



Reporter's NOTEBOOK

BY KEN LEVY

Press release 101: Helpful hints for getting in print

A pompous peek at presentation, punctuation

We get press releases. We get announcements. We get emails. We get handwritten notes.

And we get to clean them up for proper grammar, spelling and newspaper style.

Although Managing Editor Rachael Horne gets the vast bulk of these pieces clamoring for ink, we all get a shot at some of those that cross our desks.

Needless to say, this is a time-consuming and often tedious task. And, while I'm not asking everyone to learn Associated Press newspaper style, you can help reduce the tedium with a few helpful hints that will save time for everyone.

Including you.

So let's have some fun with this.

In the name of consistency, we adhere to some particular story elements, and eschew others, such as steering clear of words like "eschew." Some folks think the word is associated with fine dining, but it actually means "steering clear of."

Here are some things to eschew in a press release:

- We don't use exclamation points!!
- The ampersand (&) always gets replaced by "and," & we always avoid it.
- We like dates, times and placements of winners in articles, but we don't use the "st" after 1st, the "rd" after 3rd or the "th" after 4th, 5th, 6th, etc. Words are best.
- Only Government Agencies Capitalize Every Word They Possibly Can
- It's not that we're rude, but we rarely if ever say "please" or "thank you" in stories unless a source is being quoted. It's always best to get straight to your call for action. Thank you.
- Don't be too wordy. For example, saying "people who want more information should..." I mean, who else but people would want more information? Their horses? Same thing with "those who are interested should call..." Would anyone who's not interested make that call?
- Avoid acronyms without saying who they are in first reference. I learned this from the SPJ, which helped me

with my ASMP membership after I joined the IPC.

- There is no such thing as a "first annual" event since it's running for the first time.
- Don't add the ":00" after the hour of the day, or the ".00" after a whole dollar amount. It always gets removed.
- Don't repeat information. I repeat, don't repeat information.
- Don't double space between sentences.
- Regarding its publication, it's not necessary to add an apostrophe to "its" unless it's referring to "it is." It's easy to tell by the content of its sentences.

Here are some things you should include in your press release:

- Always, Always, Always include contact information so we can follow up if there are questions. We won't publish that information unless it's directly related to who should be contacted for more information.
- If it's an upcoming event, always include the date and time, location, cost if any, a web site, email and/or phone number for more information. All the things you'd want to know if you were reading it.
- Get to the point right away. "This event is happening on this date at this time at this location...." for example. Then add details.
- Double-check name spellings, days of week matching dates, and run spell check if you have it.
- Send your pieces via email, whenever possible (editor@tetonvalleynews.net). No sense typing the piece twice.

Back in the buggy days, I used to get hammered by reporters who thought I was a grammar snob. I was a stickler for AP style and the "proper" way to say things in print.

But inflexibility infringes on individual style, making everyone follow grammatical lockstep. I finally loosened up a little bit, and learned readers more often than not prefer conversational style as long as we stick with the facts.

Now I'm the one breaking the rules a lot, justifying it behind "poetic license," which essentially means it's ok to say things however you want, as long as you say it right.