

# Breaking News

It's often said that 'communication is with the receiver.' Very true!

## **The pressure of the newsroom**

For every reporter writing the story, there is probably an Editor putting pressure on staff to churn out the maximum number of column inches in record time. These days, journalism is widely known as 'churnalism', since reporters typically spend their day in front of a computer, churning out re-written press releases instead of meeting real people and reporting their stories.

Oddly enough, this can work to your advantage. Imagine a hardworking sub editor with ten minutes until press deadline and a space to fill. Presented with a well-written press release – especially with a usable picture – all s/he has to do is edit it slightly to fit the space and the paper is ready.

The other thing to bear in mind is that the journalist may be under pressure to re-jig the piece to make the introduction a bit more sensational. Local papers are more interested in telling stories that their readers relate to; national papers have an editorial angle that will probably colour what they print.

There is not much you can do about this except be prepared to answer questions, carefully worded, in case the paper or magazine rings you back to "check a few facts". Include your phone number or email, as this often makes the difference between your piece being used or being discarded.

## **Radio interviews**

We've all been in a position where we give a reply and then think: "I didn't mean it to come out like that". If the interview is live, you have no way of taking back what you just said. But if it's pre-recorded, you may get a second chance if you mess up. In this case, try to make that section unusable and ask the interviewer to re-record so you can say what you really meant.

## **What makes 'news'?**

The clue is in the name: it should be 'news'-worthy. Aside from being new, if it is local, unusual, quirky, record-breaking, or having a profound effect on the community, that will sell the story. You don't need to use any flowery prose – just stick to the facts and let the quotes from relevant people convey some feeling to your audience.

## **Top tip**

The catch-phrase is KISS: 'Keep It Simple, Stupid'.

# Writing a Media Release

A media release is a news story which grabs the attention of the reader with the headline and the first paragraph.

1. It helps if you can find an 'angle' on the story. The media will be looking for the quirky or amusing. Failing that, you should make it clear what the story is about! Many years ago, a reporter in Frome wrote a piece on a new sports centre which had just opened. The weather, the band and the ladies' hats were described in great detail. As an afterthought, he mentioned that cracks had appeared in a wall at this brand new facility. What's the real story?
2. The first paragraph gives the gist by including the **'four Ws': Who? What? Where? When?** (And perhaps **'Why?'**).
3. Next, place the facts in descending order of importance.
4. Use quotes where you can. Somebody's personal opinion, or account of an event, adds colour and makes the story come alive.
5. Use fairly short sentences without clauses and sub-clauses. This keeps your copy crisp. Remember, the average Daily Mirror reader has a reading age of eight! Try reading it aloud. If it sounds good that way, you're probably on to a winner. Keep paragraphs short and be concise; try not to have more than six or seven paragraphs.
6. If there is a photo opportunity, make sure you mention it.
7. Choose a simple, punchy headline that sums up the main point of your story. You may need to spend as much time on this as on the rest of the text!
8. Establish media contacts by ringing relevant radio, TV and print media, asking for the name of a journalist to send it to and being enthusiastic about the story. Email the release to your named journalists, using your punchy headline as the subject.
9. Follow up with a phone call if you haven't heard back. If your story isn't used, find out why, as a learning exercise. Keep trying, and keep building relationships.

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