

LESSON PLAN: WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

OBJECTIVES

- Develop writing skills by composing press releases for CC! Week events.
- Learn correct formatting for writing a press release.
- Understand the process for submitting a press release to the media.
- Introduce self-assessment skills.

MATERIALS

- Sample Press Release
- Names and numbers of relevant media outlets
- Press Release Tip Sheet
- Self-Assessment Rubric

PROCEDURE

1. Tell students they will create a press release to promote National CHARACTER COUNTS! Week events in their area.
2. Ask what a press release is and if they know how to compose and submit one. Brainstorm ideas.
3. List the events that will be taking place during CC! Week in your area. Divide them up among the class as topics for a press release as appropriate. If your area is holding only one event, have each student work on the press release.
4. Explain to the class that a good press release answers all the “W” questions (who, what, where, when, and why). Have them ask themselves those questions about the event they are publicizing.
5. Distribute the Press Release Tip Sheet. Discuss the main points of a press release and common errors that should be avoided.
6. Have the students write their press releases according to the correct formatting. Distribute the Sample Press Release and make sure students understand each step.
7. Tell them they will complete a self-assessment on completion of their work, which is to be handed in along with the finished press release. Distribute the Self-Assessment Rubric and go over the key assessment areas.
8. On completion of the assignment, display the work in the classroom to allow students to see one another’s work. Take a vote on the press release(s) that will be submitted to the media.
9. Choose where to submit from the list of relevant names and numbers of media outlets, and submit the chosen pieces according to the regulations on the Tip Sheet.

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SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Person [*Whom should the reporter call with questions?*]:

Organization Name:

Phone and Fax Numbers:

E-mail Address:

Headline Announces News in Title Case

The lead sentence should grab your reader's attention in 25 words or less by succinctly stating the news you have to announce. Provide dates, times, locations, and any significant details. Answer the who, what, when, where, and why questions.

The first two paragraphs should contain the most important information. The news media may take information from a press release to create a news or feature article.

The rest of the press release gives further background information about CHARACTER COUNTS! and National CC! Week. It ends with these paragraphs:

The third week in October was first declared National CHARACTER COUNTS! Week in 1993. Since then the date has been set aside as a time to highlight character education and the importance of modeling good character. Rallies, parades, community forums, school assemblies, and art and essay contests celebrate work done throughout the year. The premise of CC! Week is to have fun, but the message is to strive for good character at all times in every situation. More than 5 million young people in over 60 countries are expected to celebrate.

CHARACTER COUNTS! goals are to teach and model core values known as the Six Pillars of Character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. With an array of success stories in schools and youth-service organizations, CHARACTER COUNTS! has become by far the most widely implemented character-education framework in the nation.

Visit www.CharacterCounts.org for more information on CHARACTER COUNTS! Week.

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(This symbol indicates that the press release is finished.)

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PRESS RELEASE TIP SHEET

Tip 1.

Make your press release newsworthy. A good release answers all of the “W” questions.

Tip 2.

Your headline and first paragraph should tell the story. The rest should provide the detail. You have only a few seconds to grab the reader’s attention. Don’t blow it with a weak opening.

Tip 3.

Think about your audience. Will the reporter you send it to find your story interesting? Answer the question “Why should anyone care?” by ensuring your announcement has news value such as timeliness, uniqueness, or something unusual.

Tip 4.

Use the active, not passive, voice. Verbs in the active voice bring your press release to life. Rather than write “made the decision,” use “decided” instead. Use strong verbs. For example: “The school leaders expressed a strong desire to participate” reads better if changed to “The school leaders were eager to take part.”

Tip 5.

Use only enough words to tell your story. Avoid unnecessary adjectives. Keep it concise. Make each word count.

Tip 6.

Proofread your work. Common mistakes that result in rejection of submissions include grammatical errors, lack of content, too many exclamation points, and press releases written like advertisements.

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE SELF-ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Questions to Ask Yourself After Writing	Check This Box If "YES"	Check This Box If "UNSURE"	Teacher's Comments
1. Have I included contact information, time, date, and location at the top?			
2. Does my title convey concisely the subject of the press release?			
3. Does my first paragraph answer the "W" questions (who, what, when, where, and why)?			
4. Does my first paragraph make readers want to read the rest of the release?			
5. Does the main body of the release give sufficient information about the facts of the event?			
6. Is the language concise, without being too flowery?			
7. Have I checked grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and style, and made necessary changes?			
Final Author Comments			
Final Teacher Comments			