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Writing Suitable Copy for the Press

By Carolyn Moncel

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Summer is finally here and school is out, but learning for the rest of us continues. Whether you're a seasoned PR professional working for a top agency, a novice just beginning a career, or a mid-level manager working in-house at a small business, the time comes when we all could use a refresher course in properly writing suitable copy for the press.

My lesson occurred recently upon reading an interesting interview with retired Wall Street Journal assistant managing editor, Paul R. Martin, Sr., in The Bulldog Reporter, a public relations trade newsletter. Reporters and public relations professionals alike greatly admire Mr. Martin's experience, and they should because his advice for avoiding common writing mistakes is the best primer available for writing great press releases.

Allow me to share with you what I learned: ·

Keep your press release short and simple. Try to use one word instead of two, and ask yourself if what you've written is redundant. If in doubt, have a colleague or friend read your release. Reporters want to understand your key points immediately. They don't want to call you multiple times for clarification. ·

Write plainly and avoid company-insider phrases, clichés or industry-specific jargon. Unless you are targeting the trade press, avoid all jargon because it has have no meaning outside of the company or industry. An example phrase would be "state of the art." ·

Do not capitalize titles to elevate your boss or company. Never capitalize titles like "President" or "Chairman". Capped titles should only be applied to things like the names of countries or political heads of State.

Refrain from creating new words or phrases. Instead of saying, "grow the economy" verbs like 'expand,' or 'increase,' still work just as well. ·

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Write in active voice. Remember that no one likes to read poorly written copy. Brush up on your grammar and never use the passive voice, which is boring.

Whether you are a PR professional or a small-business owner writing press releases in-house, you must know how the media writes. Keep in mind that journalists expect the quality level and same attention to detail in your copy that their editors demand from their own stories. If you violate these rules, here is yet another instance where your release will receive a one-way trip to the reporter's trash can.

Notable PR Resources:

The Bulldog Reporter
Steven R. Van Hook's All About Public Relations

PR Newswire

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Killer Press Kits – Press Kits That Demand Attention

By Annette Gisby

So, you've had your book published or you've gone the self-published route, but what do you do now?

You contact a newspaper, radio or television station requesting an interview and they ask you to send them a press kit.

First of all, don't panic. A press kit is not some magical entity that only those published by the big houses can have. You can create an affordable and great looking press kit on your own.

Here are some things that you can include in your press kit to send to interested reviewers and interviewers.

An author's bio detailing all your professional writing credits, contest wins, short stories, articles etc. A little bit about what you enjoy in your spare time, but most of it should be about your writing life.

Include the clippings (or photocopies of them) from newspapers or magazines where your articles have

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appeared. If you've only ever written for the web, print out a copy of the article and mention the website where it was selected to appear. Don't include your own website as a writing credit.

An author photograph, as professional as possible. A head and shoulders shot is usual. Don't send your latest holiday snaps.

A picture of your book's cover, or postcard or poster of it.

Any previous good reviews you have had for your book.

Any speaking engagements or booksigning events that you have coming up. Or the details of previous ones and how successful they were.

You could also include a previous interview, it might save them some time and at least you know what sort of questions might be asked of you.

If you can afford it, a nice presentation folder for your press kit goes down well, but it isn't a necessity. On your website, you can also list the things above as a virtual press kit, but if a newspaper etc. ask for a press kit, don't just send them to the website. They would probably prefer everything in hard copy, but it doesn't hurt to ask if they would accept an electronic copy.

Annette Gisby is a novelist and freelance writer. Her articles have appeared both in print and online, and to date she has three fiction books published, *Silent Screams*, *Drowning Rapunzel* and *Shadows of the Rose*. Her non-fiction book, *Writing the Dream* has lots more hints and tips for writers. Please visit Annette's website for more information on her books:

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