

How to Write a Press Release: An Easy Boilerplate

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1. We are lucky in gerontology because almost everything we do is relevant and interesting to the general public.
2. The CLSA is the best longitudinal data on Canadians that has ever been available.
 - a. Of course the media will want to learn more about our research.
3. Analyze your data with dissemination in mind
 - a. Score on a social support scale does not mean as much to the public as presence or absence of a confidant
 - b. If you present income in \$10,000 increments, the odds ratios are easier to interpret (as they are not tiny)
 - c. Score on the CES-D or PTSD scale is not as clear as has depression or not; has PTSD or not.
4. I would strongly encourage you to think about sending out a press release for almost every article you publish
5. All press releases have a standard formula.
 - a. Once you know the formula (see below) you can draft a release in 2 or 3 hours
 - b. Your university's media relation office will be happy to help but it makes it much easier for them if you present them with quite a polished draft of a press release.
6. Press releases are designed
 - a. To be read by nonexperts - so keep it simple
 - b. To entice reporters to cover your research -so be clear why your findings are important and who might be interested
 - c. To be used as 'filler' for newspapers and news blogs around the world- therefore they need to be clear, well-written and fine to "stand alone" as an article with engaging quotes from experts (i.e., you and your co-authors)
 - i. 95% of your coverage will come from 'filler' coverage, but they can easily get picked up in dozens of outlets including Times of India, NBC blogs, etc.
7. Scan Eurekalert! to see examples of press releases and keep up with your field - <https://www.eurekalert.org/>
8. You want to make sure the journal does not publish the 'accepted pre-proof' article online (Note this is now the default in Elsevier journals).
 - a. You need the final edited and approved proof to be the first one published online
9. Upon article acceptance (or in Elsevier when I send in the revise and resubmit) I put the following in my response email:

"We will be working with media services at University of Toronto to create a Eurekalert! and press release on this article. Please do not publish the paper online until we have finalized the corrected proofs. Media relations also requests that they are informed about the embargo date at least 3 days in advance of publication in order to maximize media pick-up."
10. Draft the press release when you are editing the proofs
 - a. It is more time efficient when the complete article is fresh in your mind

- b. You also will be ready in case the journal moves up the publication date
- 11. Oxford Journals states
 - a. “The most important aspect is to remember that the research should contain a ‘hook’ or main point of interest for the reader and the journalist. This hook should provide an identifiable audience, main point of focus for the release, and headline for the article. *If you cannot identify the hook then it is unlikely that we can.*”
- 12. It is easier to generate media attention if the publication coincides with a date of interest
 - a. September 13th is Grandparents day
 - b. September 21st is World Alzheimer’s Day
 - c. February is American Heart Month
 - d. For a full list see <https://www.ipromo.com/blog/2020-awareness-event-calendar-awareness-days-weeks-and-months/>
- 13. Choose an embargo date that is a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday at 5:00 am EST
- 14. Provide embargo time/date at the top in bold caps (NEWS RELEASE 22-APR-2020 5:00 AM EST)
- 15. The title/headline should be short, enticing and in the active voice
 - a. Maximum 90 characters including spaces
 - b. Use 25-point font
 - c. Bold
- 16. The sub-headline should touch on some of the key findings and it must be engaging
 - a. Many reporters do not read past this
 - b. No more than 255 characters including with spaces.
 - c. Use 14-point font
 - d. Italicize
- 17. Types of Headlines and Sub-titles
 - a. Summarizes all key findings
 - b. Catchier headline but less information
 - c. Translating findings into something more tangible
 - d. Focus on the most novel finding
 - e. Asking a question
 - i. Great for hypothesis papers
- 18. Write the byline “University of Toronto” (replace with your university)
- 19. Start content with Toronto, Canada (replace with your university’s location)
- 20. The text should be succinct.
 - a. Maximum of 500-700 words (Fewer words are fine)
 - b. Order information so the most important is first
 - c. Be accurate, avoid hyperbole- Don’t overstate the findings!
 - d. Be clear-avoid jargon such as SES
 - e. Avoid too many technical details
 - f. Try out the ideas on your kids first, or someone else with limited knowledge and interest in your research – they will quickly indicate where it is boring and unclear
 - g. As a whole, think about the “3 minute” cocktail party overview of the paper
 - h. What 2-3 points are the most important, most interesting and/or most novel?
 - i. Sadly, positive news gets much less attention than negative news (and null findings are completely ignored)

- ii. You may choose to emphasize novel findings even if they are not the main focus of the published article. Here are some examples from my research:
 - 1. Example 1: “Parental domestic violence as a risk factor for later-life addictions”
 - a. Childhood sexual abuse and childhood physical abuse were also risk factors for substance dependence, but these have been well documented in the previous literature, so I didn’t put them in the title but waited until later in the text to discuss them
 - 2. Example 2: “Low fruit and vegetable intakes and higher body fat linked to anxiety disorders”
 - a. So was chronic pain and serious physical health problems but neither of those factors are particularly novel, so I buried that information lower in the press release
- 21. First paragraph needs to catch people’s interest and be engaging
 - a. Think of a press release’s first paragraph as the ‘1 minute elevator speech’ overview
- 22. Use many short paragraphs with spaces between paragraphs
- 23. If it isn’t self-evident why the findings are important, unexpected or exciting, you need to make that evident within the first few paragraphs
- 24. Provide engaging quotes that provide opinion or insight on each main finding
 - a. I use one quote per author
 - b. Never more than one quote per paragraph
 - c. I draft all the quotes so that the story flows.
 - d. Always send the drafted press release to the whole team and ask them to respond by email confirming they are OK with their quotes and with the whole press release
 - e. Put the quote first, then “said co-author NAME and then their title and position at the end”

Example: “We were surprised and delighted to learn that more than 70% of our sample maintained their excellent state of health across the study period,” says the first author, Mabel Ho, a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto’s Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work (FIFSW) and the Institute of Life Course and Aging. “Our findings underline the importance of a strength-based rather than a deficit-based focus on aging and older adults. The media and research tend to ignore the positive and just focus on the problems.”

- 25. Provide details on when and where published (usually later in press release)
 - a. Example: “The paper was published online this week in Substance Use and Misuse.”
 - b. At a minimum, try to send out the press release in the same month it is published (ideally the day of)
- 26. Near the bottom, perhaps 2nd last paragraph, put in information on the methodology:
 - a. Example “The study included 2,017 participants of the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) with asthma, who provided data at the baseline wave

(2011–2015), follow-up 1 wave (2015–2018), and during the pandemic (September–December 2020).”

27. Last paragraph put in a quote that sums up:

- a. Example "As life gradually returns to normal following the pandemic, it is still important to consider the potential longstanding mental health effects," said MacNeil. "We hope these findings can help inform targeted screening and referral to efficacious treatments such as cognitive behavioral therapy to support older adults with asthma who are experiencing depression".

28. Follow the text by ### in the middle of a blank line

29. After the break put Publication Source:

- Give full citation with DOI number and link which will go live after the embargo date (note the production team at the journal will give this to you upon request):

Publication Source:

MacNeil A, Birk S, Villeneuve PJ, Jiang Y, de Groh M, Fuller-Thomson E. Incident and Recurrent Depression among Adults Aged 50 Years and Older during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2022; 19(22):15032. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192215032>

Next section provides the contact details with bolded headed:

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30. If there is a paywall for the article add the following

“A full copy of the paper is available to credentialed journalists upon request. Please contact esme.fuller.thomson@utoronto.ca.

30. On the day of the press release

- a. Try to have lots of free time to answer any media calls/emails
Most reporters appreciate a call back within an hour
- b. Have a one-page point form list of the key points you want to emphasize
- c. Have a quote or two to use to get your point across
- d. Track the media interest: Altmetric, Google Searches, & your media relation office