



## The Media Interview & how to write a press release



# The interview- lecture content

The importance of Sources for journalists

How to approach people

Who do you approach

Issues of verification

Balance

Question lines

How to conduct interviews

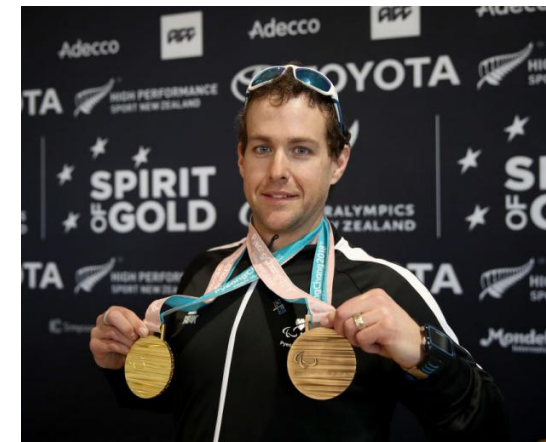
Anonymity

The Press Release

How to write an article coming out of a Press Release and an interview

# Sources

- **News comes from people because:**
  - Of their job (official spokesperson or expert)
  - Of what they have accomplished
  - They are a witness to something important happening
  - Something important has happened to them
  - They know someone or something important
  - They are representative of a trend, idea, opinion, particular perspective
  - Give journalists tip-offs
    - **They provide journalists with quotes or soundbites for their story**
- Journalists have a **CONTACTS LIST** and do a 'ring around' to track down background and interviewees for a story, or sniff out a story.





# Sources ('talent')

- Journalists adapt their interviewing style according to their source.
- BUT must talk to everyone with respect and courtesy.
- **Main Source groups:**
  - **Politicians and CEOs**
  - Experts
  - Celebrities/Sport Stars
  - The Innocents
  - Criminals
  - Children







COMMS 203  
GeoSci Civil Defence  
Media Team 2017

Photographer:  
Ulysse Bellier



# Why interview?

“In journalism, quotes – or the lack of them- can make or break a story” (Paterno & Stein 2001)

- 1) They provide credible ‘from the source’ information and/or opinion
- 2) Hold public figures to account in a live situation – not through a press release spun by PR experts – function of democracy
- 3) Seeing or hearing the interview subject allows the public to make their own judgements about who they are and what they represent
- 4) Can give a story scope, depth, veracity, emotion, humour, colour
- 5) Generate information through a story-related party and not just the journalist
- 6) Provide a range of quotes around which you can shape your story
- 7) Add personality and colour and credibility to your writing
- 8) Give credibility to the opinion of the ‘person in the street’
- 9) Ask questions the public would like to ask themselves

BBC journalism skills: Interview Techniques

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHUn6zSGEJ8>

"An engaging interview is essentially a good conversation". Peter Allen BBC



# How to prepare

Try not to interview too early – be very clear in your own head why you need this interview and what information you are going to generate out of it.

Make sure you clarify your **story** and your **angle** (how the story is framed)

Consider if you need to interview someone else who has an opposing view or different perspective.

Make sure you have done your background research not just on your topic but on the person you have selected to interview.

**Never go into the interview without completing your background research – make sure it is up to date!**

Organise your questions into logical sections of information to help give your interview structure

# How to prepare cont.

- Think about your location and evaluate for distractions and sound quality ie. cafes are usually very poor locations for an interview.
- Ask if you can record the interview and make it clear when you start to record and finish recording. (on the record and off the record – be clear if off record)
- Stipulate the length of time for the interview – and stick to it if you can.
- Do not rely on your memory or try to take full notes during the interview – you often lose your connection with your subject if you are scribbling notes, just note the basic info and key points.
- Explain the purpose of the interview – why them, what for, how is their material to be used, publication/privacy etc.
- Confirm that you can contact them later with a few follow up questions or clarifications by phone or email.



# Starting the interview

- Give them an overview of your story, angle and why you are interviewing them.
- DON'T give them the questions ahead of time or you will get well rehearsed answers
- Start recording
- Introduce them at the start of the recording : “I am interviewing Jacinda Ardern, the Labour Prime Minister of New Zealand, on 28 March 2017”. You can check with them that you have got their title correct which is how you will reference them in your writing.
- Make sure you label your recording at the time of the interview and double check you have the spelling and details correct.
- Then, ask your first question which should be factual ie. confirming their title descriptor, confirming their role or position of authority or expertise.
- Don't ask them for their working history etc they may never stop talking.

# Questions

- There are only variations of six basic questions. Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?

Should be open ended “can you tell me about..” “one way of looking at this issue is ...how would you respond to that perspective?..”

- Avoid phrasing your question so it could convey your personal pre-determined point of view.
- Shorter questions are better than longer – be concise
- Ask questions one at a time – don’t lump a number of questions together
- Use clear language – don’t over complicate your language. You can get a complex response from a simply phrased question.
- Ask the important question early in the interview – only ask the tough one first unless they are an official/media trained.
- Don’t use more than 3 or 4 questions on one topic – start on a new tack, rephrase or come back to it later.
- Thank them courteously at the end (even if you don’t really feel like it!)



# During the interview

- Maintain strong eye contact as much as you can
- think about your body language and how you give feedback during and at the end of responses
- Remain politically and emotionally neutral but engaged and interested
- Give time for the subject's response – **sometimes pause** – don't leap in as soon as it appears they have finished talking.
- Ask **follow up questions** to drill down to a deeper level or to craft a more succinct response (great to use for quotes in your work).
- Check you are still recording a few times during the interview
- Signal if you have finished one topic area and are starting on another. You can ask if they have anything more to add before you change the topic focus for the next set of questions.
- Take a few notes during interview (more relevant in a field interview – but not easy to do).

# Do not lose control of the interview

- Don't let the subject become side-tracked into an area which is off topic for your research.
- This may happen because of your poorly worded questions.
- Or it may happen because you feel too embarrassed to interrupt.
- It is totally acceptable to interrupt and bring the interview back on topic or clarify a particularly point.
- Practice how to interrupt and redirect the discussion – use your body language and phrases such as: “I am sorry to interrupt but could we just go back to your earlier point...”
- In your briefing to your subject before the interview starts you can explain that you may have to do this to keep the discussion within the parameters of your research topic.

# After the interview

- Check that they have nothing more to add or additional thoughts on some of the key points discussed before you turn off your recorder.
- Check your recording to make sure it happened.
- Double check your labelling and spelling of names and titles.
- Write down any observations you may have had during the interview about what was said, how it was said, manner, tone etc.
- Make sure the subject has your contacts as they may think of additional responses or want to retract or refine the way they expressed something.
- Transcribe your interview as soon afterwards as possible. The longer you leave it the harder it becomes. This is usually done on the run if you are a journalist.
  - **NEVER use a quote out of context – that is dishonest**
  - **Don't use 'off the record' quotes- that is dishonest**



# Balance

Mike Hosking officially broke broadcasting rules with false Māori Party comments

19/12/2017 Daniel Rutledge

Like 742

Seven Sharp has most upheld BSA complaints in past year

Last updated 19:07, December 9 2016



## NZ Radio and TV Broadcasting Standards (BSA)

- When discussing controversial issues of public importance in **news, current affairs or factual programmes**, broadcasters should make reasonable efforts, or give reasonable opportunities, to present significant points of view either in the same programme or in other programmes within the period of current interest.
- Guidelines
  - 4a No set formula can be advanced for the allocation of time to interested parties on controversial issues of public importance. Significant viewpoints should be presented fairly in the context of the programme. This can only be done by judging each case on its merits.
  - 4b The assessment of whether a **reasonable range of views** had been presented take account of some or all of the following:
    - the programme introduction;
    - whether the programme approaches a topic from a particular perspective (e.g. authorial documentaries, public access and advocacy programmes);
    - whether viewers could reasonably be expected to be aware of views expressed in other coverage.
- The purpose of this Practice Note is to provide guidance to complainants and broadcasters about the way these standards have been interpreted by the BSA with respect to television programmes.

### Day & Moss and NZME Radio Ltd - 2018-090 (2 April 2019)

Two complaints about Heather du Plessis-Allan's use of the term 'leeches' to describe the Pacific Islands during *Wellington Mornings with Heather du Plessis-Allan* were upheld, under both the good taste and decency and discrimination and denigration standards. The Authority recognised the important role talkback radio plays in fostering open discourse and debate in society. However, the Authority found Ms du Plessis-Allan's comments went beyond what is acceptable in a talkback environment, considering the use of language that was inflammatory, devalued the reputation of Pasifika people within New Zealand and had the potential to cause widespread offence and distress.

*Upheld: Good Taste and Decency, Discrimination and Denigration*

*Not Upheld: Children's Interests, Law and Order, Balance, Accuracy, Fairness*

*Orders: Section 13(1)(a) broadcast statement; Section 16(4) – \$3,000 costs to the Crown*

### Chapple and Television New Zealand Ltd - 2018-064 (26 February 2019)

The Authority has not upheld a complaint that an episode of *Sunday*, which investigated gay conversion therapy in New Zealand, was unbalanced and inaccurate. The Authority found the existence of differing viewpoints was pointed to throughout the programme, with balancing comments provided by those featured and in final comments from the presenter. The broadcaster made reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of the programme, relying on authoritative medical opinion from health experts regarding current views on gay conversion therapy and the potential harm that could be caused by the practice. In making these findings, the Authority recognised the high public interest in this story and found that upholding the complaint would represent an unjustified and unreasonable limit on the broadcaster's right to freedom of expression.

*Not Upheld: Balance, Accuracy*

# THE BASIC NEWS STORY

INTRODUCTION — MAIN ANGLE OR THEME SUMMARISED

MAIN ANGLE DEVELOPED FURTHER

MORE ON MAIN ANGLE

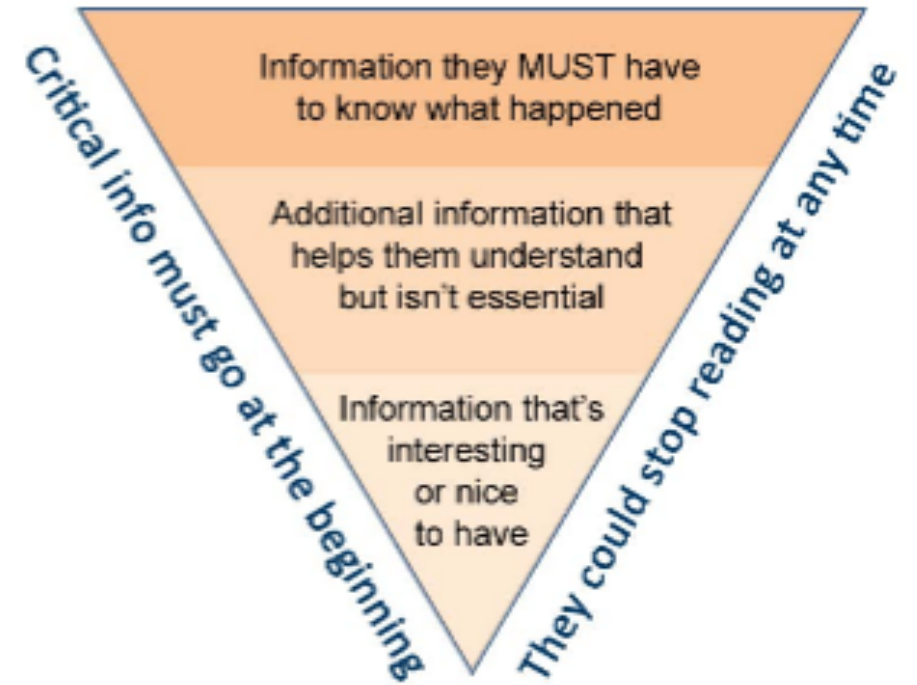
MORE SUBSIDIARY

OTHER RELEVANT  
POINTS

BACKGROUND

THE INVERTED PYRAMID

## Inverted Pyramid News Writing





# Write a short, catchy headline

- Keep it short – 7-8 words max
- Headlines need to be succinct, short and snappy.
- Use vivid, simple and active language
- The headline should provide a basic image of the content of the article.
- Use present tense so it's newsy.

(Can use future tense if that is relevant – just as catchy and effective)

**Central Function: is to attract the reader**

Use the inverted pyramid to structure a press article of 4-5 sentences

NEED TO HAVE:

- What has happened?
- Where did it happen?
- When did it happen?
- Who was involved?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- What does it mean?

This enables you to present the most important information first.

This formula means the article does not need to be edited but can be shortened by cutting from the bottom paragraph upwards.

# The Fog Index

(readability test for English writing)

- The Gunning Fog Index is about sentence length. Based on an observation of the pattern of attention given by readers to printed material, it suggests that the longer a sentence, the thicker the fog which the reader has to get through to get to the message
- 8-10 word sentences are clear and easy to understand
- 10-15 word sentences are slightly less clear and easy to understand
- 15-25 word sentences can mean the fog is thickening
- 25+ can mean the sentence is impenetrable
- Keep sentences short and concise. Break up longer sentences to maintain clarity.

# WRITING THE NEWS- INTROS

- Engage the reader instantly – readers always distracted
- Summarise what the story is all about - ‘stand alone’
- Declare why the story is being published
- Direct, simple, uncomplicated (KISS) – single idea
- Use what is the newest, most attention-grabbing aspect of the story, questions and complexities comes later



# The Introduction

- “This is the start of the story, the opening paragraph.
- The traditional news introductory paragraph, still the dominant form, has two related purposes: to engage the reader instantly and to summarise what the story is all about.
- The structure is known as the "inverted pyramid" and dates back to the days of hot metal when words on their way on to paper passed through a stage of being slugs of lead. It was always easier and faster to cut a story from the bottom, using a pair of tweezers.
- News stories always have to be cut because reporters write them too long, and the (imperfect) theory was that a well structured story could always be cut from the bottom so that in extremis (do not use - see later) if the intro was the only paragraph left it still made sense.
- The good intro depends on your judgment and decisiveness. It declares why the story is being published, what is the newest, most interesting, most important, most significant, most attention-grabbing aspect of the story.
- It is not a summary of everything yet to come.
- The best intro will contain a maximum of two or three facts, maybe only one. In a popular tabloid it will consist of one sentence, probably no more than 25 words.
- The worst intro will be uncertain of what the story is all about and will contain several ideas.
- The best intro will demand that you read on.
- The worst will make it likely that you will move on.”
- <https://gu.com/p/2x79n/sbl>

# Print News Stories

- “News stories are about providing information, and there is nothing more frustrating for the reader than finishing a story with unanswered questions still hanging.
- Journalism students are taught about the five Ws: who, what, when, where and why. They are a useful tool to check you have covered all the bases, though not all will always apply.
- It is always difficult to detach yourself from your own prose when you read it through, but try. Try to put yourself in the place of the reader coming cold to the story, interested in it and asking the questions that will make it clear.
- Have you dealt with them? The subeditor, or text editor, will soon tell you if you haven't.
- There is always a problem over how much knowledge to assume, **particularly with a running story** of which today's is another episode.
- You cannot always start from the beginning for the benefit of reader recently arrived from Mars, but you can include sufficient to ensure it is not meaningless. It is a matter of judgement.”
- <https://gu.com/p/2x79n/sbl>

# Press Releases

Press releases are short, factual news stories written in the third person and given to the media to encourage editors/journalists/broadcasters to feature the story in their publications and programmes.

They can also be published on the originator's website and in company magazines and newsletters. In these instances, the style is often changed from the third to the first person.

- Approximately 80% of newspaper news stories are generated by press releases
- They should be crafted so they read the same way as a news story
- The strategy is to get them published without being re-edited
- (therefore give the journalists; facts, quotes from key

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/zach-cutler/press-release-tips\\_b\\_2120630.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/zach-cutler/press-release-tips_b_2120630.html)

# Writing a Press Release

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# Don'ts for Media Releases

- Don't type your media release in capital letters.
- Don't type your media release in italics.
- Don't fail to proofread your release, (better still have it proofed by someone else).
- Don't use clichés.
- Don't use padding.
- Don't send it late.
- Don't send it to the wrong person.
- Don't use bold points to emphasise your point.
- Don't open quotation marks and forget to close them.

# How to write a news story using a press release

- Approach a press release the way you would approach food you're about to buy: examine it carefully to make sure it's all there, and sniff it to make sure it's good. **Be prepared to treat it as the starting point rather than simply a puzzle to reorganize**—if time and price allow you that luxury (Dearn 2014).
- PR is usually written and reviewed by a team people.
- Some of the facts in the release may be wrong or things have changed, or it is a narrow perspective on a topic/issue.
- What information would your readers like to know, that is not in the Press Release? Ask the politician those questions, which will be invaluable for writing your article.
- **These questions give you an information edge which means you are not just rehashing the press release in your own article.**

# What to look for in a Press Release

**What is the key content/issue/political stance or opinion in the press release?**

The heading and first paragraph should clearly indicate the central focus

**Is there something in the press release that is:**

newsworthy?

Controversial?

Omits an opposing point of view or perspective?

Warrants a follow up story?

**Do the usual who, what , when, where, why checks:**

- **Who** authored the PR and what organisation does it represent?
- **What** is the central issue, opinion, policy?
- **When** did this event or piece of news take place?
- **Where** is the event or news happening?
- **Why** is this happening? Who is the target audience? What is the reasoning behind this event or news?

# Key questions you could ask

(after you have carefully analysed the press release)

- Clarification of any facts, figures which may be unclear, or clarify their source, relevancy, provenance, timing.
- Are there counter facts/figures publically available which differ? Why could this be so?
- Are there any glaring omissions or a subtle lack of full details available in the PR? What question could you ask which can politely reveal that lack of clarity, or confirm that no more information will be provided in that area.
- Ask a question based on the central issue/argument coming out of the press release so you can get a direct quote from the spokesperson.





## **MEDIA STATEMENT Rugby Australia, 10 April 2019**

“Rugby Australia is aware of a post made by Israel Folau on his Instagram account this afternoon.

The content within the post is unacceptable. It does not represent the values of the sport and is disrespectful to members of the Rugby community.

The Rugby Australia Integrity Unit has been engaged on the matter tonight.”

Tweets Tweets & replies Media



Gareth Thomas @gareththomas14 · 8h

I don't write this with hate or anger after Israel Folau's comments. I write with sympathy. To everyone who reads it, don't be influenced by his words. Be the better person and be YOU. Whoever YOU is..Hell doesn't await YOU. Happiness awaits YOU. 🌈❤️

173 1.1K 8.2K

Tweets Tweets & replies Media



Andrew Mulligan @Andrew\_Mulligan · 3h

If you're feeling vilified or marginalised on social media because high profile athletes like @IzzyFolau are spreading dangerous homophobic prejudices then please know you are loved and appreciated.

8 44 205

Until Israel Folau repents, Rugby Australia has no choice but to let him go

By Peter FitzSimons

April 11, 2019 – 12.00am



In the wake of his [latest homophobic outburst](#) – gays, among other sinners, are heading to hell once more – Israel Folau has to go, and will go.

Quick. Clean. Gone. At least until such times as *he* repents.

His contract will be suspended or terminated on the grounds of having breached either rugby's social media policy, or his contract. Rugby Australia simply has no choice.



Sam Kerr's response to Israel Folau's Instagram post. (Instagram)

## Write a 1-2 paragraph news story, including a headline using the Rugby Australia Media Statement

- Write your headline last
- Craft your opening sentence carefully so it links directly into the Media statement
- Make sure you have the 5 x Ws.
- Do an online search to find links to a similar circumstance for Folau which you would use to add background to your story.
- Think carefully about the tone of your piece.
- Make sure your 'voice' is not evident – this is not an opinion piece.
- Think carefully about your final sentence