Writing Press Releases

Make your group “known” on campus through effective promotion.

In order to grab attention for an event or initiative that your group is involved in, consider writing up a press release.

Here are some tricks of the journalistic trade to get you started:

Tip #1: Use the Inverted Pyramid Structure

The inverted pyramid structure means that you should put the most important or enticing information in the first few sentences of your press release, and then unfold the rest in descending order of importance. Don’t bury your “best” stuff near the bottom.

For example, if you are announcing a contest with a large monetary prize for the winner, put that up front:

“A $500 bookstore gift certificate will go to the winner of this year’s Homecoming Banner contest— the largest prize offered to date for the annual competition—and is open to all students.”

What’s more important, your organization’s name, or the fact that you’re offering an enticing prize?

Tip #2: Include the 5 Ws

Begin the release with a concise summary of who, what, when, and where. The second paragraph should detail more about the what and why.

Tip #3: Keep it Simple

Use plenty of action verbs and active voice. Keep the release simple and easy to understand. Use short sentences and paragraphs.

Tip #4: Include Formatting Items

Be sure to include:

- Release date
- Contact information (your name/position, your phone and email)
- Headline
- Dateline

What’s Happening?

Make it a practice to send out press releases and/or email announcements for various happenings within your group, such as:

- Events that are open to the community
- The accomplishments of individual members
- Group recognition from campus, community or national sources
- Community service initiatives
- Recruitment drives, open meetings and ways to get involved
- What your group offers to the campus community (who we are and how we can help you)

When sending press releases, include a photo if possible. Include the who, what, where, when and why as a short paragraph to accompany the photo.

You can send these notices to:

- Campus listserves
- The school paper
- The local newspaper
- The office of public relations/community relations
- The online campus calendar
- The Alumni magazine (they like to highlight current students, too)

A good rule of thumb is that five total paragraphs is a good maximum for each release.