

Get your story in the paper



A guide for teachers

A story in the local paper is a great way to amplify the impact of young people's citizenship activities and get good publicity for your school. This guide explains how to do it.

We suggest that as many of these activities as possible are done by young people - for example, drafting the press release. However a member of school staff should have oversight of the process and your school may have a communications officer or a member of the leadership team who should be consulted.

A **press release** is a statement you send to a newspaper. It follows a standardised format and provides information about the story the sender wishes to have published. This guide describes the standardised format used to write a press release and explains the **6 steps** to getting your story published in the local newspaper.

A press story is free publicity and potentially reaches large numbers of people. Frequently local decision makers - for example the local MP, councillors and business leaders - rely on the local paper online or in print to keep in touch with events. So even newspapers with small circulations are potentially influential.

There are two types of local newspaper.

1. A regional or city daily - eg. the Liverpool Echo, the Manchester Evening News.
2. A local weekly - eg: the Camden New Journal, the Haringey Advertiser.

Both types of newspaper have surprisingly few members of staff. They all rely to some extent on readers (you) sending them stories of local interest. Therefore your school's story has a good chance of being published, particularly in a local weekly newspaper which operates with the fewest staff of all.

SIX STEPS TO GETTING YOUR STORY IN THE PAPER

6

Step 1 - Find out the contact details of local newspapers and media.

You may see local newspapers for sale, have a free newspaper delivered through your letterbox or read the newspaper online. They should all publish their contact details in the print copy. Alternatively, you can find their details online. Search for the online editions of local newspapers and magazines. And don't forget regional BBC and independent radio stations.

Step 2 - Work out the 'hook' for your story.

Your story stands a better chance of being published if it has a 'hook'. This could be Christmas, Mothers Day or Volunteering Week. Or it could be a 'hook' event that's more specific to your local area.

Step 3 - Find out the copy deadline.

The copy deadline is the time and date after which your story won't get in the next edition. For weekly newspapers it may be two or three days before publication, so plan well in advance. Online editions are often more flexible.

Step 4 - Adapt the template press release on Page 3 and send it to the News Editor (sometimes referred to as the News Desk)

Copy, adapt and paste the press release below directly into an email and send it as early as possible before the next copy deadline to the News Editor (or News Desk). Contact details will be on the newspaper's website and in the print copy.



Step 5 - Follow up on the phone before the copy deadline

Phone the News Editor to check they've received your press release and that your story is in the diary. If they haven't seen it, send it again.

Step 6 - Create a good photo opportunity

Take your own photos as it's unlikely a newspaper will send a photographer. However newspapers will use your photo. It's fine to use a good quality smartphone camera. Find out who is the best photographer in your group, plan your shot visually and take the picture(s) in landscape

Writing your press release

The next page shows the layout and content of a press release. The closer you follow this **standardised format** the easier it is for a journalist or editor to turn it into a news story ready for publication. Use the template to minimise the work of the newspaper staff and give yourself the best chance of publication. There's also a word version of the template available with this guide.

1. Always use **Arial** font.
2. Follow the **layout style** and **conventions** in the press release template on the next page.
3. Snappy **headings** quickly inform the journalist about the content of your press release and attract their interest.
4. The main writing tip is to focus on the **5Ws** - Who, When, What, Where and Why. **Why** is particularly important because it provides an opportunity to explain the bigger picture and places your story in context.
5. Include attributed **quotes**. These make your story more human. Make sure you obtain consent from anyone who provides a quote.
6. Always include your **contact details** so the journalist may follow up with you.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE or EMBARGOED UNTIL...(provide the date and time)

Heading. The heading should be typed in bold and centred. Keep it short, snappy and to the point.

Subheading. This is optional and is used to elaborate on the information in the heading. Formatting is the same as the heading, but smaller. Again, keep it simple!

First paragraph. Start with a bang. Get the five 'W's in straight away – Who, When, What, Where, Why.

Following paragraphs. Make your points in order of importance. The second paragraph should elaborate on the first. You are essentially telling a story, so you must give the reader the full picture. Spell out the facts, give statistics, and quote names and numbers of people involved.

Quotes. Include a direct quote from the most relevant person involved: it will humanise the story. It can be you! Keep the quote brief, providing an overview of the event. If writing a quote for somebody else, get their consent before using it. Remember to give the person's full name and role or job title unless it is a child under 18, when you should follow the relevant safeguarding and privacy policies.

'More follows...' If the press release spreads to a second page, type 'More follows' at the bottom right-hand corner and 'Continued' at the top of the second page. Never split paragraphs or sentences.

ENDS

This marks the end of your story. Below, under the 'Contacts' and 'Notes' headings further information may be found.

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

Give names and telephone numbers of people a journalist can contact for further information. This will most likely be somebody from school and (if you wish) somebody from the organisation you are working with.

Ms Citizenship Teacher, Teacher responsible: M -10001 E – citteach@greatschool.sch.uk
Ms Media Person, Media officer: T - 99999 M - 99999 E – mediaperson@oxfam.org.uk

NOTES TO EDITOR:

This is your last chance to give journalists background information, and links to photographs, websites etc. For example: Visit www.oxfam.org.uk to find out more information.

All text of a press release should be in **Arial** font