroy your credibility. Volume needs *quality* to be effective.

Quality. Use correct writing style and grammar, and the ability to discern the *newsworthiness* of your material. Quality also refers writing in third-person, using an inverted pyramid (so the main points are first) and using Associated Press style.

Targeted: This deals with when and how to make a release, to whom, and, to a certain extent, form. The number of media outlets and specialty publications is increasing. Be sure you are sending your information to the outlets most interested in your story.

Southwest Region News Service

Southwest Region News Service is a weekly educational news service highlighting University of Missouri Outreach and Extension programs and events with helpful, unbiased and objective information specific to southwest Missouri. Weekly articles that make up the *Southwest Region News Service* are delivered electronically every Friday.

The personal information (or e-mail addresses) of subscribers to *Southwest Region News Service* is never shared with other organizations, subscribers are never sent advertisements, and subscribers never receive attachments (or viruses).

To receive *Southwest Region News Service* for free, and to learn more about everything from 4-H to nutrition and gardening, please subscribe by sending your name and e-mail address to: burtond@missouri.edu.

David L. Burton, Civic Communication Specialist
University of Missouri Extension,
833 Boonville, Springfield, Mo. 65802
Tel: (417) 862-9284
E-mail: burtond@missouri.edu

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
 Extension

University of Missouri Extension does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability or status as a Vietnam era veteran in employment or programs.

Writing a media release that will get used



News writing
tips for the
non-journalist.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
OUTREACH AND EXTENSION

What is news?

Here are some yardsticks by which to measure the value of news:

Timeliness. A story needs to be immediate or near the present. Without timeliness a news story is either history or prediction.

Proximity. Close, physically or psychologically to the audience and the point of the publication or broadcast. Editors prefer “local” stories.

Importance. How “big” and important is the idea, event, situation or person?

Conflict. This includes all kinds of struggles. Mankind versus the environment or some of mankind versus others, etc.

Progress. Improvements made by man show progress. Research development, better production methods, education, new equipment, improvements in living standards, human relations, etc.

Unusualness. Does the story provide rare, odd and sometimes unforeseen ideas, events or situations?

Human interest. Ideas, events or situations that touch human emotions provide human interest, which can arouse casual curiosity or incite anger, fear, joy or compassion.

How do you report news?

A news story must contain basic information to be appealing to a local editor or reporter. Be sure the first few paragraphs of your release contain:

Who? Who said it? Who is it about?

What? What happened?

Where? Where did it happen? Remember that proximity makes it news.

When? When did it happen? Remember timeliness and correct dates.

Why? Why is it important?

How? How did it happen? Is it unusual?

Quick leads are a must

Most people whiz through newspapers, reading headlines and the first paragraph or two. So, get your important facts into the first paragraph. The first sentence is even better.

Put the most important points first. Editors chop stories from the bottom to make them fit available space. If you’ve got something essential toward the end of the story it might not make it into print.

News writers use the inverted pyramid style. In your release print the most important thing first, then the second-most important thing, and so on, down to the least important.

News writing style

The best way to improve your readability is to use short sentences, short paragraphs, easy words and active verbs. Here are a few tips:

- **Use short sentences.** Stories averaging between 15 and 20 words per sentence are easy reading. Sentences longer than 30 words may be hard to understand.
- **Use short paragraphs.** Newspaper columns are narrow and what looks like a reasonably sized paragraph can be too long in print. Editors don’t like long paragraphs and neither do readers.
- **Use easy words.** Use short, simple words instead of multi-syllable words with the same meaning. When a technical or difficult word must be used, explain its meaning.
- **Use personal words.** Words like “you,” “we,” a person’s name and a direct quote, give your copy more human interest. This kind of personalization is a good technique for holding readers’ interest.
- **Use action verbs.** Action verbs keep a story moving and “grab” the reader. Look at headlines on the sports pages for good examples.

A version of the University Outreach and Extension style guide, which provides a set of basic information helpful to anyone writing a news release, can be found online at: <http://outreach.missouri.edu/swregion/news>.