

reside in a specific
and often have a common
historical heritage; a local
a group.

communication

noun 1. the act or process
fact of being commu
interchange of thoug
by spee

CRAFTING THE PERFECT MEDIA RELEASE

THE PR ALCHEMIST'S HANDBOOK

WELCOME

MEDIA releases (aka Press releases) are issued in their hundreds every day.

Everyone is doing it because, to have one's story picked up by a media outlet or shared via social media is likely to result in a publicity dividend that is far in excess of the effort that went into producing the release in the first place.

And it is safe to assume that - by taking out a subscription that allows you to post your releases on allmediascotland.com - you already know this.

You will know also that, to gain a foothold in anybody's consciousness, you need to be producing content and lots of it... so that you can be found by online search engines, shared via social media and known to busy journalists who are being asked to turn around more in less time.

To command attention, your story needs to be either irresistible or told in a way that is sufficiently compelling.

Our pledge to you: the tools you are about to be given will set you apart from the competition.

This training is partly about your writing skills and partly about the mechanics of uploading your release on to allmediascotland.com.

Welcome aboard.

THE PR ALCHEMIST'S HANDBOOK

THANKS for purchasing a media release posting subscription on www.allmediascotland.com. You will be now wanting to make best use of it. Read on to find out...

- How best to tell your story
- How to instantly grab the attention of your target readership
- How to upload a release on to the site
- How to forward your release to the likes of your local newspaper and radio station, including on an embargoed basis
- How to produce a release that is stylistically consistent with the content elsewhere on the site
- How to craft an effective headline
- How to avoid disappointment of producing a release that cannot be published on the site
- How to help develop the site's services

A close-up photograph of a computer keyboard. The central focus is a bright yellow key with the words "Online training" printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The key is slightly raised and has a soft shadow. Surrounding it are several white keys, including one with a left-pointing arrow, one with the letter "A", and one with the word "Shift" and an upward-pointing arrow. The lighting is soft, creating a clean and professional aesthetic.

**Online
training**

THE most common type of media release story is about something that is happening. Often, a new thing.

It might be a new product that is being launched. Or a conference taking place. Or a new menu at a restaurant. Or a centre being opened.

Generally, of the format that someone (or organisation) is doing something.

At some time, somewhere.

And because the format - someone doing something, at some time, somewhere - is so ubiquitous, it can be difficult for a media release written in this format to separate itself from the pack.

It is also - if truth be told - a bit dull, all about the author of the release (perhaps even bordering on self-congratulation) and not really about the reader.

The great advantage of media releases posted on allmediascotland.com is that they serve two audiences: the first is the site's big media audience, who might pick up and run with the story.

The second is the general public, who might encounter the story directly, maybe after having found it via an online search, or having had it brought to their attention by a friend or colleague, thanks to social media.

allmediascotland.com, after all, enjoys high online search ranking because it has been around for so long and is, every day, very busy. Search engines seem to like it, meaning allmediascotland.com offers its media release posting subscribers the added benefit of complimentary SEO (search engine optimisation).

But whoever that reader is - a professional journalist or a member of the general public - what are the odds of them being interested if the language used in the release is about you and not them?

So, now that we have identified the problem - the danger of indulging in self-congratulation - how do we turn your story into one that might engage with others?

It is very simple. It can be summed up in the word, IMPACT.

Of course, there will be always stories that speak for themselves and really need no explanation as to why they will work, almost no matter how 'badly' they are written. These tend to come under the story type, Extraordinary. Or Celebrity.

You are not going to be that curious about the story of someone winning a black belt in Taekwondo, until you are then told that they are aged 82.

So, let's assume your challenge is how to sprinkle 'magic dust' on to a story that isn't an obvious winner.

The 'impact question' has the capacity to liberate. If it doesn't work every time, it is because this is not an exact science. But it will work more often than not.

You are opening a health centre. Who cares that it cost £5 million to build and that it's you who has built it? But they will begin to care if its impact (or expected impact) is to help improve the health care of children aged under five.

You are launching a new product. Who cares, especially if it happens to be named and numbered in a way that's almost impossible to remember? But they might just begin to care if it promises to make life easier.

You are appointing a new member of staff. Who cares, especially if they have never heard of you and almost certainly never heard of the person who is being appointed? But they might care if the anticipated impact is an improvement in customer care and they are, or might be, a customer.

You are opening a new restaurant. Who cares that another restaurant is opening in a town they might have little connection with? But they might care if it promises a certain type of cuisine or a price that is amazing value for money.

You are launching a report, written by a respected author. Who cares that another report has been written by another supposedly important person, especially if they have never heard of either you or the supposedly important person? But they might

care if the report is recommending something that will directly affect them. Or their children. Or their friends.

In one fell swoop, the impact question becomes potentially energising. You are no longer churning out just another, same-old media release; you are thinking much more creatively, because the prize is people wanting to read about you.

Now, you are a contender, beating off the competition and securing the coveted attention of a busy person, who will always say they have much more important things to do.

JUST TWO OR THREE WORDS



IT'S a familiar image: that of the writer struggling to get going. As another sheet of paper is scrunched up and tossed into a waste bin, it's not about being unable to write, it's just: how to begin?

The refuge of many media releases is to begin with background which, by definition, is not going to be the story.

It will help enormously if you 'buy' into the aforementioned premise (in chapter one) that a story is unlikely to have much resonance if it is about you as opposed to your target audience. In chapter one, we suggest you try to tell your story via the perspective of actual or anticipated impact.

If the impact is that children's health is to be dramatically improved, well you have already probably cracked it, in terms of what words to use, to begin your release with: Children's health is to be dramatically improved by..

Let me formalise that process in a moment.

The common alternative - the format that has you announcing that you are doing something, at sometime, somewhere - is simply fraught with danger.

It is the sort of danger that might have you beginning your release with your name, or at least that of your organisation, even though you will know that only a relatively small number of people will have heard of you, far less care about what you are up to.

It is the sort of danger that has your release beginning with the name of a day. That something is happening on a Wednesday really isn't saying terribly much.

It is the sort of danger that has your release beginning with a location, even though you don't need telling that relatively few people are going to be excited by that.

It is the sort of danger that has your release beginning with the word, 'Following'. What more obvious a signal that it's background first and perhaps story second? Arguably worse is the release that begins, 'Despite'. That's not only background first, it's background with added logical gymnastics.

That's not to say that who you are, what day and where aren't important ingredients to your story. But they are not so important that they require to appear at the very start, which is where people will begin deciding whether the story is for them.

Background should go where background should go. If people are engaged with the story, they won't only be interested in, say, when an event is taking place, they'll be insistent. But they first require to be engaged.

And you should not under-estimate people's capacity for becoming bored by a story. Within a few words, they might be gone. Nor should you under-estimate how people might be put off engaging with your story because they don't know what you know. The BBC quiz show, Pointless, involves 100 people trying to

answer a question (or questions) in 100 seconds. Not everyone gets correct what might seem to be common knowledge.

So, here's the technique...

Go for the constituency that you would like to target.

If it's fans of French cinema, then say so. If it's parents of teenagers, then say so. If it's a few lucky customers of a leading media website, then say so.

In one fell swoop, you are focussing on your target audience and not you.

In just two or three words, you are thinking audience first and you second.

It's a great recipe for improving your release for another reason: it forces how you how to finish your opening sentence.

In other words, your target audience... are to be..., can expect..., should..., could..., etc, etc.

For example, Fans of French cinema are to be treated to a rare public appearance by one of the industry's most famous directors.

Now that is a story.

And you will have an audience intrigued to find out more.

SUCCESS? IT MAY ALL COME DOWN TO YOUR OPENING PARAGRAPH



TO be blunt, your target readers need no incentive to be bailing out of your story at the earliest opportunity. They are busy people and they are perfectly capable of making snap decisions.

We all do it, professional journalists or members of the public: we decide almost instantly whether a story is for us; if not within the first couple of words, then at least by the end of the first paragraph.

Chances are, there is no way back if your opening paragraph has failed in its essential purpose: grabbing attention.

What's particularly lovely about what you are about to learn about opening paragraphs is that, if written to this recipe, the rest of your story can be written almost on auto-pilot.

To recap. Chapter one identified how so many media releases are of the style: someone is doing something, somewhere at some time. It was recognised that it can be a very self-defeating format, partly because it oozes self-congratulation as opposed to trying to reach out to people.

So, we examined how the 'impact question' might be a more effective alternative to how to tell your story.

And then, in chapter two, we drilled down to the audience you are trying to target, and how that constituency should perhaps comprise your first two or three words.

For example, Fans of French cinema.

To complete the opening paragraph, you will want to say what might happen to your target audience.

For example, Fans of French cinema are to be treated to a rare public appearance by one of the industry's most famous directors.

You will have hopefully recognised that this opening paragraph example actually says not very much, and that is a deliberate ploy, because teasing is an important weapon in trying to grab attention.

It's another common failing of many media releases that they pack their opening paragraph with detail. And the truth - as already alluded to, in the previous chapter - is that detail is more likely to alienate than engage.

Numbers put people off, as do names of organisations or people never heard of. In certain circumstances, geography can be alienating, as can acronyms. Jargon is, by definition, only known to a few.

Consider how much more inclusive an opening paragraph could be were it to include the term, 'a leading UK bank', as opposed to identifying the bank, in question, by name. Most of us have bank accounts; only a minority of us will have accounts with a particular bank.

Detail is important to a story, but from paragraph two onwards, once your target audience has decided whether the story is for them.

And what is additionally lovely about a teasing opening paragraph? One deliberately light on detail? As already suggested, it's time for auto-pilot.

Because you, as the author of a teasing opening paragraph, have raised questions that require to be answered.

Who is that French director?

When are fans going to be treated?

Where?

Why?

It's the classic five Ws of Journalism: Who? What? Where? When? and Why?

The challenge for the rest of the release, from paragraph two, is one of 'standing up' or corroborating your bold claim made in the opening paragraph.

And if you are looking for ongoing inspiration, read newspapers. See how the professionals do it. Spot how their opening paragraphs are light on detail and strong on impact or extraordinary. Then notice how the second and subsequent

paragraphs are often, at least initially, a repetition of the first, but this time with detail.

Note also how, were their stories cut from the bottom up, the story is still readable, still makes sense; a sure-fire sign that the least important information has been pushed towards the bottom, so that if not read, it's no great loss.

FINDING STORIES



FOR some, this perhaps should have been chapter one. After all, you can't write a story without first having had the idea.

Now, it might be that you are part of an organisation or a department that meets regularly. In which case, you could add to the agenda the question, Anyone got any stories?

It might be with a view to issuing a media release. Or then again, simply adding to the stock of stories on your website which, for obvious reasons, you cannot really allow to become stagnant.

Of course, as alluded to already, some stories will pretty much speak for themselves, not least the extraordinary.

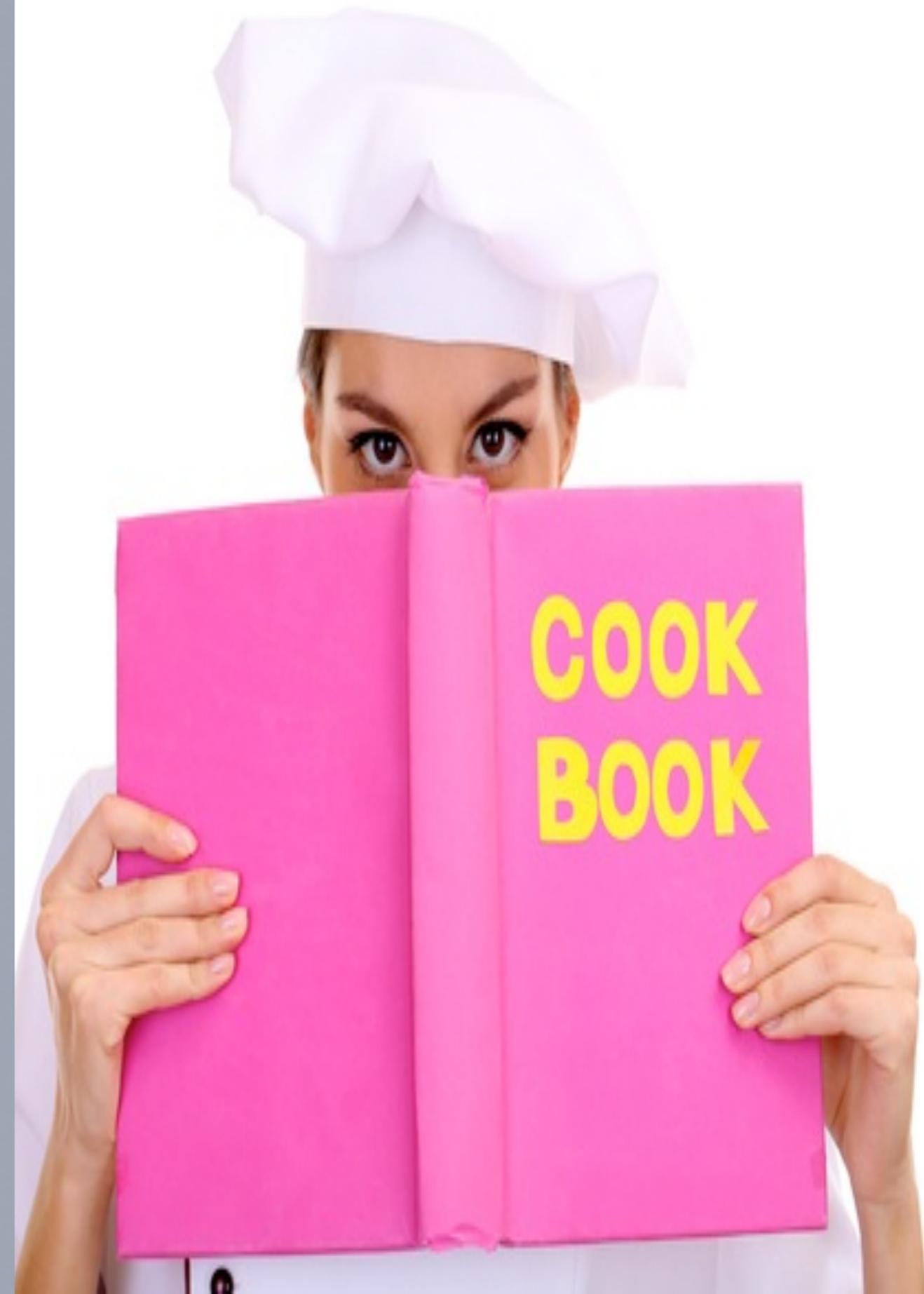
And of course, periodically, something new will be happening or at least scheduled in a calendar.

But if that adds up to just a trickle of story ideas, then why not adopt the exact-same thinking that, thanks to the previous chapters in this training, you will be hopefully now willing to use when it comes to writing your stories? In other words, thinking about your clients, customers, stakeholders, etc first and about yourself second.

Because your target audience will constantly have needs, questions and expectations, almost every day.

And your ability to meet these demands is guaranteed to get the creative juices flowing.

SOME STYLE POINTERS: SPEECH MARKS, HEADLINES, ETC



THIS chapter is designed to help you produce a media release that looks like the others on the site, in terms of its basic 'house style'.

For instance, all releases sharing a similar style of headline format, which should be all lower case lettering, with the exception of the first letter and any capital letters used to identify a proper name.

As you will may or may not know, all releases that appear on allmediascotland.com have first gone through an approval process.

So, were you to type New Product Promises Eternal Youth, it will be amended by one of our moderators to read as follows: New product promises eternal youth

Next up is the first word of your release. It should be all capped, except if the first word is a single letter, in which case the first two words should be all capped.

Have a look at releases on the site already: they'll show you the way.

Among other style pointers: a tendency to avoid capping when it comes to job titles; i.e, chief executive rather than Chief Executive.

Quotes are teed up with a colon, as in the following example...

The website's managing director, Mike Wilson, said: "allmediascotland.com has been established for several years and has earned a reputation for reliability and accuracy.

"Journalists visit the site reassured that its content has been thoroughly checked.

"They also know that the media releases on the site have benefitted from moderation and, in many cases, by training to help ensure they are suitable for the media's needs."

Wilson added: "Our web visitor figures show that about 50 per cent of our readership are regular visitors, with the remainder prompted to visit the site either through social media recommendations or an online search for key words."

Note too, that speech marks are double marks. A quote within a quote requires single marks, to differentiate it.

For example:

Wilson continued: "Some experienced PR practitioners have taken part in face-to-face training on media release writing and found it very useful, a chance to reflect. As someone emailed recently: 'It blew away the cobwebs and immediately improved my practice,' he said."

Okay, a few others...

- Instead of %, it's per cent.
- Instead of 1, 2, 3,... 10, it's one, two, three,... ten (in full).
- Instead of eleven, twelve, thirteen,... it's 11, 12, 13...

- To identify one thousand, it's 1,000 as opposed to 1000.
- Just the one, rather than two or more, spaces between sentences. And no need to indent paragraphs, as you might if handwriting a letter.
- As for the use of commas, the rule of thumb is where you might draw breath, were you to read your release out, aloud.
- It's English-English, not US-English; i.e, recognisable, not recognizable.
- Speech marks should sit around the quote and its internal punctuation, whether a full stop or a comma.
- Note too that double marks appear at the start and end of an unbroken quote plus at the beginning of each intermediary paragraph. But not at the end of each intermediary paragraph.
- And, in passing, a quick word about the use of the apostrophe. There is no possession apostrophe in the word, 'its', as in belonging to. It-apostrophe-s is short for it is.

YOUR MEDIA RELEASE HEADLINE

A close-up photograph of a computer keyboard. The focus is on a single blue key with white text that reads "http://www". The key is slightly angled, and the surrounding keys are blurred. The background is a light gray surface.

http://www

IT'S a craft, in its own right: being able to pen a headline that not only summarises the story within just a few words, but does so in a way that raises a smile.

So, you shouldn't feel disheartened if, when penning your own headline, you are struggling to come up with a beautifully-crafted play on words, a delicious pun or a clever cultural reference.

And be reassured, the alternative will perfectly suffice.

And it is this: re-write your opening paragraph but in a much tighter form. Don't be afraid to use some of the exact, same words, but do it in a way that creates a heading that is no longer than, say, eight-to-ten words.

If you have done what you should have done with your opening paragraph - ie, written something very light on detail - then it'll be simply a case of producing something short from something already pretty short.

WHAT TO STEER CLEAR OF



ALLMEDIASCOTLAND is a website than can be viewed around the world. While the accuracy of what you say about yourself cannot be vouched for by the site, it becomes an altogether different proposition if you start bringing third parties into your release.

It might be harmless: you want to reference a government report, in which case it is simply good manners to share with your readers where they can find out more (usually with a hotlink). Similarly, an awards ceremony: a URL link saves folk the hassle of searching for it themselves.

As you may or may not know, all releases submitted to the site first require to be approved before they are published.

That moderation is usually about checking for spelling, grammar errors and use of trademarked names without permission.

Moderation takes place between 0930 and 1630, Monday to Friday, and not always immediately during that timeframe (so, best factor that into your plans).

The simple rule of thumb is that media releases are about self-promotion, leaving it to readers to detect any temptation to exaggerate.

If, however, you want to make claims of a third party - not least claims that imply having to provide a right of reply - then your release risks not being approved for publication (allmediascotland

reserving the right to deny publication - as stated in our [Terms and Conditions](#)).

Such media releases are for private emails, sent via your own devices, to individual journalists and media outlets; not for publishing on a website that can be viewed around the world.

We say this in our [Terms and Conditions](#), which includes reminders to use copyrighted material only with permission, and how it is you who is wholly responsible for any implications that might stem from the content of your releases.

PR is a serious business and we take our business seriously.

**WITH
YOUR
STORY
NOW
WRITTEN,
HOW TO
UPLOAD
ON TO
THE SITE**



As a subscriber to the media release posting service on www.allmediascotland.com, you will have already signed up to the site and created for yourself an username and a password (the latter of which you can amend at any time, when signing in).

So, sign in.

Go to [Post Your Media Release](#) (found in the Media Releases dropdown menu, on the main menu bar). If the system recognises you as being a subscriber with at least one valid credit remaining, you will be immediately presented with a template to complete. It should appear to you as all pretty self-explanatory, with instructions peppered throughout, as reminders of how it all works.

For instance, when asked to identify yourself as the posting organisation, it is your details that are being asked for, not those of any client you may be acting on behalf of.

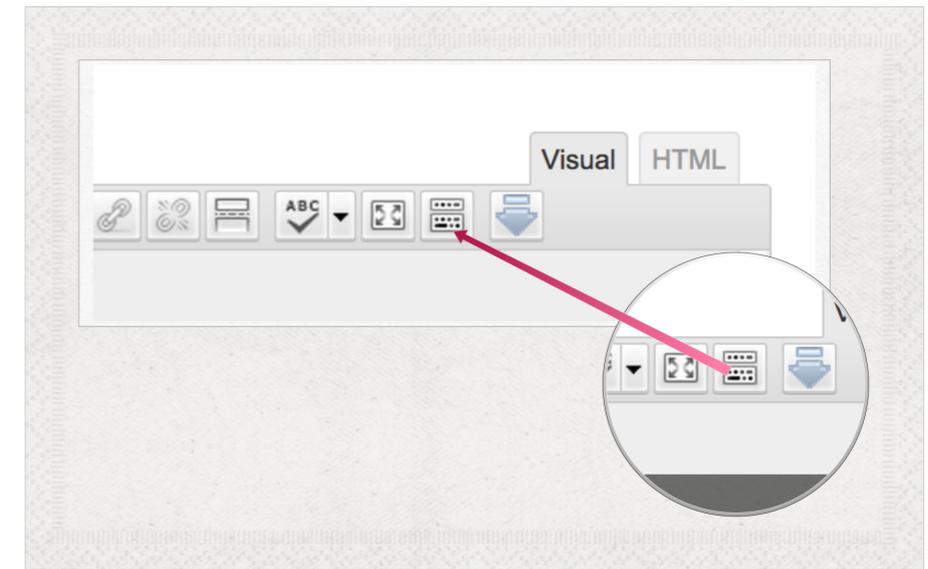
And when submitting a headline, you are asked to do so using lower case letters, except for the first letter of the headline and with any proper names. Please do also retain in the headline the words, 'Media Release', already in situ; they help with signposting on the front page.

Next up, we come to the main body of the release.

Firstly, the very strong recommendation is to copy and paste the body copy of your release via the T (for text) icon.

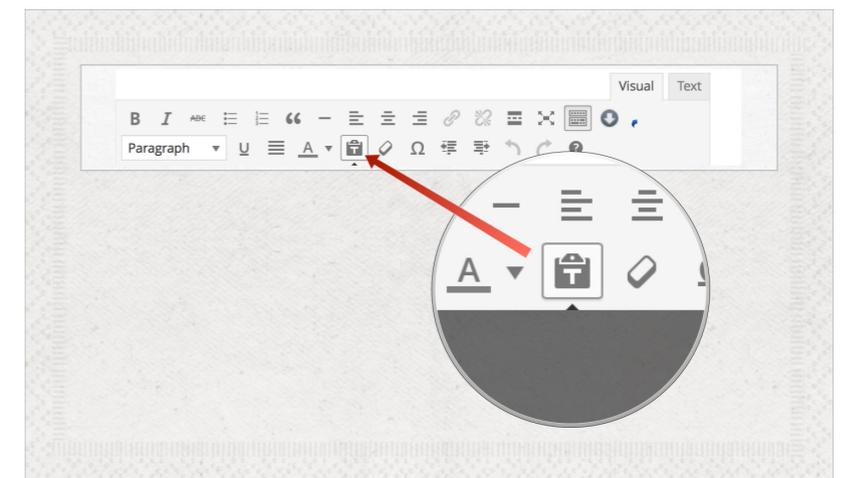
Where do you find the icon?

Depends on the browser you're viewing the site on.



You'll see a toolbox comprising various icons. It is either two rows deep or one. If only one, then go to the icon towards the far right (it's called 'kitchen sink').

Click it and the second row will now appear. On that second row is the T (for text) icon, via which you paste your copy. In passing, at this juncture, you might want to remove any extraneous carriage returns that might be showing, so that the spacing between paragraphs is no more than a line break.



You don't need to indent pars, as you might if handwriting a letter. And you are asked to cap the first word of the body copy of your release (to clearly signal to readers it is the start of your story) or the first two words if the first word is a single letter.

Among the other icons that are showing in the toolbox, one will be very useful to know: it is the one that allows you to hotlink, either to a website or to an email address. It is the chainlink icon on the top row (of the two rows that you will have in front of you).

To hotlink to a word (or words) in your copy, first highlight it (or them) with your cursor.



Then go to the chainlink icon. If it's a website you want to link to, add your www. immediately following the http:// code already showing. For an email address, replace http:// with mailto: and have the address immediately following.

Of course, the broken link icon next to the link icon is how to undo a hotlink.

And then the rest, you complete as per the template, including contact details, geography, subject and the date and time you want the release to appear on the site.

If uploading an image to accompany your story, first ensure that you have the right to use it and, second, have it cropped so that it conforms to this ratio: 800 pixels wide and 450 tall. Anything different and you risk the post including a picture of a person with their head chopped off. Post the image in jpeg or gif form.

As a general guide, try to keep the image to within 1MB in size.

You are almost there. But before you hit the 'Submit' button, you require to say yes or no, as to whether you want the release to appear just on the site or to be forwarded to other media outlets - such as your local newspaper - either at the exact, same time that it appears on the site or in advance, on an embargoed basis.

Read on...

HOW TO FORWARD YOUR RELEASE TO OTHER MEDIA OUTLETS, INCLUDING ON AN EMBARGOED BASIS



WHEN you are posting your release into the template provided, all of the fields on offer should be self-explanatory.

There is the field for you to identify yourself, as the organisation that possesses the posting subscription. There is the field too for writing the headline and also the box to place the body of your release.

And so on.

And then you are directly asked a question: would you like to forward your release to other media outlets, such as your local newspaper or radio station?

If your answer is yes, you are then instantly asked a second question: if there's at least 24 hours before you want your release to go live on the site, do you want to forward it to other media outlets on an embargoed basis?

If your answer to the first question is no, then you won't be offered the second question.

But if you answer yes to the first question, whatever you decide in response to the second question, you are then presented with forwarding options.

This will depend on the geography you have chosen earlier.

Let's imagine your chosen geography is Aberdeen, Dundee and North-east Scotland.

Then you'll be presented with two options: National (Scotland) and Regional (Aberdeen, Dundee and North-east).

Click both and you'll be presented with various boxes, to tick.

Tick the outlets you want to receive your release.

If you have said yes to the second question, your chosen media outlets will receive your release ahead of it going live on the site (with allmediascotland adding the warning that the embargo should be respected, so that you don't need to).

If, however, you have said no to the second question, then your release will be forwarded at the exact, same time it appears, live on the site.

No ticks, then no forwarding. But don't be too tempted: sending a release that a media outlet is unlikely ever to use is likely only to annoy.

And on the very few occasions you see the same outlet identified more than once, such as the The Press and Journal, still just choose it the once. For instance, a radio station might be heard over several geographical areas, but operate from the one editorial base.

Finally, to forward your release countrywide, then choose Scotland as your geographical area. That way, you will be presented with the forwarding options for Scotland-wide media outlets plus those for each and every regional area in the country also.

CHOOSING CAREFULLY: TIMING AND DISTRIBUTION DECISIONS



TEMPTING though it might be to feast on all the forwarding media contacts provided by allmediascotland, the smart decision is to be judicious.

Only forward to those outlets you genuinely think will be interested in your story. To do otherwise risks annoying the very outlets you are trying to cultivate.

If forwarding on an embargoed basis, you really should be giving yourself at least 24 hours before the release appears on the site. That way, you will be providing your target media a reasonable amount of time to work on it. And if they do any work on it ahead of it going live, the probability is they will not let that effort go to waste.

But, of course, the danger of sending out your story on an embargoed basis is that embargoes do get broken, including by accident.

Therefore, you might want to have the content of your story reflect the worst case scenario of it being used in advance of when you wanted it to.

HITTING THE 'SUBMIT' BUTTON



SO, you have completed the template.

You may have perhaps included an image, that you have full permission to use.

You have decided the date and time you'd like to see the release appear on the site.

You have decided whether you'd like to forward the release on to other media outlets, either at the exact, same time of it appearing on the site or before, on an embargoed basis.

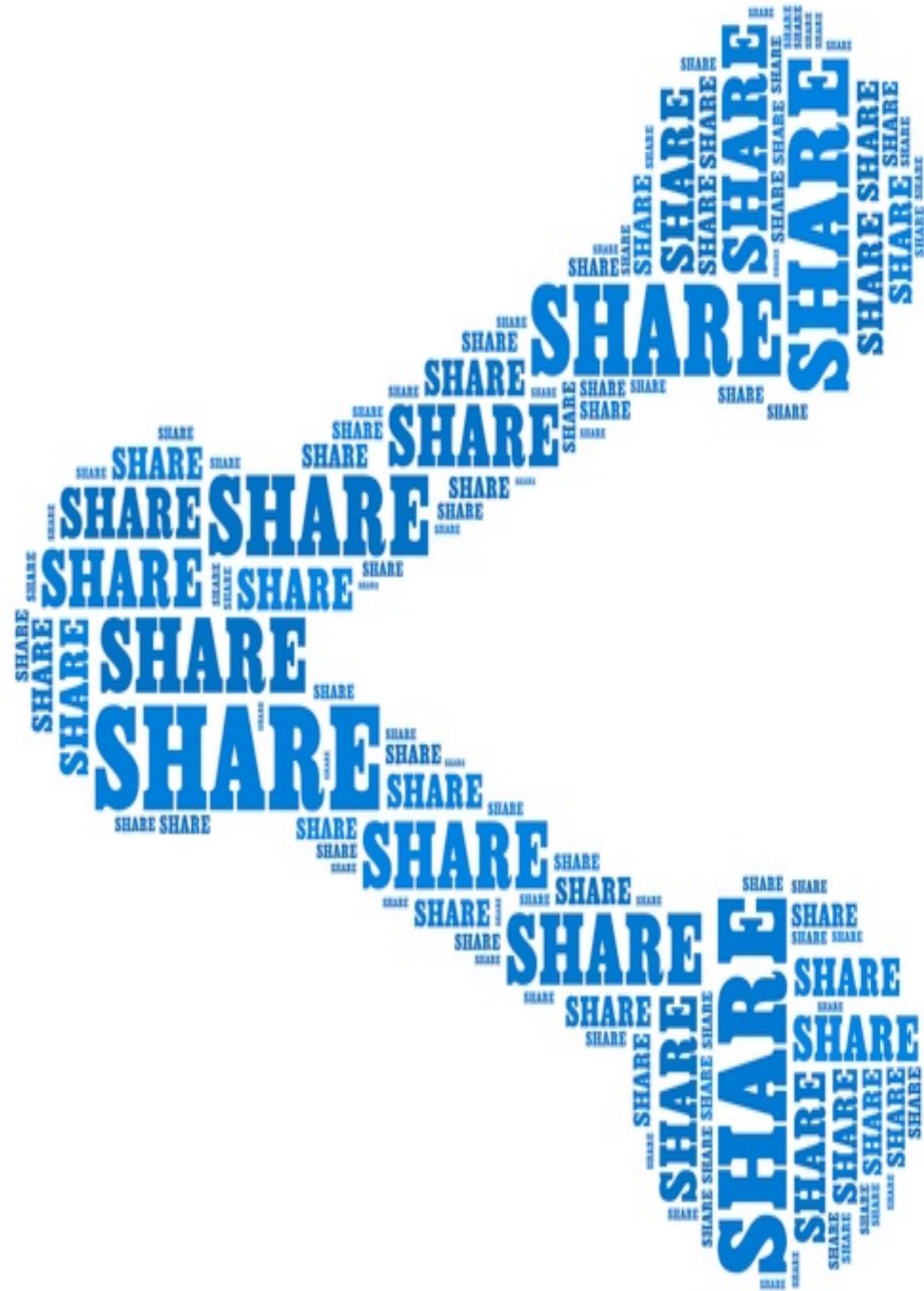
You have taken a moment to check for accuracy and you have double-checked the headline and the first word (or two words) of the release to ensure it conforms to the house style, identified in chapter five.

All seems present and correct.

Now it's time to hit the 'Submit' button. On doing so, a message will pop up on your screen, telling you that the release is now in the hands of the moderator. Your release will not appear on the site until the moderator has checked it and approved it for publication.

You may need to be patient, including by a couple of hours. As it is, moderation technically takes place between 0930 and 1630, Monday to Friday, though allmediascotland.com is not averse to taking emergency calls.

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE; BE PART OF THE COMMUNITY



ALLMEDIASCOTLAND.COM is all about community.

It's about sharing, including the many services the site provides, for free.

It's of course organisations sharing their story ideas with the media, via their media releases posted on the site, and journalists looking to those organisations for story ideas.

There's the community that is the media directory, including services for hire.

It's about taking part in allmediascotland's many Q&A-based features, not all of the interviewees requiring to be media practitioners.

It's about alerting the site to possible stories for its weekday digest of Scots media news, Your Noon Briefing.

It's about online and face-to-face seminars.

It's about following several twitter feeds, including twitter.com/allmedianews, [allmediajobs](https://twitter.com/allmediajobs) and [nonstopstories](https://twitter.com/nonstopstories) and several others, such as [allFoodPR](https://twitter.com/allFoodPR), [allSportsPR](https://twitter.com/allSportsPR), [allFilmPR](https://twitter.com/allFilmPR), [allTheatrePR](https://twitter.com/allTheatrePR) and [allDrinkPR](https://twitter.com/allDrinkPR). Plus [allVisualArtsPR](https://twitter.com/allVisualArtsPR), [allPropertyPR](https://twitter.com/allPropertyPR), [allCharitiesPR](https://twitter.com/allCharitiesPR), [allEducationPR](https://twitter.com/allEducationPR), [allLegalPR](https://twitter.com/allLegalPR), [allMusicPR](https://twitter.com/allMusicPR) and [allMotorsPR](https://twitter.com/allMotorsPR). And not forgetting [allGardensPR](https://twitter.com/allGardensPR), [allFinancePR](https://twitter.com/allFinancePR), [allTravelPR](https://twitter.com/allTravelPR), [allSciencePR](https://twitter.com/allSciencePR) and [allOutdoorsPR](https://twitter.com/allOutdoorsPR).

It's about allmediascotland.com providing a [helpdesk](#), to answer your queries.

And it's for subscribers to our media release posting service to suggest media outlets to be added to the site's release forwarding options. That the list is credible but not as comprehensive as it could be is because the site is partly about providing a low-cost solution to organisations who are unable to afford the more sophisticated alternatives in the marketplace.

And should your direct recommendation of the allmediascotland media release posting service result in us acquiring a new client, we'd be happy to thank you in the form of a shopping voucher, to the value of ten per cent of the subscription taken out. Because, the more releases there are on the site, the more both journalists and the general public will value it as a source of stories.

We're easy to get hold of: info@allmediascotland.com.

Good luck in your endeavours.

Mike Wilson, managing director, allmediascotland.com ltd.