

A Quick Guide to Preparing a Press Release

In preparing a press release for The Daily Democrat follow a few simple dos and don'ts:

- Do use standard size paper.
- Do type your release. Do not write it by hand.
- Do remember to tell the Who, What, When, Where and Why of the event.
- Do be brief.
- Do keep your writing clear, your spelling (particularly of names and position titles) accurate.
- Do double-check the accuracy of your information. Is the time accurate? Do the day and date match up? Is the spelling correct for the name of the organization and any individuals identified in the press release?
- Do remember to submit your news release at least 10 days in advance of the event itself or the deadline for registration to the event.
- Do remember to submit the news release to a specific individual in the editorial department. Do not hand it in without knowing its destination. If you do not know where you want the information to go, find out and keep a note to yourself so you can verify receipt if necessary.
- Do be a pest. If you haven't seen your release and the event is rapidly approaching, then call The Daily Democrat and speak to the person who has received the release.
- Do think photographs. Either take photos and provide them with the release, or contact The Daily Democrat in advance to arrange for photos. (The paper accepts black and white, color or digital photos.)
- Don't begin the release with a personalized sentence. Most editors will eliminate such a sentence because it clutters up the story without providing useful information. Keep sentences simple and clear.
- Don't use personal quotes to provide information. A quotation adds a personal dimension to a story and only serves to reinforce existing information.
- Don't have a list of contact people in the press release itself. Have as few contact people and telephone numbers as possible, usually no more than two.
- Don't worry about making your press release creative or clever.
- Don't type in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. The release becomes difficult to read. When writing about an event that has already happened, follow the above directions and also remember to report:
 - What was the event? Who was involved in the event? What happened? What was the purpose of the event? When did the event happen?
 - Report who received any honors or awards, and why. Include as much background on the individual or individuals being honored as possible.
 - Bear in mind that in writing about a past event, timeliness is everything. Write about the event as soon as it has happened. Don't wait for photographs to be processed, or for someone else to get you information. Alert the proper person at the paper if there's a problem, but act fast to get the information to The Daily Democrat as soon as possible.

Tracking the Press Release

A "worst case plan" in the event things go wrong, primary rules in submitting releases are as follows: Assign one person to handle the release. That person should keep careful notes. The person in charge of publicity shouldn't get angry if everything goes wrong and nothing appears in the paper. There is always another event, another staff writer, another editor. Holding a grudge hurts no one but the person holding it.

Delivering the Press Release

1. Deliver your news release at least 10 days in advance — depending on the event you want publicized — to a specific person at the paper. Never drop off your release without knowing who will be getting it. Keep a record of the date and write down the name.
 2. Confirm that the person specified has received your release. Regardless of how you deliver your release, make a follow-up phone call to the person or to whom it was addressed to confirm receipt and whether there are any immediate questions. Make a note of the date and time.
 3. If you have not seen your release by one week prior to the event, call your contact at the paper and find out when it is scheduled to appear. (Make sure you read the paper. Don't ask the person to monitor the publication for you and tell you when it appeared.) Again, make a note of the date and time.
 4. If the time you were told comes and goes, and the release still has not been published, telephone the paper and ask to speak with your contact's editor/supervisor. Explain the situation fully, but calmly. You will need to tell the editor/supervisor:
 - To whom the release was delivered and when. Describe whether it was delivered in person, by hand, faxed or e-mailed.
 - Explain that you followed up your first contact with a second contact to confirm receipt. Give that date.
 - Explain that you didn't see the release in the paper by one week before the event and you called to find out when it was going in the paper. Give the date of that conversation. Report any promises made.
 - Explain that you are rapidly closing in on the scheduled event, need the article in the paper immediately, and wouldn't have bothered the editor/supervisor except you had exhausted all your options with your contact.
 5. Following the event, make direct face-to-face contact with the editor/supervisor in an effort to examine what went wrong so you can head off future problems. Stay calm and rational. Take specific notes and save them for the next time you have an event. The more professional you are, the greater respect you will receive.
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