

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Jenny Wilcoxson Davis, MA

Creative Forecasting, Be Our Guest – February, 2002

The Activity Professional can create news stories that bring the program and facility favorable publicity by learning, understanding, and applying basic rules of journalism.

First, assemble the materials you will need to create professional, polished stories. A press release should appear on company letterhead. If that is not possible, the story may be typed or printed from a computer in traditional 12-point type on high quality (20 to 25 lb.) bond paper. Black ink on white paper is preferred, and only one side of the paper should be used. It is also a good idea to invest in an up-to-date dictionary, thesaurus, and *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual*. The AP stylebook is “the” final word in newspaper style. Full of information covering correct usage, abbreviations, spelling, formal titles and more, the stylebook easily guides writers to the answers for writing style dilemmas.

Before committing pen to paper, stop and ask yourself a few questions.

- Is the goal of the story to **inform**, **persuade**, or **entertain** readers?
- Do you want to **explain** the role of the Activity Department or **persuade** the community to attend a fund raiser?
- Will the story be lengthy or will a simple, three-sentence **announcement** provide readers the information you want to distribute?
- Will the piece appear in the community calendar, news, feature, business, sports, or leisure section?
- Are you writing this piece for a small-town daily, weekly, or biweekly newspaper or a metropolitan newspaper?

Once you have answered these questions, gather the facts that provide the framework of your story. Every news report answers these basic questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. With the facts clearly identified, the writer begins to prioritize them in order of importance. Read the example below and identify the **most important fact**. How should the information be prioritized?

Residents of Blackland Nursing Home of Greenville invite the community to celebrate Presidents’ Day during a Cherry Pie Social, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., Thursday. The former President of the United States, Jimmy Carter, will be on hand as the mayor of Greenville declares Thursday “Blackland Nursing Home Day.”

Of course, in this story the former President’s visit to Greenville is the most important fact. The mayor’s declaration of “Blackland Nursing Home Day” would be the second most important item of information. The “Cherry Pie Social” would be the least important.

Having established the order of facts, think about your opening sentence or the **lead** of the article. Think of ways to **grab the readers’ attention** encouraging them to read the rest of the story. For example:

A former President celebrated Presidents’ Day with the residents of Blackland Nursing Home of Greenville Thursday. Former President Jimmy Carter ate pie, shook hands with well-wishers, and enjoyed reminiscing with his elderly supporters during the Cherry Pie Social.

Now, you are ready to write. With a blank screen (or sheet of paper) before you, type the name, address, and phone number of the facility’s **CONTACT** person in the upper left hand corner of the page.

CONTACT: Marcy Brown
123 Cottonwood Ln.
Greenville, TX 75407
(903) 555-1212

The title is located approximately one-fifth down the page to allow the editor's instructions and headline. The author's **byline** (name) is typed directly below. The manuscript should always be double-spaced. This allows the editor some ease in reading and editing the piece.

The second and all succeeding pages of the manuscript also identify the author, story, and page number. This **tag** is also typed in the upper left hand corner of the page. An example would read: **BROWN/PRESIDENT AT NURSING HOME/ADD 2.**

Printed information on page two would begin in the traditional position at the top of the page. The writer should allow for a one-inch margin on all pages. If the press release is longer than one page, the writer should type:

--MORE--. When the story concludes, the author must type: **--END--** or **--30--** to indicate the editor has reached the end of the **copy** or story. Whenever possible, a page should end at the end of a paragraph.

With a bullet-proof manuscript in hand, you are now ready to bring your story to the attention of local editors. The efforts you have made will do you no good if you have missed your **deadline**. Make certain to deliver your story to the newspaper at least two weeks in advance of an event you are trying to publicize and immediately following a concluded activity. If you are unsure of a paper's editorial deadline, call, identify yourself, and ask. A professional presentation, of yourself and your writing will attract the editor's attention, providing an opportunity to develop a point of contact for future activity articles.

Jenny owns ACT Enterprises, an Activity Consulting firm that serves the eldercare industry of North Texas. CF