



## News Release Writing

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Today, our topic is how to write a good news release. Once you have a good news release, you can adapt it for your local newsletters, *Skychaser*, *Roundup*, and other documents going to internal and external audiences. The original news release is also invaluable to the Wing Historian.

National Headquarters expects PAOs to write using Associated Press style. This is because whenever we communicate with external audiences, the AP journalistic style is the standard. It's particularly important to our news media contacts. If we don't write the way they expect, it lowers our credibility. AP Style has seemingly endless rules about spellings, names, titles, abbreviations, capitalization, punctuation, but they aren't really that bad, and we'll get to them in a separate lesson.

### Basics

A good news release needs 1) a worthwhile topic, 2) a strong lead, 3) good quotes, 4) an appropriate conclusion, and 5) an appropriate length. (A good photo or two is also beneficial, and we'll look at that question in a separate lesson.)

**Topic:** This needs to be something that readers and editors will see as important, but different media will have different criteria for this judgment. A weekly newspaper will likely print relevant stories based on news releases where a daily newspaper might not, even if the release is well-written. Getting to know your local media representatives will help you understand your local media environment and their

editorial judgments. But remember that even if your local news media does not use your release, it may still be ideal for newsletters and other internal communication.

**Lead:** Your first sentence should summarize the main points of your story, usually in 35 words or less. Address multiple (but not necessarily all) “Ws.” The Ws are Who, What, Where, Why, When, and How. Do NOT write a lead that tells **ONLY** the topic and nothing about what actually happened. Example:

Not so good: “South Dakota Wing, Civil Air Patrol, held an online training exercise this weekend.” This is not a good lead because there is little to intrigue the reader to read further. It is only a topic and provides no details about actually happened.

Better: “Forty-five people from six communities took part during a day-long emergency services exercise this weekend, held online by South Dakota Wing, Civil Air Patrol.” A lot of information is packed into these 24 words. This lead encourages the reader to read further. It also just “feels” more important than version one.

**Quotes:** A good news release needs quotes. The ideal is two quotes. The first is from the person who is most knowledgeable – SDWG/CC, the mission IC, activity commander or project officer, etc. The second quote adds perspective from a second knowledgeable person. Of course, as a news release, YOU (the PAO) can write the “quotes” to most effectively tell your story, as long as you confirm with the person being quoted that the quote is acceptable.

**Conclusion:** Your conclusion may include what comes next in an ongoing story, a final quote that sums up the story, contact information, etc. For an external release,

we generally append the “boilerplate” provided by CAP National Headquarters, but we do not use the boilerplate for our internal publications.

**Length:** The above sounds like a lot, but we also have to write in a way that is focused. Your release should not be longer than two pages, double spaced, 12-point type, including the NHQ “boilerplate” content at the end. This means putting a lot of meaning into relatively few words. Get the basics across and leave out the fluff and hype. If the media WANTS more detail, they’ll contact you.

### **Final Thoughts**

The above is a starting point for writing a good news release that is most likely to attract the favorable attention of your local media. Note that the length of stories for the *Skychaser* should be shorter, usually 100-200 words. Often your original news release can be shortened by trimming some of the background, using shorter quotes, etc., and leaving out the boilerplate. If you are having problems with the length of your *Skychaser* submissions, let me help, or just send me the original, which I can edit.

In our next lesson, we’ll look at those AP style rules, which seem nit-picky. Luckily, there are only a few that we encounter every time we write.

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