



...Write a Press Release

The Idea

To let your local press know that you are holding an event/organising a debt action, and persuade them to cover the event. A press release can also be used if there is news on debt or if you want to make your views (or that of your group) known on an issue.

Writing a press release is about setting out clearly and concisely all the relevant information regarding an event or issue and providing contact numbers a journalist can call anytime to get further information or quotes. The aim is to offer the journalist a story on a plate, to do as much of their work for them as possible.

Things to remember

The audience – whom do you want to reach with your message?

The message – what do you want to say?

The desired outcome – what do you want your audience to do or think?

Hooks – every story has to have one. Either one exists and you link your story to it or you create your own with a stunt or activity.

How to write the release text

Bear in mind Rudyard Kipling's poem:

*I keep six honest serving men,
Who taught me all I know
WHAT
WHY
WHEN
HOW
WHERE
And WHO*

You must begin by answering these pressing questions.

- ✚ The first sentence or 'intro' must sum up the whole story and provide all the most important facts. A basic intro might say who (your group usually!) is doing what when and either how or why.
- ✚ The second sentence provides supporting information and context – including any of the basic questions unanswered in the intro.
- ✚ The rest of the text is either quotations (which usually serve to provide colour and expand on why something is being done or what you hope to achieve) or further supporting information and background.

Overall think of the press release as having a pyramid shape. Each layer should provide extra information

Style

Keep your sentences short, especially your intro which should ideally be 20-30 words. Each paragraph should be only one sentence or at most two very short ones.

Keep the news release short – even with double spacing it should be no more than two pages. One page is best. If you have to use more than one page make sure you put 'More Follows' or 'Continued' on the bottom of each page.

Make the release as factual as possible. If stating your view, support it with facts and coherent arguments that speak to ordinary readers, not just other debt campaigners.

Use attributed quotes when stating opinions. When quoting (usually your co-ordinator or yourself as a spokesperson) give the full name and title of the person, put what they said within quotation marks, refer to them as 'Mr' or 'Ms' X in any following quotes. Always include a quote.

Avoid repetition and waffle – make sure every sentence provides some new information.

Avoid jargon, spell out acronyms when first used, ie 'International Monetary Fund (IMF)', then use the acronym from there on in.

Get someone else to proof-read your release for spelling and to check that the release makes sense and answers all the obvious questions – use a non-member of your group if you can!

Try and emphasise the local angle including with the quotes. It may help the quote to put 'A N Other from Anytown JDC and a local primary school teacher said:.....'

Make sure each sentence adds new information without raising new questions. A reader should be able to stop at any point without being confused.

George Orwell's rules for good writing (taken from his seminal essay Politics and the English Language, May 1945):

- ✚ Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- ✚ Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- ✚ If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- ✚ Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- ✚ Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- ✚ Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Layout

Make sure you use letterhead paper or paper that features your own or the Jubilee Debt Campaign logo (but make it clear it is from a local group).

'News Release' should be typed in large bold letters across the top of the page beneath the logo.

The release must have a short, clear, interesting heading in bold caps.

The release should be typed and double spaced to make it easy to read.

Your release should be dated at the top, either just below or above the heading.

Try to include some text about Jubilee Debt Campaign in the notes.

Put ENDS at the end of the quotable section of the press release, before the notes and contacts. This signals to the journalist that this is the end of the part of the press release that can be quoted verbatim.

You **must** include both day and evening telephone numbers (preferably mobile numbers) for a named spokesperson for the group at the bottom of the release text.

You may include at the bottom 'Notes to Editors;' bullet points giving relevant factual information.

Follow Up

The news release is not the end product. Published or broadcast stories are the end product. To ensure you get maximum value from your release call everyone you sent it to a day or so afterwards to draw their attention to it and ask if they are interested in writing a story, attending the event, etc. Do your best to persuade them but be prepared to accept defeat gracefully. If media have not attended a press released event you hoped they might cover, call immediately afterwards to give them an update on how it went and to offer a photo of the event.

Thanks to Dave Timms (Press Officer, World Development Movement).