

PRESS RELEASE WRITING MODEL

A press release is your opportunity to use events to convey your organizational message. Take it on as a chance to write the news story, as you would like it to read in the newspaper. Bear in mind though that it must be written in a familiar format that resonates with journalists as news. If it does not look or read like news, they will be much more likely to pass it over for another release that fits their format and requires less editing.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Include this phrase if the news that you are reporting can be written about immediately. You should use the word "release" as opposed to "publication," so it does not sound as though you are commanding the newspaper to run this story. The only time you would use different wording would be if you had a good reason to ask the editor to hold the story and are sending the release early to give the editor time to do preparatory work or if you do not want the dailies to run it ahead of the weeklies. In that case, use this space to write: EMBARGOED UNTIL [DATE]. If your timing strategy necessitates that it not be released before a certain time of day, include this information on that line as well, otherwise, the reporter will assume 12:01 AM on the date specified.

CONTACT INFORMATION

This is critical information. Make it as easy as possible for the reporter to contact you. Be sure to include day and evening phone numbers and email here, because reporters often work odd and unpredictable hours.

DATELINE

You should estimate the date at which you expect the release to arrive on the editor's desk and post-date your release a day or two after that. The news content may be fresh, but if the release carries the date from the day before it is read, they may jump to the wrong conclusion.

HEADLINE

Use the headline to sum up the story in a short and eye-catching way, written in the present tense. When possible, avoid mentioning the organization's name in the headline, so that it will read more like real news than organizational propaganda. Instead of "Brit Tzedek", consider "Jewish Peace Group.." or "Hundreds of Local Jewish Activists..." Keep in mind, headlines substitute commas for the word "and."

To make your headlines stand out, particularly when they are likely being emailed in plain text, put them in capital letters. If the release is not being sent as plain text, bold the headline and put it in a slightly larger font. Center the headline to set it off from the rest of the text.

CITY

This should name the city where the news is taking place. To garner local coverage this city needs to be the city or near to it where the newspaper is published, otherwise it will seem irrelevant to journalists in most local papers. The city's name should be written in all capital letters and separated from the story with an m-dash, the way it does in news stories.

SUBHEADS

You can use a subhead to offer further details or to explain, a catchy but slightly ambiguous headline. The same rules for layout and style apply here, though the font should be lightly smaller to set it apart from the headline, unless it is formatted in plain text.

LEAD

This is the single most important part of the press release and your opportunity to summarize the import of this news to the reporter from whom you want to cover it. Above all else, the most critical of the story's 5 W's (who? what? where? when? why?) That must be answered in this paragraph is WHY?—as in "why is this news (worthy)?"

The other 4 W's must then appear in one of the first two paragraphs. Traditionally they are spelled out in the first paragraph, but it can be dropped to the second if organizational affiliation and/or logistics detract from the conveying the WHY or the news-worthiness of the story.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 15, 2007

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NEW CAMPAIGN CALLS ON AMERICAN JEWS TO TALK MORE

PEACE GROUP CHALLENGES COMMUNITIES TO EXPAND DIALOGUE ABOUT ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

CHICAGO—American Jews now have a new opportunity to talk to each other about resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to call on the Bush Administration to actively engage in diplomacy to get the peace talks back on track. Today Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, the country's largest Jewish grassroots peace movement, launched the "Let's Talk" campaign [letstalk.btvshalom.org/home], a multi-part, community-driven effort to change the way American Jews talk and think about Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This campaign will stimulate substantive debate in order to get people thinking about how best to act on behalf of Israel. Creative programming throughout this far-reaching campaign will bring a range of perspectives to Jewish communities across America. A personal pledge to become more involved in community discussion will be used to promote discourse locally via house parties, discussion groups, and Brit Tzedek chapter activities.

While Let's Talk uses a petition to urge President George Bush to facilitate the negotiation of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is more than just a petition campaign. Over 1000 people have already signed the petition [letstalk.btvshalom.org], however, the campaign will reach deeper into communities to mobilize many people to do more than just sign their names.

"The campaign will build a model for the dialogue we want to see take hold not just on the community level, but on a national and international level as well," said Marcia Freedman, Brit Tzedek's president.

One example of the kind of programming that Brit Tzedek plans to do more of as part of this campaign is the group's recent nationwide tour of the Combatants for Peace that it sponsored in the lead up to the campaign.

While representatives of the group of former Israeli soldiers and Palestinian militants, who are now committed to promoting peace, spoke to hundreds of people daily in a 22-city tour across the country last month, the Israeli Consulate in LA issued a report to the Israeli Foreign Ministry and to all of Israel's representatives in North America condemning the tour and calling for actions to be taken against conscientious objectors to stop "their negative effect on Israel's image."

→ MORE * MORE * MORE

ADDITIONAL GRAPHS

Organize information from here down in an inverse pyramid of priority so that the most important information leads and is thus more likely to get read.

MORE

Type MORE across the bottom at least three times at the bottom of the first page if your release is longer than one page. Try to end the first page at the end of a paragraph or at least the end of a sentence.

CITATIONS

Tell reporters high up in the pyramid that they can find supporting information by directing them to websites or simply alerting them to resources available through the organization, including mentioning of the availability of photographs.

PRESS RELEASE WRITING MODEL (CONT.)

Although Brit Tzedek disagreed sharply with the consulate's assessment, in a letter in response, the group welcomed the opportunity it presented to engage in the "open exchange of ideas," because doing so "offers the best opportunity to strengthen Israel and the American Jewish community's relationship to it."

"This controversy underscored the range of opinions of what it means to be pro-Israel that exists within the American Jewish community," said Freedman. "If we are to be successful in doing our part to secure a tenable peace for Israel, we must do more than preach to the choir; we must reach out across our community in order to broaden and invigorate this critical debate."

"Having witnessed both the disastrous effects of America's profound diplomatic neglect in recent years and of military action in the Middle East last summer, Brit Tzedek is absolute in our conviction that only through dialogue and negotiation will long term peace, security and stability for Israel and the region as a whole be achieved," Freedman added. "History has demonstrated that only when the United States plays an active role in promoting these negotiations is true progress made. Therefore, we as a community must be certain that our voices are heard calling on our government to actively engage in facilitating a return to the negotiating table. That is what 'Let's Talk' is about."

Brit Tzedek v/Shalom, the Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace, is a national grassroots organization more than 36,000 strong, that educates and mobilizes American Jews in support of a negotiated two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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QUOTES

Use attributable quotes to convey less tangible aspects of your story, such as stating the goals of a project being undertaken or summarizing the impact of the news on the community. Use quotes only to add information not to restate the lead. Use quotes to create an opportunity to insert your organizational voice in a legitimate news format and to suggest to reporters the use of your designated spokesperson as a source for their article. It is best that quotes remain short and to the point, so they can be easily excerpted in a news story; this is what is known as a sound bite. Attribute quotes in past tense.

TAG LINES

Include a brief description of your organization and its goals in italics.

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Include this demarcation or "-30-" at the end of your release so reporters will know that they have the received it in its entirety. Its journalese for "that's all, folks"

OTHER TIPS FOR WRITING PRESS RELEASES

STYLE

Write in an active voice. Write your headlines in the present tense.

NUMBERS

Spell out numbers under ten and numbers that begin sentences. Spell out the word "percent." Avoid adjectives and jargon.

LENGTH

The shorter the better in terms of sentences and overall length, so make every word count. A long release could likely deter a busy journalist from reading it at all. Never exceed two pages and only exceed one if you are releasing a major news story.

FORMAT

Do not use letterhead as it just takes up space and raises doubts as to your release's objective news content. Print your releases on standard 8x11" WHITE paper. This is the easiest format for journalists to read.

SUBSTANTIATION

Check and double check your facts and do not exaggerate; nothing will endanger a news story and the development of a productive working relationship with a journalist more than misleading them. Include independent verification and empirical evidence of your message when available. For instance if you are announcing a speaker who is coming to discuss the shifting consensus in the American Jewish community about a two-state solution, cite a recent poll that demonstrates proof of such.

CONTEXT

When possible, place your news in the context of larger events to depict your story as a local angle on a national or international news story and thus increase its news cache.

PITCH

Every press release sent should include a short pitch at the top to the journalist or beat that you are targeting. The pitch should summarize the lead and should include explanation of why you think that particular journalist might be interested.