Writing a Press Release

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What is a press release?

- **Definition:** Official announcement or summary to the media

- **Primary goal:** Convince reporter that your story is worthwhile

- **Secondary goal:** Inform media about an event, finding or other information of interest

- Attributes of a good press release:
  - Accurate and timely information
  - Well-written (clear and easy-to-understand language)
  - Short (about 1 page)

Why are press releases important?

- The media are an effective way to disseminate your message

- They have their own biases and agenda

- You have little/no control over what/how they write
  - Press release gives you some control over your message

IMPORTANT

- You must have a clear SOCO

- Write one only if you have a story to tell
  - The story is NOT that you finished a report or have some data
  - The story is what the report has to say or the story the data tell
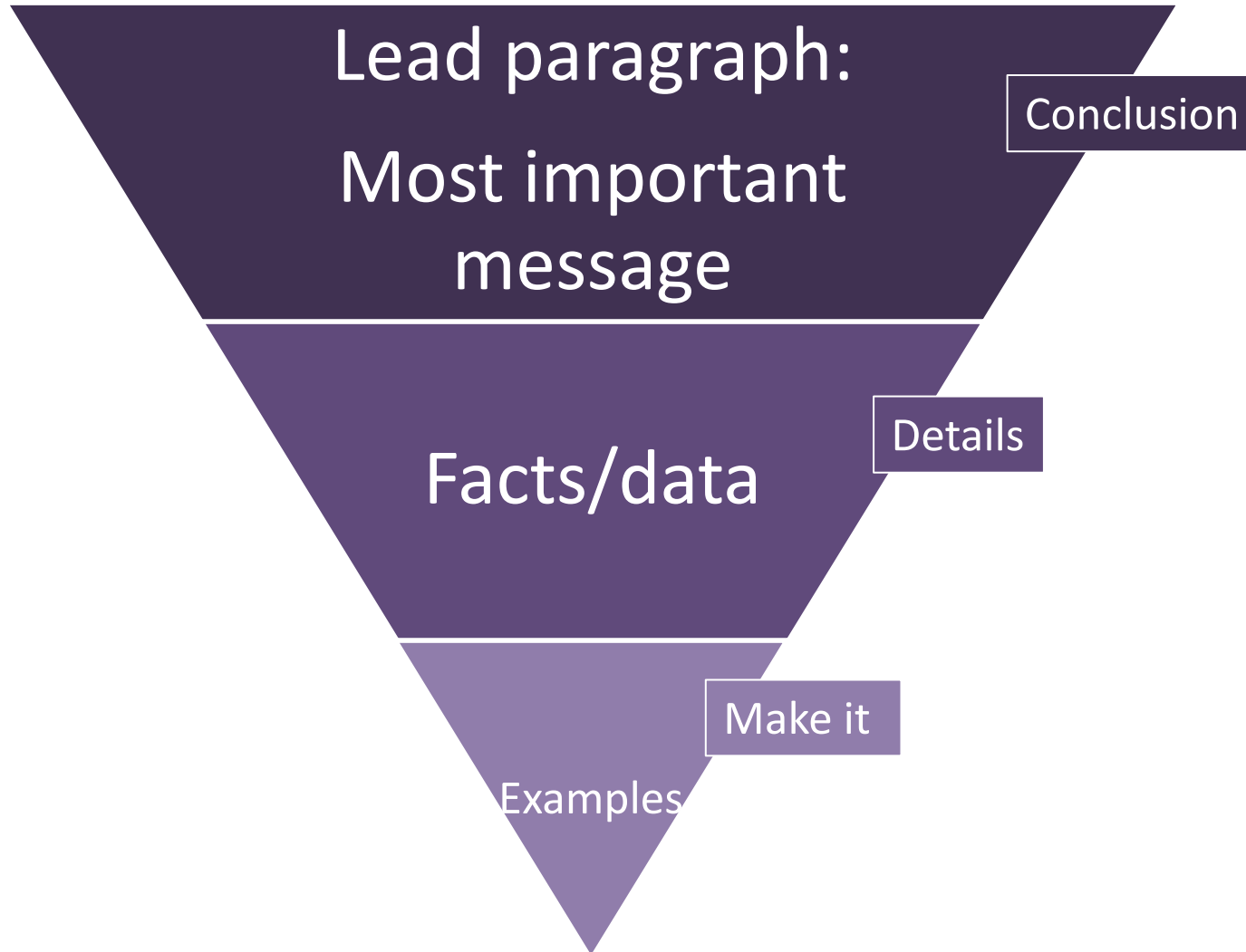
What is a SOCO?

- SOCO = Single Overriding Communication Objective
  - Also called the bottom line, key message
- Goal:
  - Convince them your story is important
  - Convince them to talk about it
- What you want them to know
- Make it short and forceful

SOCO = Single Overriding Communication Objective

Components of a press release

- Letterhead/logo
- Your contact information
- For immediate release OR embargoed until…
- Heading and subheading with **strong action** verbs
- Dateline (date, city, region where press release is released)
- First paragraph: answers <u>who</u>, <u>what</u>, <u>why</u> and <u>where</u>
- Clear SOCO
- 1 or 2 good, brief quotes
- ###: indicates the end of the press release

Use the inverted pyramid

Lead paragraph:

Most important message

Conclusion

Facts/data

Details

Make it

Examples

How to write the press release

- Lead (1st paragraph)
  - **Goal:** attract the reader
  - Contains few numbers
  - Has key message/conclusion
  - No more than 35 words, 2-3 short sentences, 3-4 lines
- Body (rest of press release)
  - **Goal:** provide details of the issue or report
  - Arranged in order of importance (most to least)
- Headline (see next slide)
  - **Goals:**
    - Motivate reader to read article
    - Solve a problem or answer a question

Attributes of a headline

- Is factually correct
- Is informative (not descriptive), catchy, interesting
  - **NO:** New report released today **YES:** HIV-related deaths fall by 20% in 2020
  - **NO:** The magnitude of opioid addiction **YES:** Opioid addiction at an all time high
- Uses active voice and strong, concrete, short action verbs, in present tense, preferably
- Does not use jargon
- Uses key terms from article
- Uses numbers, if appropriate

Headline: use what, who, when, where

Lusaka Times headlines:

-
-
-
-
-

New York Times headlines:

-
-

Perform the TACT test on the headline:
Taste-Attractiveness-Clarity-Truth

- Is it in good **taste**?
  - Is there anything possibly offensive or that can be taken the wrong way?

- Is it **attractive** to the reader?
  - Can it be improved to be more engaging and interesting, without sacrificing accuracy?

- Does it **clearly** communicate the key points?
  - Is it clear and simple? Does it use active voice/active verbs? Is it jargon-free?

- Is it **true**?
  - Is it factually correct?

If NO, then rework headline

1: Press release checklist: WRITE

- **Write in 3d person.** Unless using a direct quote

- **Write for your readers.** Take a walk in their shoes to understand their perspectives and concerns

- **Be brief.** One page (400-500 words)

- **Get to the point.** Make your point clearly, remove words, and approaches that don't help clarify your point immediately

- **Keep adjectives to a minimum.** They are distracting and difficult to read

- **Stay objective.** The more factual and unbiased, the better

- **Eliminate jargon.** It makes your press release difficult to understand and inaccessible for many readers

- **Proofread and edit carefully.** This avoids costly errors and makes your release look more professional

Tell them...

WHEN

WHERE

WHO

WHAT

HOW

WHY

2: Press release checklist: DISSEMINATE

- **Share your release.** Share it with local media outlets. You'll enjoy a better ROI and it will get more attention

- **Follow-up by phone or email.** This personal touch can help cement your press release on a journalist's radar and make it easier for them to remember

- **Include your contact information.** It may generate further interest – make it easy for the press to find you

3. Press release checklist: THINK WEB

- **Include relevant keywords.** These should be searchable and relevant to the topic

- **Don't overdo the keywords.** It gives your press release a spammy, dense feeling. Don't overdo it or you risk turning your readers off.

- **Use multimedia.** Elements like videos or images can enhance your press release. Use them sparingly, so as not to overwhelm the text

Your turn: Write a press release

- Read the article given to you and write a 1-page press release
- Do not forget the headline and the subheadline
- Make sure the headline passes the TACT test
- Add keywords for the web