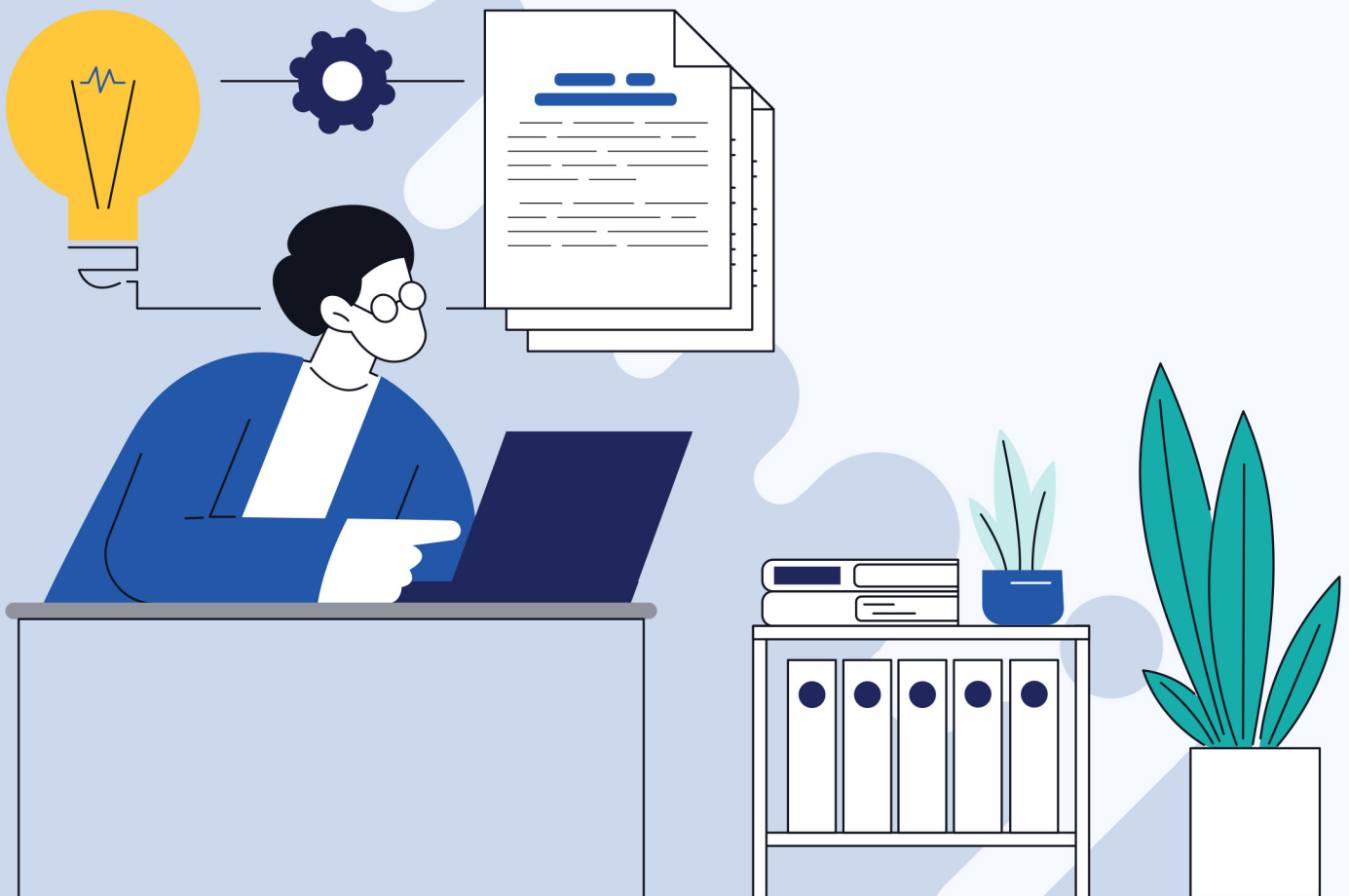


Modernize Your News Release

Write a Strong Lead with Tips from Ann Wylie



Introduction

In the fast-paced news media world, where journalists are inundated with a deluge of information, the first few sentences of your press release can make or break your story's chance of getting coverage.

The first paragraph of your press release, or lead, serves as the gateway to your story, clearly and concisely summarizing your most vital and newsworthy information. In the hierarchy of a press release, the lead holds the coveted position as the third most important element, following the headline and subheadline. Its role is to entice the audience, providing a sneak peek into the story's essence while leaving them hungry for more.

Crafting a compelling lead is imperative. Busy journalists may decide whether to cover your story based solely on the initial sentences of your press release. Strategically structuring your lead with precision, ensuring it not only conveys the highlights of your narrative but also sparks curiosity that prompts further exploration, is vital.

This guide is a roadmap for mastering the art of writing engaging and compelling leads, featuring the expert advice of award-winning writing coach and CEO of [Wylie Communications](#), [Ann Wylie](#).



Ann Wylie
Writing Coach and CEO
Wylie Communications



Leads 101

Before sitting down to write your attention-grabbing press release lead, take a step back and identify the pivotal elements of your story. These will become the focal points of your lead, laying the groundwork for the entire press release.

Here are some other points to keep in mind:

- The opening paragraph serves as a concise summary of your news. Ann suggests sticking to 35-50 words.
- Use easy-to-understand language. Craft your lead to be readable and easily digestible. Avoid using overly technical language or acronyms.
- Infuse a hook or angle into your lead that makes your news relevant, interesting, or even surprising for your target audience. Cultivate curiosity so that readers are eager to explore the full narrative.
- Showcase the benefit, impact, or implications of your news. Make it evident why your story matters and how it may affect or interest your audience.



Lead or lede? A lede is the introductory section of a news story and thus to “bury the lede” refers to hiding the most important and relevant pieces of a story within other distracting details. The spelling *lede* is an alteration of *lead* which referred to the strip of metal that separated lines of type; this helped avoid confusion for copyeditors and typesetters. Also, in the English language, lead can be a noun or a verb, with different meanings and pronunciations. Today, it seems that using either word works when referring to the first paragraph. ([Merriam-Webster](#))



Business Wire’s [Release Summary](#) feature is perfect for showcasing a snappy statement that captures the essence of your news, enticing viewers to read your full release.

Steer Clear of Stale Press Release Openings

With so much importance on the lead, it requires special attention. So often the same pattern of announcement text is used. Ann stresses the need to shake things up!

Announcement Leads

The “Company ABC, a leader in technology, today announces...” statement is formulaic and a relic of the past. It lacks the conversational tone that resonates with modern readers. Consider framing your lead as if you were responding to the question, “What’s going on today?” Bring immediacy and relevance to your opening.



Save your boilerplate for where it belongs – in the boilerplate section of your press release. Overloading your lead with standard company information is a missed opportunity to engage your audience right from the start.

Exhaustive Fact Packs

Stop packing too many details, especially all the Ws (who, what, when, where, why, how) into the first paragraph. A lead overloaded with information becomes unwieldy, making it challenging for busy journalists to discern the key points.

Resist the temptation to create a laundry list of facts in your opening. This approach can overwhelm the reader and dilute the impact of your message.

If you pack all essential information into the first paragraph, you risk leaving the subsequent paragraphs without a clear purpose. Save some key details for the following sections to maintain a logical flow and sustain reader interest.



Look at the media you’re trying to influence and see what kind of leads they typically write.

Elevate Your Press Release Openings for Maximum Impact

The [general format for any type of lead](#) is this:

- Start with the reader, focusing on their perspective.
- Follow up with the benefit, addressing what's in it for the reader.
- Introduce the service or product, providing a clear picture.
- End with the organization's name, reinforcing brand recognition.

Here are the different types of leads that Ann recommends, complete with examples:

Benefits Lead

Launching a new product or service? Focus on how it solves customer problems instead of on the product or service itself. Address the reader's wants and needs, emphasizing the benefits.

Original: *Community Transport Corp. today announced that it will build a new, \$24 million bridge at the Lake of the Ozarks.*

Better: *The 2,000 commuters who now spend an hour each day driving from Sunrise Beach to Osage Beach will soon be able to make the trip in 15 minutes, thanks to a new bridge that ABC Company will build this summer.*



From Corvias: Unaccompanied housing for single service members is a crucial component of military life. It provides this demographic with a convenient location on base, in a comfortable and supportive environment. Randolph Pointe at Fort Liberty stands as an example of the significance and benefits of such housing for single service members.



Include other content like [multimedia](#) or case studies to enrich your story.

News Lead

Instead of a traditional “Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How” approach, appeal to reader interest by leading with the two most captivating elements:

- What happened?
- Why should I care?



From Principal Financial Group: A recent survey from Principal Financial Group® shows a disparity between U.S. employers and their employees in financial health and well-being. As employer sentiment and business health remains steady, there are opportunities for employers to support employee financial health.

Feature Lead

Ann describes [feature leads](#) as paragraphs that show instead of tell. Illustrate your key messages instead of stating them. In a study sponsored by the Newspaper Association of America and the American Society of Newspaper Editors, it was found that feature-style stories increase readership, increase viewership satisfaction, and improve brand perception. Set aside your public relations expert hat for a moment, put on your journalist hat, and give it a whirl!

Here are some different approaches for a feature lead:

Description: Paint a vivid picture.



From Warner Bros. Pictures: ‘The Deliciously Delectable World of Wonka’ – an all-new float inspired by Warner Bros. Pictures’ scrumptious big screen spectacle “Wonka” – will make its way down the streets of New York City this November in the 97th Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade®. Millions of spectators lining the streets, from the Upper West Side to Herald Square, with millions more on television across the country, will be treated to the colorful, vibrant and fun chocolate shop float from the highly anticipated holiday film.

Anecdotal: Tell a compelling and emotion-packed story in the first paragraph. Use a cliffhanger or hook to draw readers in, with details unfolding in subsequent paragraphs.



From Cognigy: Delivering the best possible customer experience (CX) is critical to an organizations’ future ability to survive. But, while the high-level benefits are clear, the large majority of global contact centers lag behind in adoption of customer service automation technologies – including Generative AI, or Large Language Models (LLMs) – that will drive them forward.

Compression of Details: Concisely describe your results in a compelling way.



From [Rivers Casino Philadelphia](#): Neighborhoods surrounding Rivers Casino in Fishtown just got a million times better; local civics and other nonprofits now have more funding for capital improvements and expanded programming, thanks to the casino's annual \$1 million contribution to the Penn Treaty Special Services District (SSD).

Human Interest: Include a relatable person in the first paragraph to add a human touch. This fosters a connection between the audience and your narrative.



From [Be the Match](#): For 16-year-old Nivia Charles, of Oakland, Calif., the future is uncertain – but not because she doesn't know what she wants to be when she grows up. The aspiring pediatric oncologist has sickle cell anemia, an inherited blood disorder that is often life threatening.

Statistical: Capture attention with impactful data.



From [Stefano Boeri Architetti](#): Urban forestry is the most urgent challenge for the survival of cities. According to the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, by 2050 68% of the world's population is expected to live in urban areas. Urban forests are the key allies in the fight against climate change, providing clean air, mitigating the urban heat island effect, managing stormwater, and much more. This is the main theme of the second edition of the World Forum on Urban Forests hosted in Washington DC from 16 to 20 October 2023.

Wordplay: Infuse a bit of humor or play on words to create a lighter, positive tone in your lead.



From [Experian](#): Amid tailgating and touchdowns, football fans are planning to blitz their budgets and spend \$743 on average this season on football-related expenses, according to a national survey by Experian®. To avoid a financial fumble, Experian is helping consumers learn more about building credit without debt and getting the most out of their money launching a campaign with two-time professional football champion Travis Kelce of the Kansas City Chiefs. The campaign will generate awareness about the new Experian Smart Money™ Digital Checking Account & Debit Card that embeds the game-changing feature Experian Boost®.

By experimenting with these lead formats, you can discover what resonates best with your audience and tailor your press release openings for maximum impact. **Remember, the key is to be engaging, informative, and to entice readers to delve deeper into your story.**

Press release leads can either captivate or lose the attention of journalists and your target audiences. Leads strategically summarize the vital elements of your news, serving as the gateway to your narrative. By putting Ann's advice to work, steering clear of stale openings, and experimenting with different lead types, you can elevate your press releases and create a lasting impression.



About Ann Wylie, Wylie Communications

Award-winning coach Ann Wylie works with communicators who want to reach more readers. And she works with organizations that want to get the word out. Ann has written more than a dozen learning tools. They include Think Like a Reader, Master the Art of Storytelling, and Cut Through the Clutter. She is also the author of Rev Up Readership, a toolbox for writers. Learn more and register for Ann's [upcoming classes](#).

About Business Wire

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Founded in 1961, Business Wire is a trusted source for news organizations, journalists, investment professionals, and regulatory authorities, delivering news directly into editorial systems and leading online news sources via its multi-patented NX Network. Business Wire's global newsrooms are available to meet the needs of communications professionals and news media worldwide.

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