

Press Releases - Student Vote BC 2009

What is a press release?

A press release is a document written by a person or an organization to inform the news media about an event or item that is considered by them to be 'newsworthy'. In other words, it's written to attract media attention.

Although press releases are rarely published in the newspaper, they are written in a very similar style as a news story - so it's great to look at the newspaper to get a feel for the way an article is put together. Some of the common elements of a press release are:

1. The press release must have a 'headline', just like a news story. Make it simple, snappy, active and interesting so that the person reading it wants to keep reading! An example might be:

XYZ Candidates to Target Future Voters in Upcoming Cranbrook Debate

Note the capital letters for the major words and the 'active' voice - something is happening!

2. It has to have a 'hook', or 'lead' - that's the element of the story that is newsworthy. Normally this lead or hook is the first sentence of a press release.

An example of a lead might be:

Provincial candidates in the riding of XYZ will have to answer to hundreds harsh critics about important issues affecting their communities this Thursday April 16 at 1 p.m. when Cranbrook School hosts an all-candidates debate in the gymnasium.

The news element is right there, with all the major facts stated and questions answered - the 'who, what, where and when'.

3. Write the rest of the release to describe the event in more detail and answer the 'why and how'. Why is this important and newsworthy? Why do students want this event at their school? Why are the candidates coming? How did this event take shape?

4. The best press releases contain quotes to help tell the story and give it context. For this release, it could be a teacher describing what will happen or how excited his students are. It could be a student describing what issues she thinks will be spoken about, or how important an event like this is to help her decide who to vote for. It could even be a candidate expressing his or her enthusiasm about the upcoming debate.

5. Always write in third person - never use 'I', 'me' or 'you'.

6. Keep your release to one page. News will editors get lazy and stop reading.

7. Always close your press release offering the editor a contact person to speak to for more information.