

# Press releases that... grab attention!

## Step-by-step guide

*How would you tell the story  
if you were meeting a friend after work?*

Members of the third framework coordinating committee held their second JCFHS meeting at the headquarters of the sub-regional joint action team and discussed ongoing progress in implementation of the project's strategy.



Our actions to clean up the local lake have been a spectacular success, and we're going to recommend it be opened up for public bathing for the first time in 20 years.





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This step-by-step guide prepared by the EU Neighbourhood Info Centre, based on its publication "Writing to Grab Attention", provides you with inside information on how to write press releases that grab attention, along with some basic tips.



## A press release?

One key communication tool, especially for building relations with the media, is the press release, but... the media receive dozens a week!

So, your press release is competing with dozens of others.

What do you do then?

Make it interesting to... grab attention, of course!

Write it as if you were talking about your project to a friend!

A press release should be viewed as an article that you prepare on an activity you want to announce, or information about your project that is relevant for public consumption. This you will send to the media for their use, either as background information or, hopefully, to publish, word for word.

Journalists do like to "copy-paste" and it is to your benefit as your messages go out in the way you want them; however, for them to do so it needs to be written in a journalistic way.

There are certain standard elements that one puts in a press release, which are referred to further down, but first and foremost you need to answer a few questions:

- Do you need a press release?  
Is what you want to say interesting, relevant and timely?
- Do journalists in your country/region use press releases?
- Who is your target for a press release?  
Yes, journalists, but they are your tool to reach your target audiences.  
So also define your target audience: this will help you decide what is relevant enough to include in your press release.
- How will you make sure a journalist will pick up your press release and use it?  
Will you call the person?  
Will you use a PR agency that has the contacts?
- If you want to give out a press release at a press conference, in what format should it be: electronic or print or both? It should be both!



## Headlines and intros

When journalists pick up a press release, the first thing they will read is the title (headline). If it grabs their attention, they will read the first paragraph (intro) and maybe the second. If the story really manages to create an interest then they may even read more and, ultimately, cover it.

### The headline

When you pick up a newspaper or a magazine, what do you read first? The headline, for sure. Therefore the title of your press release must attract the reader, make them want to find out more. It should be lively and active, create an interest, tell a story and so on. At the same time, though, it must be short and comprehensible, so people can understand it at a glance.

*Headlines can...*

- **Tell a story** "A good recipe for farming? Trading pesticides for owls"
- **Refer to the facts** "To handle football fans, border guards learn English"
- **Be lively** "For your wedding, get a trolleybus"
- **Ask a question** "Does brain drain from poor to richer countries only have negative effects? Femise report studies the cases of Palestine and Tunisia"
- **Be playful with words** "The new trade routes of old natural soap"

*Headlines must not be...*

- **Long and boring** "XTP-EMW organized a regional workshop titled 'National Efficiency Action Plans (NEAPs)' on 20-21 January 2012 at hotel APC in Kiev, Ukraine"
- **Full of jargon** "EU-funded MEDSO and URMS II projects sign Memorandum of Understanding"
- **Written with acronyms** "EA finds that EDF spending do not benefit SMEs"
- **Too general** "FZQY Project team visit to Azerbaijan"
- **Incomprehensible** "IFGO is co-organizing the Forum on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency 'Building Financing Partnerships'"
- **Without an interesting angle** "2nd Agriculture Project Annual Workshop, Brussels, 20-25 January 2012"



## **The intro**

An introduction shouldn't be long, as what you are trying to do is ... grab the attention of the media. So don't waste your space (and time) on people's titles, long names, places, jargon and names of committees that only you and your colleagues understand or are interested in. The whole intro should not be longer than two brief paragraphs, as people do not read more before they decide if they should spend more time on it.

With a good intro, not only do you generate interest, but you also manage to tell your basic story to those who are not interested to read further down.

One common mistake is to lead a press release with practical and boring information and have something interesting at the end. Do not bury your interesting information at the end of your press release, simply because... readers may never reach the end!

An intro should reply to the «five Ws» (who, what, where, when, why) and «H» (how) which are the first element included in the "inverted pyramid". This means that everything you have to say must be said from the beginning.

*The «five Ws» and «H» (how)*

**Who** was involved (your project, other partners, officials)

**What** happened, your story, what you want to say

**Where** did it happen

**When** did it take place, the period in which your action is unfolding

**Why** it matters, what you are trying to achieve/tackle

**How** did it evolve, occur, what did you do



## An Example

Below an example of a fictional title and an intro, the same text, written differently. Which is best?

### **Forest Adjacent Community Problems and Their Solutions Discussed**

On 1 November 2011, CNBT presented results of the study "Knowledge, Attitude and Perception of People Living in Communities Adjacent to Forests", conducted within the framework of a Programme carried out in Moldova, to the concerned official structures and NGOs.

### **Few Moldovans aware of importance of forests, new study finds**

Only a tiny minority of people living in Moldova's forest areas are aware of their environmental importance, according to a new study by the EU-funded forestry programme FLEG, with the vast majority seeing forests as a source of firewood, with little understanding of the impact of illegal logging.

The first title and intro does nothing more than announce that a study was conducted, whereas the interesting facts are the findings of the study. The findings could have been hidden in the paragraph before last of the press release!

In your press releases, don't bore with too many titles, jargon, surveys, institutional frameworks etc. What the media and the public want to know, or need to know actually, are the most relevant and important facts.

**Communicate outcomes, not procedures.**

And don't forget... whatever you don't say, people don't know!  
Simple, but true!

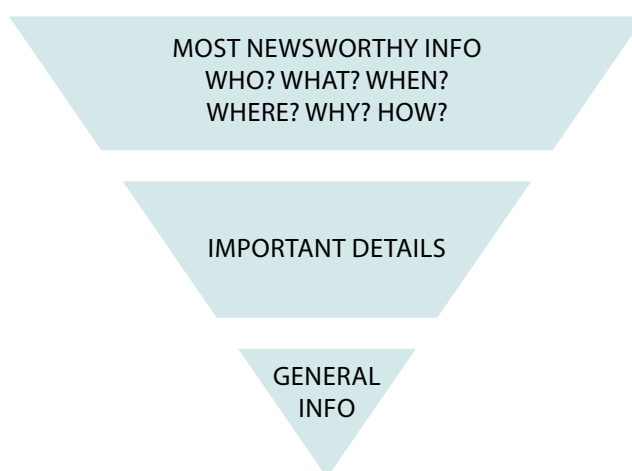


## The inverted pyramid

This is the “inverted pyramid” - what one learns at journalism school or in the field and a very useful tool for you to have in mind, as it will guide you in structuring your press release.

What it actually shows is how editors work in the newsroom: they want the most important elements of the story at the top and the further down you go the more secondary the info is.

To save space, for example, the editor starts cutting an article or news story from below.



## Length

We are living in the age of smartphone messaging. The advisable length of a press release is one page, with half a page more for the background and contacts, *at the most*.

You absolutely need to say more. So what do you do?

- Have a couple of paragraphs at the end as background information with more details about involvement in the sector or the country.
- In an accompanying document (background note) give the facts and figures that are too technical (in eurospeak they call this a *Memo*).
- Add useful links from where one can find out more, something of particular importance for an electronic press release.



## Also consider...

- **Reliability/credibility** A few “mistakes”, and people will stop trusting you.
- **Consistency** Be consistent in visual identity, logos and colours (graphics), project name, key messages, style of text, etc.
- **Language** Write in a clear and precise way, don't try to impress with difficult words, don't try to cover up something you don't know, don't use five words when you can use three!
- **Avoid acronyms and abbreviations** that people outside your project will not understand. If one has to be used, the first time write it in full with the acronym/abbreviation in parenthesis.
- **Photos** It is more effective to accompany your text with a good quality, publishable photo, illustrating what you want to say, to which you will add a caption.
- **Release date** Up at the top of the press release write the date on which you are circulating it.
- **Contact** Always give a contact name and phone number at the end in case a journalist wants to follow up. An email isn't enough because it may be that the person responsible doesn't see it.

## Quotes (statements)

Use statements from people to make a text more lively, real, interesting, human, convincing, etc. Have a quote from a beneficiary, a community leader, an important person.

*Make them stand out in your text by putting them in italic.*



# A press release

Some key elements for a good press release:

## Environment:

### Europe's bathing waters continue to improve

STRONG  
HEADLINE (bold)

Brussels, 21 May 2013

DATE

Ninety-four per cent of bathing sites in the European Union meet minimum standards for water quality, according to the European Environment Agency's annual report on bathing water quality in Europe. Water quality is excellent at 78 % of sites and almost 2 % more sites meet the minimum requirements compared to last year's report.

STRONG INTRO

Cyprus and Luxembourg stand out with all listed bathing sites achieving excellent water quality. Eight other countries have excellent quality values above the EU average: Malta (97 %), Croatia (95 %), Greece (93 %), Germany (88 %), Portugal (87 %), Italy (85 %), Finland (83 %) and Spain (83 %). This is an improvement on last year's results, continuing the positive trend.

EXTRA DETAIL

Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik said:

*"It's encouraging to see the quality of European bathing waters continuing to improve. But more remains to be done to ensure all our waters are suitable..."*

QUOTE (italics)

Jacqueline McGlade, EEA Executive Director, said:

*"...Today's report demonstrates that bathing water quality is generally very good, but there were still some sites with pollution problems, so we urge people to check the rating of their favourite swimming place."*

Every year, the European Environment Agency (EEA) compiles bathing water data gathered by local authorities at more than 22 000 sites across the 27 EU Member States, Croatia and Switzerland. More than two thirds of sites are coastal beaches, with rivers and lakes making up the remainder.

CONTEXT

Bathing water in Europe needs to comply with standards set in the 2006 Bathing Water Directive, which updates and simplifies previous legislation. It has to be implemented by EU Member States by December 2014. The EU publishes an annual summary report on the quality of bathing water, based on reports that the Member States must submit before the end of the previous year. Citizens can find out about the water quality at their favourite swimming spot by visiting the EEA's Bathing Water Web Site.

BACKGROUND

For more information:

[European Environment Agency bathing water site](#)

[European Commission bathing water site](#)

CONTACT DETAILS

(name & surname,  
email,  
phone etc.)

Contacts

At the European Commission:

Name Surname (+32 2 000 0 000)

At the European Environment Agency:

Name Surname (+45 11 22 2222)

## Photos and Captions

It is always more effective to accompany your press release with a photo, which should include a caption that replies to the Five Ws – who, what, when, where, why. Photos should be in high resolution and interesting. When using photos, always respect copyright.

In some cases you may send out a stimulating and attractive photo with a caption that tells the whole story, and it can be published just as it is, with no press release!

Below are some examples of photos with captions, that tell a story, show you elements that should be included, but also emphasise the importance of choosing a good angle. For more on Taking Photos for EU-funded projects have a look at the Info Centre handbook, available on [www.enpi-info.eu](http://www.enpi-info.eu).

Photos and captions that tell a story.

### Focusing on results



The new trade routes of old natural soap in Lebanon. A Lebanese worker shapes freshly made soap into balls at the Med Cosmetics factory near Tripoli. The soaps are made by the Med Cosmetics project outside Tripoli and displayed for sale at their shop in the old market. The soap industry on the Lebanese coast is as old as olives. The project was part of the EU funded Invest in Med programme.

(Photo: Epa ©EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre)

### Stirring emotions



Managing water resources in Ukraine.

People on the Dniester River say: those who live in the area should solve the problems of rivers. The key is integration between the people and finding consensus among the stakeholders, according to experts of the Water Governance in the Western Regions of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) project.

(Photo: Iryna Tuz ©EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre)



### Capturing action



Russia: A journey towards inclusion. As part of the EU Partnership, Moscow's school No 518 gives children with severe disabilities the opportunity to study with other children. Disabled boy George Bichkov (front R) playing with his classmate after a lesson. (Photo: Epa ©EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre)

### Respecting EU visibility



A master class of Polish folk dance during Europe Day celebrations in Yerevan, on Northern Avenue, 12 May 2012.

(Photo: Epa ©EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre)

### Meetings can show movement



Support to Civil Society in Tunisia. Rami Salhi, regional manager of the Euromed Foundation of Human Rights speaks during the conference of the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development in El Kef city, Tunisia, on 04 march 2012.

(Photo: Epa ©EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre)

### Technical meetings can be lively



Support to State Labour and Health Safety in Azerbaijan. Aliyev Alikhan (left), state labour inspector, in a discussion with Uykun Ogun (right), EU Twinning Project expert in Baku, 11 June 2012. This project aims at facilitating the exchange of knowledge between labour inspectors, who gained experience in Germany, EU Twinning project experts, and labour inspectors from other regions.

(Photo: Epa ©EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre)



## 10 + 1 TIPS

- 1 Template** Look around you and find a press release that you like. Select the elements you believe work well, create a template and use it in the future.
- 2 Grammar** For headlines you don't have to be grammatically correct, so don't worry too much. What's important is to grab attention!
- 3 KISS (keep it short and sweet)** One page or one and a half, including the background and contact info is the perfect size for a press release. Write what you want to write, then go back and delete whatever is not necessary!
- 4 Terms of Reference** Do not make good communications material, if you want to use them then you must rephrase to make it more interesting and simplify the content.
- 5 Immediacy** Say what you have to say from the beginning, focusing on the specific information you want to announce and not the details or names.
- 6 Figures** If you have concrete figures, for example if the number of people benefiting from your activity is impressive, then give them, as numbers are convincing and can make an impression.
- 7 Official name** If the name of your project is long, technical and boring use a shorter version and put the official one somewhere below in the text.
- 8 Language** When not writing in your mother tongue, have a native speaker look at your text.
- 9 Acronyms and jargon** When you write for a more general audience have in mind that they may not know acronyms you use or technical terms, therefore simplify or spell everything out.
- 10 Timing** Your message may be good, but if your timing is wrong you may lose the game. Timing is significant in two ways: to decide when to send your story (day, time) and to know when is the best hour/day to reach out to journalists.

### +1 Tip Questions

Ask questions to draw out what you want to say in the press release.

Why is your activity important?

How are you making a difference?

How many people are affected?

Where do these people live?

Who are you cooperating with?

When you say women, of what age?

# Stay connected



[www.euneighbours.eu](http://www.euneighbours.eu)

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Other Info Centre Handbooks for EU-funded projects are available online:

[Writing to Grab Attention](#)

[A Photographer's Handbook](#)

[Neighbourhood Glossary South](#)

[Eastern Partnership and Russia Glossary](#)

The **EU Neighbourhood Info Centre** is run by the EU-funded **OPEN Neighbourhood** programme, which is implemented by two mirror projects, EU Neighbours South and EU NEighbours East, communicating the results of the EU support in the South and the East of the Neighbourhood.

[www.euneighbours.eu](http://www.euneighbours.eu)



This step-by-step guide exists only in electronic format. It has been produced with the assistance of the European Union, and is an update of the 2012 edition first produced by the EU Neighbourhood Info Centre, a project funded by the EU. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the Consortium led by Ecorys (UK) and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.