

Nurse Author & Editor

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Writing a Press Release

How to Write a Press Release

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Ivy Lee, the founder of public relations

Here's a bit of trivia: the press release was born on October 28, 1906. It was written by Ivy Lee and reported the news of a train wreck in Atlantic City, NJ that left more than 50 people dead (Kennedy, 2010). The *New York Times* was so impressed by the release they printed it verbatim. While that rarely happens anymore, press releases are still a mainstay of the public relations industry as a way to share information with the public.

Why would you, as a nurse, have a need to distribute a press release? Several possible reasons come immediately to mind

- As an author, you want to announce the publication of new book.
- As a researcher, you want to share findings of new, groundbreaking research.
- As an editor, you want to share publication of a significant study in your journal.
- If you are in a leadership position in a hospital, you want to share news to address a crisis, or announce a major accomplishment, such as achieving Magnet® status.
- If you are in a leadership position in a school or college of nursing, you want to share news of new faculty appointments, endowed professorships, or receiving funding to build and name a new facility for the school.
- As a professional society, you want to announce achieving fundraising goals or an upcoming conference with speakers of international renown.

For many of these examples, you may have a public relations department that will do the work for you; still, having a working knowledge of what goes in a press release can be helpful so that you can make sure that the information you believe is most important is conveyed to the public.

WRITING THE PRESS RELEASE

I'll be honest—as an editor, I probably receive a dozen press releases every day and most of them are deleted unread. Still, there is usually one that catches my eye and I will flag it to share with others. Outlets available to me include the news section of my journal, *CIN: Computers, Informatics, Nursing*, and the blog I help maintain for the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE). I will also share news on my Facebook page (if my friends are bored with nursing news, they haven't said so) and on Twitter.

Press releases follow an industry format and if you don't abide by that, you have just increased your chances of it going into the trash exponentially. The following template illustrates exactly how you should write your press release. I have added notes so you can avoid common mistakes.

Press Release Item	Content and Notes
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: or EMBARGOED UNTIL <date>	You need to let the recipient know if they can share the information immediately or if they need to wait until a certain date. An embargo can be helpful to a reporter, giving him/her a chance to get a head start on interviewing key people named in the release. It is common to have an embargo (usually a week) for the announcement of research findings that will be published in a journal; the timing of the embargo usually corresponds with the date of publication of the journal.
CONTACT: Contact Person Company Name Voice Phone Number Fax Number Email address Website URL	The whole point of writing a press release is to have the recipient, ie, reporter, follow up to get more information and write a story. Therefore, it is important to include complete and accurate information for an appropriate contact person. I say <i>appropriate</i> here because you don't want to include the Dean's name (or Chief Nursing Officer) unless that person has agreed to field phone calls from the press. At the same time, you don't want to include the name of an administrative assistant or secretary unless that person has relevant information and has been authorized to handle incoming requests from the media.
HEADLINE	<p>The headline will be the first thing the editor/reporter sees in his/her inbox, so if it doesn't grab their attention, the rest of the release will not be read. I really don't care that Joe Somebody has been named Vice President of Sales for Some other Company, but I get an amazing number of releases that are written exactly this way.</p> <p>Instead, be direct and to the point in less than 10 words (5 are better). Don't use jargon and avoid flowery adjectives. Here are three that are in my inbox right now that I would consider effective headlines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearable Technology: One Step Closer to Mobile Healthcare • RNs to Join Council Members, Community Leaders to Demand

Safe Patient Staffing Bill

- Beyond the Bedside: Nurse Leaders Examine the State of Nurse Staffing

City, State, Date

Why? It's traditional and readers expect to see this information introducing the first paragraph. Some writers also include the date at the top with the contact information.

First Paragraph

One to two sentences that gets right to the point. This paragraph should be a quick overview of the news you are sharing and why it is important.

Second Paragraph

Background information on the product, service, or news. Write using terms that will be easily understood by the vast majority of readers, which may include non-nursing and non-healthcare audiences.

Third Paragraph

This paragraph explains the purpose, target market, and benefits of your product or service, or intrigues your reader to find out more, visit your website, contact you for more information or recommend the product/information to someone else.

Fourth, Fifth Paragraphs (optional)

Your press release should be able to tell the story—and stand on its own—in three paragraphs. You can include up to two additional paragraphs for reporters who might choose to write a longer story and need more information.

About Your Company, Business, School, Hospital, Journal, or Yourself

Conclude with a final paragraph that describes who is issuing the release. Describe products, services, or the target market. Include "For more information" as the last sentence.

-END-

-30-

#####

-MORE-

-END-, -30-, #####, are the traditional endings for a press release. Center one of these marks at the end of the release. Ideally, your press release should be only one page. If it continues onto a second page, add -MORE- so the reader knows there is more to come. End the release on the second page with -END-, -30-, #####. However, I suggest that you try to edit the document down to one page, if you really want someone to read the whole thing.

DISTRIBUTING YOUR PRESS RELEASE

Back in the day, press releases were all sent by mail, then we moved to faxes, and now email reigns supreme. Even

though your press release is being sent by email, note that the format (described above) has not changed from much from what used to be sent in the days of paper.

For distribution, it is best to work with resources that are available to you, such as the public relations department in your university, hospital, or publisher, to send out your release. This group should have well-maintained and carefully curated recipient email lists that are relevant to you and your news. Even if you accept the fact that the vast majority of people will not read beyond the headline, if your release is distributed widely to an appropriate list, you can be assured that at least a handful of people will contact you (or the contact person) to follow up. Also, public relations departments will have the proper procedures in place to send out a mass emailing that will not be identified as spam. While spam decreased in 2013 by 2.5%, it still accounts for almost 70% of email flows (Barrett, 2014) and managing spam is a major Internet issue.

If you must do it yourself, then I would suggest using a company such as [eReleases](#) or [PRNewswire](#) to distribute your press release for you. These types of companies distribute to hundreds of thousands of email addresses and if your release is fairly specialized, then there is the very real chance that it will get trashed by 99.9% of its recipients. Still, if it gets into the hands of a few key people who are interested in your information, you can count this as a success.

What about a service such as [MailChimp](#)? MailChimp is not a press release distribution service; they envision that their customers are sending out newsletters. However, with MailChimp you can create a personalized email distribution list and send your document, which may include elements of a press release, written in newsletter format, to your personally curated mailing list. Using MailChimp protects you, the sender, from being identified as a spammer and ensures that your mailing abides by the regulations of the Can Spam Act of 2003 (Federal Trade Commission, 2009). MailChimp provides reports that allow you to see how many people received and opened your email, how many messages bounced, how many recipients unsubscribed, and how many readers followed any links included in your message. Finally, if you send a limited number of emails (12,000 per month) to a limited number of subscribers (less than 2,000), then MailChimp is free. This might be a realistic way to determine if sending email blasts of news and information is an effective strategy for your publicity efforts.

CONCLUSION

Press releases are a time-honored way of sharing news with the media. While some may consider them a dinosaur, the three major PR distribution companies sent out approximately 642,000 press releases in 2013, which works out to about 1769 releases per day (Hoffman, 2014). Perhaps this is a lot of white noise that gets lost in the day-to-day business of the Internet. But if you would like to take a try at sharing news or innovations using a press release, I hope this article has provided some tips and suggestions to help you avoid common mistakes and give you a head start on being successful.

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