

Dr. Randall Hansen's *A Barebones Guide to Writing Successful Press Releases*

One of the most important lessons that beginners need to learn is that writing media releases is all about developing a persuasive communication within the framework of a traditional news story format.

Editors will quickly trash media releases that make outlandish promotional promises -- "the best ever," "everyone wins," "one-of-a-kind," "changing humankind forever." You get the idea. Instead, press release writers *must* think like a reporter. Media releases *must* follow journalistic style in order to be given any kind of consideration. How do you accomplish this task? Here's a barebones guideline.

1. **The Headline:** In about ten words -- or less -- you need to grab the attention of the editor. The headline should summarize the information in the press release, but in a way that is exciting and dynamic; think of it as a billboard along a highway -- you have just a few words to make your release stand out among the many others editors receive on any given day.
2. **Opening Paragraph:** Sometimes called a summary lead, your first paragraph is critical. This paragraph must explain "the five Ws and one H" of the story -- the who, what, when, where, why, and how. This paragraph must summarize the press release, with the following paragraphs providing the detail.

The opening paragraph must also contain the hook: the *one* thing that gets your audience interested in reading more -- but remember that the hook has to be relevant to your audience as well as to the news media. A hook is not a hard sell or a devious promotion -- it's just a factual statement.

3. **The Body:** Using a strategy called the *inverted pyramid*, the body of the press release should be written with the most important information and quotes first. This inverted pyramid technique is used so that if editors need to cut the story to fit space constraints, they can cut from the end without losing critical information.
4. **The Closing Paragraph:** Repeat the critical contact information, including the name of the person, his or her phone number and/or email address.