Writing media releases

Lots of interesting things happen at UOW everyday, and the Media Unit is committed to helping staff and students to get their messages out to the media and general public. The guidelines below are designed to help you develop clear and interesting media releases and maximise the amount of media interest in your story.

General tips

- If you have a newsworthy story to promote, develop a media release. If you need to advertise, book advertising space. The media can usually see through attempts to gain free advertisements.

- Think about the five Ws and H – who, what, when, where, why and how – have you included this information? What is important about your research, event, announcement etc.? Why is it newsworthy? Include the most important details in the first paragraph.

- The ST factor: is your event the first, biggest, best, weirdest?

- Remember that you’re writing for journalists – so make sure your release is interesting to them and not too self congratulatory.

- Think about your audience. Do your best to speak in layperson’s terms – it doesn’t matter how interesting your research/event is if no one can understand it.

- The media relies heavily on pictures, sounds or video footage. Think about photo or filming opportunities and describe them in your release – what will the media be able to see, hear etc if they follow up your media release? Think about video footage or photos that you could make available.

- Try to keep your release to one page and two pages is the absolute maximum.

Timing

- Think about the timing of your release. If you are responding to something (e.g. a government announcement), make sure your release goes out quickly and in the same day. Also make sure you or your nominated spokesperson is available for comment or interviews on the day that you send your release.

- If you are promoting an event, give the media about 24 hours notice (Monday releases should go out on Friday) – if you give them too much notice journalists may forget about you, and if you don’t give them enough time they might not be able to fit you in to their daily schedule.

- Check what else is on during the day that you are sending out your release – if the Prime Minister is visiting town, or there is a mass protest being held that day, you are less likely to gain media attention.

- The media is more likely to attend a morning or lunchtime event than one late in the afternoon because of news deadlines. If your event has to be in the afternoon, think about offering an alternative interview/photo opportunity and include these details at the bottom of your media release.
Quotes

Include a quote or two from a central figure (i.e. the lead researcher, person organising the event, yourself...) – this will make your story more interesting. These should be written the way you would normally speak – they shouldn’t sound mechanical or rehearsed.

Use double quotation marks (") not single ones (‘). Only use single quotation marks when you need to quote inside a quote e.g. “I told him ‘Don’t worry’,” Mr Philips said.

Always use the word said rather than says when quoting in a media release – because you should be writing in the past tense. Also avoid using words like explained, argued, exclaimed etc - said is the most neutral expression.

Said comes after a person’s name i.e. “This is very important research,” Professor Wallace said, not “This is very important research,” said Professor Wallace.

Style

We are always the University of Wollongong or UOW, never Wollongong University or UoW.

Use plain, spoken language: about instead of approximately, buy instead of purchase, a year not per year, live not reside, using not utilising etc.

Use the modern spelling for words like program (not programme), while (not whilst) and among (not amongst).

Try to explain any acronyms (except UOW – this one is widely known) and don’t use too many – avoid them if you can.

Avoid unnecessary capitalisation – this makes for confusing reading. Words like university, faculty, government etc. should only be capitalised if they are referring to a specific institution e.g. capitalise University of Wollongong, Faculty of Commerce and Australian Government, but not it is important to make a student’s university experience a good one.

Headlines of releases and news stories follow Australian news style and should only have capital letters for the first word and any other words that would normally be capitalised.

The word internet is not capitalised, website is one word and online is not hyphenated.

Australian English uses S not Z for words like organise, customise, capitalise, symbolise etc. However there are some words, like capsize or resize that always have the Z.

Generally the numbers one to nine are spelt out, 10 and above are in numerals: six men, eight boats, 35 kilometres. But use: tens of thousands, a thousand-to-one chance, I’ve told you a hundred times. And always spell out a number if it begins a sentence: Forty days and 40 nights.

Dr, Mr, Mrs etc don’t have full stops after them i.e. write Dr Smith, not Dr. Smith. And write out Professor and Associate Professor in full.

Don’t put a double space at the end of your sentences – this is a throwback to old-fashioned fonts used on typewriters, and fonts are now designed to have the correct spacing without you having to do it manually. Double spacing creates holes of ‘white space’ that interrupt the flow of reading.

Finally

Ensure you have included relevant dates and times, a contact name, (mobile) number, email and website address so the media can easily find more information. Make sure the location (e.g. room and building number) of your media opportunity is clearly listed.
Once you’ve finished your release, send it to story_ideas@uow.edu.au so that it can be checked and sent out by Media Unit journalists. Try to let us know about your media release at least a couple of days before you want it sent out, and longer if you have specific needs that will take more time.

Include any specialist media outlets (magazines, journals, websites, specific geographic areas) that you would like the Media Unit to distribute the media release.