

Joint UNECE/WBI Workshop on National Gender Statistics Training Programmes

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What do journalists, or newsrooms, look for in a media release?

What follows is the perspective from an international news organisation; it could be print, one of the wire services such as reuter, ap, afp, or a global broadcaster such as bbc, cnn.

- No exact or universal answer
- Criteria vary according to needs of different countries and societies
- Rule Number 1 is consider who is your audience? Who are you trying to reach? How might you best reach them? Is it academics? Is it decision-makers? Who influences decision-makers? Are we seeking to reach out to mass audiences, the public, families?
- Remember you are competing for space with many other organizations

You have seconds- possibly less than 10 seconds in which to grab the attention of a news editor or a journalist.

- Ask yourself the questions readers and journalists would ask
- **News organisations know a great deal about their audiences. They continually research them. The cut-throat nature of competition means they have to stay in business. They will be asking what do our readers, viewers, listeners want to know, need to know, about issues that could impact upon their lives?**
- Say something newsy, significant. Don't issue backgrounder information. Don't issue a news release if you have nothing of note to say. Tendency to be anodyne, sometimes risk averse; you have to cut through in what is a competitive environment. Aceh example of daily un briefing.
- It is possible to generalise about **A USEFUL DEFINITION** of News

**News is a new piece of information
about a recent and significant event
that is of interest to listeners,
is relevant to them,
and may affect them.**

Concise and precise

- The headline is the first thing to catch a news editor's eye
- Needs to be catchy, a hook. (It can be a tease-entice newsrooms, excite their interest in a story?) Headline writing is an art-form.
- You must get past this barrier in order to reach your main audience – the people
- It should be no more than one line, for example: 'Banks cut interest rates'
- Get your story across early in the first paragraph
- The rest of the press release should answer the questions – where, when, what, why and how
- If it does not answer these simple questions, then you have failed

Identifying the Top Line

The top line is the foundation on which we build our story. The correct top line ensures your story is new, direct and informative. It needs to be *clear, informative and easy to understand*.

- **Ask key questions about the story until you understand it**
 - WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY, WHEN, HOW
 - What is new? What did you not know before?
- **Decide which of these answers your audience needs to know first**
 - usually the best way is to describe what's happening now

Avoid complicating the story. Do you really need to put the official at the top? Other things that can make it difficult to write and understand are:

- too many statistics; round-up figures
- institutional protocols(one UN is of little interest to many external audiences...they would be surprised if we were *not* acting together)
- big institutions
- VIPs
- big words, jargon, technical language

They may be part of the story but are often not necessary to understand it. Use them later if your audience/readers will need clarification.

Writing the Top Line

If working in English, use the present tense if possible. Make story active, not passive. Write it so it is up-to-date and helps to focus your mind on the logical flow of information

- Don't waste words – a news editor usually makes up his mind about carrying a story within the first eight seconds, so the headline and first paragraph are crucial
- No press release should go over one page – one side if possible of A4 – and never over 400 words

Make sure your organisation has placed contact details at the end of the release. Journalists may want to contact you to:

- Interview you or someone from your organisation; have you identified a fluent media spokesperson and is s/he prepared?(Q&As, rehearsed messages for tricky questions?)
- Develop the media release by developing human interest stories; stories that humanise the issues at play
- Delve deeper into the issue; research a story s/he may want to write/broadcast based on the points raised in your media release
- Can you offer pre-researched examples to journalists that will humanise the important issues you want to put across/explain to target publics?
- Do you have a background/supporting information, and easy-to-digest factsheet on the issue?
- Maps, easy-to-follow charts, graphs?

QUALITIES OF WHAT MAKES SOMETHING NEWS

NEW:

a new event

an idea

an opinion

hasn't been reported before

latest development in a rolling story

or RECENT:

it happened earlier today

or longer ago but only if communications were so difficult, that the news has only emerged today.

it's about to happen. But beware of 'intentions'... what a government minister (for example) intends doing...

PROXIMITY

“Big problems for them are less important than small problems for us”

Fresh data on percentages of school children immunised against measles in Switzerland. Is that news to the people of Ukraine? Possibly not.

But the data *is* news – even if there is a small change – to those local communities, directly affected by any outbreaks of measles among children.

SIGNIFICANT:

significant to your audience

meaningful

important.

It may be necessary to explain ***why & how*** it *is* important.

INTERESTING:

affects people

relevant to their lives

write stories from that point of view - how an event will *affect* people.

Consider the angle to the story; if there's a local angle to the story, emphasise it. People are much more interested in what happens in their village or region or country than in *distant* events.
