

# Guidelines for Writing Effective Press Releases

The Federal Board of Revenue



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Support to Good Governance in Pakistan Programme

Tax Reform Component

F 7/2, Street 11, House 6

Khosar Road, Islamabad, Pakistan

T +92 51 2608 988/989/990

F +92 51 2608 987

[www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de)

**Responsible**

Catherine Isabel Froehling, Head of Support to Good Governance in Pakistan Programme

Dr. Amna Khalifa, Component Leader, Tax Reform Component, Support to Good Governance in Pakistan Programme

**Authors**

Guardian Management, Suite No. 8, Mezzanine Floor, 80 East, Malik Complex, Islamabad, Pakistan

Janine Baudach, Communications Advisor, Tax Reform Component, Support to Good Governance in Pakistan Programme

Humaira Zahid, Advisor, Tax Reform Component, Support to Good Governance in Pakistan Programme

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Mr. Tariq Bashir

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# Introduction

A press release, news release, media release, press statement or video release is a written or recorded communication directed at members of the news media for the purpose of announcing something ostensibly newsworthy. The use of press releases is common in the field of Public Relations (PR). Typically, the aim is to attract favourable media attention to your organization (FBR) and/or provide publicity. Typically, they are mailed, faxed, or e-mailed to assignment editors at newspapers, magazines, radio stations, television stations, or television networks. This paper excludes video release.

A press release is a written statement to the media. It can announce a range of news items, including scheduled events, new taxation and services, tax collection targets or accomplishments, etc. It can also be used in generating a feature story. Reporters are more likely to consider a story idea if they first receive a press release. It is a fundamental tool of PR work, and can benefit by anyone who's willing to use the proper format and technique.

## Writing a Press Release

A press release is a corporate document sent to media agents on behalf of FBR to announce news or events associated with FBR – communication of which provides a benefit to the institution.

The following guide is intended to introduce the process which should be undertaken to write effective press releases:

- A press release provides the basic facts needed to develop a news story and increases the chances of the news being reported.
- Journalists like clear and concise releases providing all of the information they need to know about what's going on, presented in a newsworthy manner to attract their interest and encourage them to cover the story.
- For smaller publications and online news sites, the press release may appear in its original form. Elsewhere, the release acts as a teaser, garnering attention which will then be followed up by the journalist who will find their own angle on the information.
- Journalists are looking for a hook which will form the main focus of their story. They like to know outcomes of research and they prefer a human angle to ensure the story has a public interest.
- A press release acts as an invitation for the press. Once you send out a release, you have to be prepared to talk to the media as they are likely to want to follow up on the information they have received, viewing your approved release as an invitation to get in touch.

# Top Tips for Writing Press Releases

## Answer the five Ws

It is important to include the key information in a press release to grab the journalist's attention. This is achieved by answering the following five 'W' questions:

Who has done something?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Main focus of your story – a person or group of people that are the essential element of the story.</li></ul>
What have they done?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The news, event or project with which your organisation is involved.</li></ul>
Where did they do it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The location of the event.</li></ul>
When did they do it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The time, day, and date of an event or the time period involved for a person or project.</li></ul>
Why is it important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The reason this event, person, or project is significant to the general public.</li></ul>

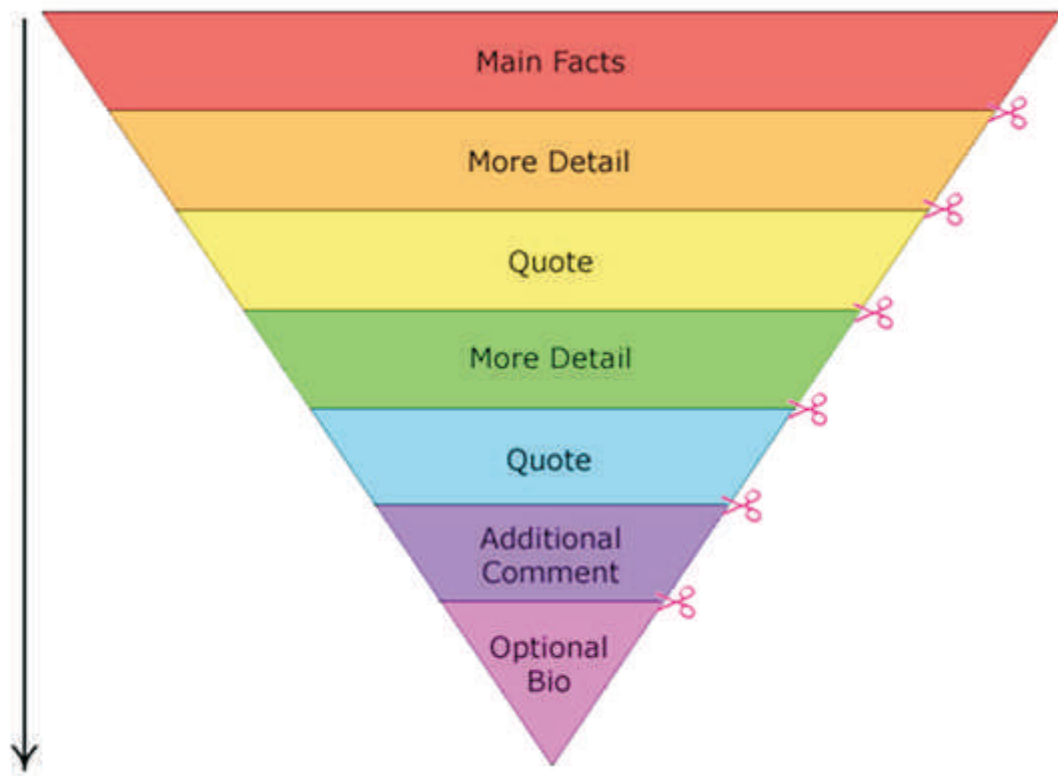
Add "How" if relevant.

## Follow the 'Inverted Pyramid' Structure

Introduce all of the vital information at the beginning of the release and use subsequent paragraphs to elaborate and provide evidence to support your hook. This structures a release in order of declining importance and ensures a journalist receives the most important information first. According to space issues, stories can be cut short at any time and therefore it is important that the vital information is still included.

It is important to conform to a clear structure when writing a press release. Journalists spend an average of three seconds deciding whether a press release is worth reading, therefore it is crucial that all of the key information is presented at the beginning of the piece to hook them in.

When writing a press release, it is good practice to follow the 'Inverted Pyramid' model shown in the following diagram. Journalists may wish to cut a story after any section as, unfortunately, the length of coverage is often determined by available page space as opposed to the relevance of the story, making it imperative that all of the important information is presented at the beginning to ensure that it isn't cut.



*This version of inverted pyramid is excerpted from University of Leicester's press office documents.*

1. The introductory paragraph should contain the **key information** you wish to share, answering the five Ws (who, what, where, when and why).
2. Next, the subsequent paragraph should contain any **additional information** to support the introduction, expanding on the information provided.
3. Follow this with a **quotation** from a person who is involved in the project/event, etc. to add some credibility to the story and making it more personable. The more important the person quoted is the more important your press release becomes.
4. Then provide **more detail** to explain the content of the quotation.
5. An additional quote can be included to **expand further** on the themes and ideas previously mentioned.
6. Conclude the press release with an additional comment detailing any information that has been omitted or **summarising** what has already been presented (this is especially crucial for events), forming the lasting impression of the release.
7. Depending on the relevance to the content, it is sometimes appropriate to include an optional bio-data in the **Notes to Editor** section listing academic background, current position and research interests.

# Press Release Checklist

Check the following:

1. Is the press release an accurate reflection of the event/news? If not make the necessary changes.
2. Have you consulted any individuals or organisations with an interest?
3. Can you confirm that by issuing this release there will be no ethical or confidentiality issues with the text, nor any copyright or other permission issues with any information you have supplied.
4. Be ready to speak to the press if required.

## The Releasing Process

Once a press release has been finalised and approved, the Press Office will then distribute it appropriately. All releases created by the office should be posted on the website, and sent to the relevant media.

There are a number of ways of sending a release to journalists including personal contacts, external consultants and subscription to online distribution portals.

## Embargoing a Release

Sometimes we choose to embargo a press release, meaning we issue the information to the media with a date and time restriction. They, therefore receive the release before they are allowed to publish the story.

This is normally reserved for stories we expect to garner a lot of media attention, allowing journalists time to prepare the story, or for stories coinciding with a published paper to enable the two to be released synchronously.



# Press Release Pitfalls

This guide will provide you with some inside knowledge of how press releases are constructed. However, there may still be some room for error. The following list identifies a few common mistakes often made when writing a press release with some advice on how to overcome them.

## Choice of Language

Using complex jargon will make your press release incomprehensible and it is thus likely to be ignored by journalists. It is easy to forget that terms which you use in your workplace may mean nothing to non-specialist members of the public. Therefore, there is a need to use simple language to explain your point. This is not the same as 'dumbing down' (oversimplify) your focal point; it is still possible to convey the complexity of the issue whilst avoiding jargon and technical speech, in favour of everyday words and phrases.

## Worthwhile Content

Only write a press release if you have something to say. As this guide shows, constructing a press release follows a standard formula which can be applied to any subject matter. However, it is important to preserve the reputation of FBR and therefore, a press release is only distributed to the media if it is about something that is newsworthy and will grab their attention, so before you begin, ask yourself, do I have something interesting to say? And only if the answer to this question is yes, should you proceed.

## Hyperbole (extreme exaggeration used to make a point)

Do not use extreme exaggeration to get noticed. It is very tempting to over-emphasise your story in hope that it will sound more exciting to journalists than it perhaps is in reality. However they will be able to see-through this and are even more likely to ignore your information than if it was presented to them in a straight forward manner. Be honest, and stick to the occasional 'firework'; a one-sentence paragraph, a very good quote or a powerful statistic that resonates with the reader and makes the release memorable.

## Waffling (speak or write, especially at great length, without saying anything important or useful)

The journalist does not need to, nor wants to, know every little detail about your news, therefore once you have written your first draft, make sure you read it through and ensure you have been as concise as possible in your explanation.

Try to stick to a word limit of 300–350 as this is the desired amount to convey all of the relevant information of a news story. It is better to leave the journalist wanting to know more as they are then more likely to follow up the release and contact you to answer any additional questions they have, as opposed to getting bored of your waffle and not even finish reading the whole text.

## Hedging (use of mitigating words or sound both in spoken and written language to lessen the impact)

You can cut down the length of the release by being straight to the point and avoid hedging. Not only does an assertive tone increase the credibility of content, but it also heightens the newsworthiness of the release by saying something 'is...' as opposed to something 'might be...'. This will ensure that a journalist takes notice of what you have to say because you are making an announcement as opposed to hinting at something. If your release implies that you are unsure, then the reader will be even more unsure of what you are trying to say.



GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN  
(REVENUE DIVISION)  
FEDERAL BOARD OF REVENUE

Mohammad Shahzad  
Secretary (PR)  
Ph: 051-9208407 Fax: 051-9208407  
Mobile: 0333-5201233  
Email: secretary.pr.fbr@fbr.gov.pk  
Islamabad: November 23, 2013

## PRESS RELEASE

Date / Time

### HEADLINE

Sub-heading

**Paragraph 1:** Introduction: Contains a summary of the key information, including answers to the five Ws (Who, What, Where, When and Why).

**Paragraph 2:** Provide more details to the information outlined previously.

**Paragraph 3:** Include a quote from you or someone relevant to the release and add credibility to the story, make it more personable.

**Paragraph 4:** Add any extra relevant information, expanding on the previous quotation.

**Paragraph 5:** An additional quote to expand further on the themes and ideas already mentioned.

**Paragraph 6:** Conclusion: End the press release with a summary of any other information and summarise what has been already said.

#### Notes to Editor:

- Provide an optional profile of the authority mentioned in within the release including his/her designation and ambit of authority.
- List contact details you are happy for journalists to use to get in touch should they require more information. An e-mail address is essential, work telephone number is desirable and mobile phone number is optional (and can only be given out if it is specifically requested). Contact numbers will not be published.

**Boiler Plate:** The Press Office will attach information about the Federal Board of Revenue to the end of the release to provide the journalist with background information about the institution the press release is coming from.

#### Please not:

The sample template shared is for reference only.

(Shahid Hussain Asad)  
Official Spokesman, FBR



Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Support to Good Governance in Pakistan  
Programme

F 7/2, Street 11, House 6  
Khosar Road, Islamabad, Pakistan  
T +92 51 2608 988/989/990  
F +92 51 2608 987  
[www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de)