



Media Releases

Best practice guidelines for writing and sharing news releases that will engage both readers and editors.

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A well-written media release, also called a press release, can be one of the most effective tools in your toolbox when it comes to generating awareness of your programs and educational tools. Each time you draft a media release, you should keep in mind that the goal of the activity is to accomplish two things: tell a compelling story that highlights your program, research, or educational content; and make it as easy as possible for an editor to plug-and-play your content into their media.

This guide provides practical tips for writing media releases with increased editorial value, which will improve your chances of a successful media placement.

Topics Addressed in This Guide

- Topics That Make Good Releases
- Extension's Core Policies on Media Releases
- Characteristics of Releases, Blogs, and Columns
- Distribution of Media Releases
- How to Talk about Extension
- Core Elements of Every Release
- Headlines
- Opening Paragraph
- Body of Story
- Photos and Images
- Common Style Issues
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- Sample News Release

Good Candidates for Media Releases

- Summary of research findings
- Resource compilations
- How-to articles
- Event marketing
- Seasonal topics pointing to Extension's expertise
- Awards, milestones, staff announcements

Extension's Core Policies on Media Releases

For events, share releases with media outlets at least 14 days before the start of the event.

All media releases must include the official Illinois Extension boilerplate, which is shared within this document.

Units are encouraged to share media releases directly with their local media outlets. If you believe that your media release would be of statewide interest, contact the state communications team for assistance with broader distribution.

All media releases should be shared on the unit homepage.

Media Releases vs. Blogs and Columns

Media Releases

- Write in third person.
- Use a journalistic tone: professional, impartial, objective.
- Attribute statements to a source as either direct quotes or attributed paraphrase.
- Use inverted pyramid style with the most important information at the beginning of the story.

Personal Columns and Blogs

- Write in first or third person.
- Use a style that best suits your personality and audience. Your chosen style could range from conversational to formal, or from academic to accessible. Your personality should shine through, so adopt a style that suits you.
- Comments are assumed to be those of the blog's author without attribution, thus do not require quotation marks.
- Use a creative content structure, such as beginning with anecdotes or questions, to build interest throughout the story, and keep readers engaged until the end.

Distribution of Media Releases

- When distributing, include the content of the release in the body of the email, not as an attachment.
- Put the headline of your release as the subject line.
- All media releases must be shared from an official University of Illinois email account.

How to Talk About Extension

- Do not use unit numbers in public communications.
 - University of Illinois Extension serving xxxx and xxxx counties.
 - University of Illinois Extension Unit 42
- Use University of Illinois Extension on first reference; use Illinois Extension or Extension on later references.
- Do not use “the” in front of University of Illinois Extension unless it is used as an adjective, such as “the University of Illinois Extension office.”
- Do not use Extension acronyms or buzz words.
- Use University of Illinois Extension serving Fulton County, not Fulton County Extension on first reference.

Core Elements of Every Release

- Headline
- Release date
- City in all caps, state abbreviated (CITY, Ill. –)
- Opening paragraph and body of story
- Contact information for the source and the writer
- For meetings, the release must include the official statement about accommodations and access. We recommend including that toward the end of the release.

If you will need an accommodation in order to participate, please email the contact person for the event. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs.

- Extension boilerplate language, listed below

ABOUT EXTENSION: Illinois Extension leads public outreach for University of Illinois by translating research into action plans that allow Illinois families, businesses, and community leaders to solve problems, make informed decisions, and adapt to changes and opportunities.

Headlines

Use the headline to convey the main point of the story.

- Use active verbs in present tense.
- Use clear, understandable language.
- Keep headlines simple and short.
- Use sentence case: capitalize the first word and proper nouns.
- Exclude most uses of “a” and “the,” and the verb “to be.”
- Headlines do not require University of Illinois before Extension.
 - Extension virtual course builds stress-management tools for farmers
 - Green infrastructure provides environmental benefits
 - Use safe, tested methods for preserving food

Opening Paragraph

Press releases follow the inverted pyramid structure, with the most important information at the beginning and the least important at the end, allowing editors to cut off content easily if space is limited. The opening paragraph should be two to three sentences that are direct and clearly summarize the basis of the story.

The opening paragraph should include how people’s lives will improve or a problem will be/has been solved. To achieve this, **write from the perspective of the person reading the release, not from the company’s perspective.**

- Why should I care? Then, if you make me care, what do I need to know or do to improve my life?
- Who, what, where, when, and how.

Opening Paragraph Formula: Events

- Who is the intended audience?
- What change/impact will happen to participants who come to the program?
- What is the event?
- Who is the sponsor?
- When will it be held? In this order, always use time (CST or CDT), date, location, and city.
 - Youth will plan and prepare nutritious meals in a workshop sponsored by University of Illinois Extension.
 - University of Illinois Extension is presenting a nutrition workshop.

Opening Paragraph Formula: Topics

Follow the same guidelines as outlined for events, but shift the focus to how this information is of value or impact to the reader.

- Farmers may see higher yields when switching to no-till practices, resulting in greater profit and more benefit to the environment. University of Illinois Extension agronomist ...
- University of Illinois Extension will tell farmers how they can improve their crops.
- Cancellation and social distancing may have real effects on the emotional health of teens. Illinois Extension can help you talk to your teen.
- University of Illinois Extension has information to help you talk to your teen.

Body of Story

- The second and third paragraphs may include a quote from someone about the topic. For a basic release, two to three direct quotes are sufficient. Quotes should include the person's first and last name, their job title, and the organization they work for.
 - ✓ "Second or third paragraph should be a quote," says Jane Doe, communications manager, University of Illinois Extension. "Quotes may have a second sentence with additional information."
- It is appropriate to add a paragraph which paraphrases what someone said without using quotation marks as long as you attribute the statement to the person, says Judy Bingman.
- You may enhance (correct grammar, clarify) a quote as long as it doesn't change the substance of the comment and the quoted person approves the edit.
- Use the present tense of "says" instead of past tense "said." If the person is speaking about an event which has already happened, "said" is appropriate.
- **Additional paragraphs for events:** Transition into logistical details, such as dates, web addresses, registration fees, and other transactional information.
- **Additional paragraphs for topics:** Provide any additional background information following the quoted material. This might include the history of a program or the partners involved in launching an effort. Think about what questions your readers would likely have and provide the background context to try and address them. Use anywhere from one to three paragraphs to provide background context.

Photos and Images

Photos help tell the story if they are relevant and high quality. A poor-quality photo is worse than no photo. Photos must meet the following criteria.

- Taken by Extension staff.
- Purchased from a photo service.
- Available through a creative commons license.

Photos of identified people at a registered event must have a photo release on file. Photos in a **public space** where there is **no expectation of privacy** in attending do not require photo releases.

People should be identified using the following template. Pictured are (seated, left to right) xxxxxx, town; xxxx, town; and xxxx, town; (standing) xxxxxx, town; and, xxxx, town.

Common Style Errors

Use Associated Press (AP) style when preparing your release. These examples highlight some of the most common tips.

Abbreviate the month if used with a date, but not if standing alone. Do not abbreviate March, April, May, June, or July.

- ✓ The deadline is Jan. 1.
- ✓ The deadline is March 1.
- ✓ The meeting will be in January.
- ✗ The deadline is January 1.
- ✗ The meeting will be in Jan.

Never use st, nd, th or rd with a date. A date is always written with month (abbreviated if needed) and day *without* a superscript. If the date includes a year, use a comma after the number before the year. If the sentence only includes the month and year, do not use a comma.

- ✓ The meeting will be July 3.
- ✗ The meeting will be July 3rd.
- ✓ The meeting will be in July 2020.
- ✗ The meeting will be in July, 2020.

Use p.m. (a.m.) with a space before the p/a in news releases. PM or AM may be appropriate in a flyer or website notice *without* periods, but not in media releases.

- ✓ The meeting will begin at 5 p.m.
- ✗ The meeting will begin at 5pm.

Never use :00 in times.

- ✓ The meeting begins at 5 p.m.
- ✗ The meeting begins at 5:00 p.m.

Use noon or midnight instead of 12 a.m. or 12 p.m.

- ✓ A meal will be served at noon.
- ✗ A meal will be served at 12 p.m.

If referring to a period of time, use "to" and do not repeat the a.m. or p.m. if it is the same as the first time.

- ✓ The store is open from 9 to 11 a.m.
- ✓ The store is open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- ✗ The store is open from 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.

Never use .00 with dollars.

- A \$12 fee will be collected.
- A \$12.00 fee will be collected.

Always use time, date, and location *in that order*.

- The meeting will be held 5 p.m. Saturday, June 23 at the Flora High School.

Spell out numbers under 10; use numerals for numbers 10 and over. Spell out numbers if they begin a sentence. Ages are always expressed as numerals.

- Eleven little calves.
- There were 11 calves.
- 11 people attended the meeting.

Spell out measurements (inches, feet, yards, gallons, ounces, pounds) and use figures for the amount. Use a hyphen between the number and measurement when used as an adjective.

- The box is 5 feet 5 inches tall.
- It is a 5-foot box.

Capitalize job titles of people only if titles come before the name; use lowercase when a job title follows name. A job title when not used with a name is never capitalized.

- says Terri Miller, Extension county director
- Extension County Director Terri Miller says
- Terri Miller, Extension County Director,
- Terri Miller is the County Director.

For media releases, writing should be simple and straightforward. Because of this, punctuation will almost always go INSIDE quotation marks.

- "Blight is a disease," says Sarah.
- "Blight is a disease", says Sarah.

Use state abbreviations instead of postal codes in releases. The state is not needed if you are writing for a state or local paper and there are no neighboring towns in nearby states which may cause uncertainty.

- The meeting will be at the community center in Mt. Vernon, Ill.
- The meeting will be at the community center in Mt. Vernon, IL.

Abbreviate street or avenue when used with a specific number in an address; spell out when no address is used.

- The office address is 601 First St. in Vandalia, Ill.
- Fire closed portions of First Street.
- The office is located at 601 First Street.

Take note of these correct spellings and punctuation:

- Email, website, the web, webpage
- Black American, African American, Asian American
- Double e words, such as "preelection," "preeminent," "preempt," "reenter," are no longer hyphenated.
- It is appropriate to use % instead of spelling out percent when following a number. Do not use % without numbers.
- Fundraiser, fundraising
- Midwest (always capitalize Midwest since it is used as a formal name of a region, but lowercase compass directions, north, south, northeast)

Formatting for Posting to Your Website

- If you copy and paste your release from a Word document, you must clear all previous formatting (such as fonts, sizes, bolds, bullets) so the branded formatting of the site is applied uniformly. To remove the formatting, select all the content you've posted and click the "remove formatting" button in the formatting bar (It looks like an underlined T with an x to the right).
- Delete any double returns after paragraphs or double spaces after periods. The program will automatically add the correct space after each paragraph and period. Use tabs instead of repeated spaces.
- Do not begin a paragraph with a tab or space. Paragraphs should be aligned left.
- Do not post long urls as text in release, instead create an embedded hyperlink. You may list a short url, such as go.illinois.edu/TopicAAA.
- Hyperlink [University of Illinois](#) and [Illinois Extension](#) to our homepages.
- Hyperlink partners, educational references, places, and popular topics. Internal links to our own content, as well as links to other reputable sources increases our credibility, authority, and visibility to search engines.
- Use short urls without <https://> before the short url.
 - go.illinois.edu/marketingrequest
 - <https://go.illinois.edu/marketingrequest>
- Use bolding sparingly and never capitalize whole words in the body of a paragraph. Occasional all caps is allowed as subheads.
- Never underline words to show emphasis. Underlining is reserved to indicate hyperlinks.

Headline

Release Date

Lead Paragraph

Quoted Materials

Use of Short URL

Additional Information

Hyperlink Internal Pages, Partners, or Related Content

Accommodation Statement

Source/Writer

Boilerplate

Rural Resilience virtual course gives farmers tools to manage stress

For Release: June 30, 2020

URBANA, Ill. – Farm life is stressful. Rural communities face unique mental health risks, but it can be hard to talk about it.

“I’ve heard stories of farmers who would drive three hours to a mental health seminar; not because there wasn’t one closer, but because they didn’t want their neighbors to know” says **Courtney Cuthbertson**, assistant professor and University of Illinois Extension specialist in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies.

Research has shown that stigma around mental health is different in rural communities, according to Cuthbertson. A new course hopes to improve the resources available to America’s farm families.

Rural Resilience: Farm Stress Training is a free online course now available at go.illinois.edu/ruralresilience. The self-paced course can be completed in under three hours.

“The goal is for participants to identify signs and symptoms of stress and suicide, reduce the stigma of needing help, and connect farmers and ranchers with resources that might be able to help,” says Cuthbertson, whose research focuses on mental health and substance use. “There’s a lack of mental health care in rural communities, and this is a way to train people to be a resource and help someone recognize and navigate stressful times.”

On a farm, most pressures are constant and uncontrollable. Machinery breaks; weather delays work; commodity prices fluctuate. The work is isolating and stressful, which puts farmers at risk for chronic stress and can lead to depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts or action.

Prolonged stress also diminishes problem-solving abilities which, on a farm, can lead to injury, says Cuthbertson. Accident and injury rates are **higher for farmers** than other occupations, according to the National Institute for Occupational Health.

The course is available through a partnership between **University of Illinois Extension** and **Michigan State University Extension**, with support from **Farm Credit, American Farm Bureau Federation**, and the **National Farmers Union**. Cuthbertson developed the course collaboratively with MSU Extension.

If you will need an accommodation in order to participate, please email extension@illinois.edu. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs.

SOURCE: **Courtney Cuthbertson**, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist, Department of Human Development and Family Studies

WRITER: **Emily Steele**, Media Communications Coordinator, University of Illinois Extension

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