
A Template for Scientific Press Releases and Science News Articles

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Virtually everyone who works in a scientific field will ultimately have to deal, in one way or another, with the production of a Press Release. The importance of Press Releases cannot be over-estimated since it is by their distribution (and the distribution of the short science news articles that are generated from them by randomly scrambling their words) that the majority of the public learn of current scientific progress. Not surprisingly, a great deal of energy, time, and resources are spent each year in the production of these releases. Shortly after the start of a new year¹ it occurred to us that this important task could be greatly simplified. We noted in a comprehensive survey of articles from 1983-2001 that 87.3% of the Press Releases and science news articles could be faithfully reproduced through the straightforward application of a set of simple standardized rules.² These rules can be easily applied to generate a form containing a pre-written Press Release in which one need only fill in various blanks with items specific to the matter at hand in order to generate a full-blown Press Release.

In hopes that it can be used to increase scientific efficiency, stimulate the American economy, and serve the general public, we therefore present the Press Release Template.³

How To Use the Press Release Template

To generate a Press Release, simply fill in all the fields, giving the appropriate information. Each field is denoted by words in CAPITAL LETTERS.

INSERT NEWSPAPER-LIKE TITLE HERE, PREFERABLY WITH A DOUBLE MEANING OR PUN⁴

Scientists today announced that they are the first to successfully demonstrate SCIENTIFIC FINDING.⁵ This has long been one of the holy grails of SCIENTIFIC FIELD. "This finding radically alters our understanding of the field, to say the least," says FIRST AUTHOR, a SCIENTIFIC FIELDologist from INSTITUTION who led the research.

"We were stunned when we made the discovery. For a few minutes we just didn't believe what we were seeing," says FIRST AUTHOR, "then SECOND AUTHOR (a student of FIRST AUTHOR) yelled 'We've done it!' and we started dancing around the LAB/OBSERVATORY/FIELD SITE. It was very exciting."

INSERT LIGHT-HEARTED QUIP FROM FIRST AUTHOR, PREFERABLY BASED ON A PUN OR TWIST ON A COMMON SAYING.⁶

News of the finding was greeted with universal surprise,⁷ except, that is, at FIRST AUTHORS INSTITUTION. "Privately, a few of us had long thought this might be the case," said FIRST AUTHOR, "but we kept it quiet because we were afraid our colleagues would think we were crazy."

Not everyone is convinced, however, and their report has been criticized as premature by some. "While FIRST AUTHOR's interpretation of the data represents one possible explanation, their data do not necessary preclude the possibility of OPPOSITE EXPLANATION," intoned A NON-AUTHOR PUNDIT IN THE SAME FIELD of ANOTHER INSTITUTION. "Further work will be necessary to fully prove that they are correct."

"Ah, NON-AUTHOR PUNDIT IN THE FIELD," chuckled FIRST AUTHOR in response, "He has been grinding the ALTERNATE EXPLANATION axe for ages. It has been growing steadily out of favor for years and our new results are the nail in its coffin. He is, of course, correct that more data is always desirable, but we are confident that future studies will only support our findings."

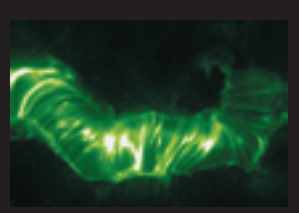

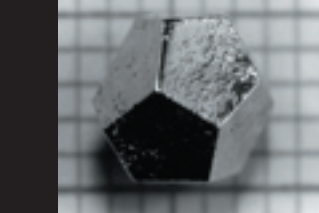

The full extent of the importance of these findings will take years to fully appreciate, predicts THIRD AUTHOR. Nonetheless, it may well have implications that cross the boundaries of the discipline of SCIENTIFIC FIELD. INSERT

MANDATORY QUOTE BY (A) Sagan, (B) Einstein, (C) Freud, (D) Darwin, or (E) folksy grandmother HERE. “Only time, and continued support, will tell,” intoned THIRD AUTHOR solemnly.

A better understanding of this effect may help scientists plan more successful strategies for SCIENTIFIC FIELD in the future. “This is just a step along the path,” said SECOND AUTHOR modestly, “but an important one.”

–AUTHOR’S BYLINE

FIGURE. It is important to provide a figure that can be used with the press release. However, it is never a good idea to show any graphs, equations, or chemistry. We have provided sample images⁸ that are appropriate for almost any topic. It should be noted the same image can serve equally well in reports about any of several different branches of science.

			
Astronomy	A n t h r o p o l o g y	Astronomy	Anthropology
Biology	Astronomy	Biology	Archeology
Chemistry	Biology	Chemistry	Biology
Geology	Ecology	Crystallography	Epidemiology
Mathematics	Epidemiology	Engineering	Forensics
Medicine	Geology	Geology	Medicine
Meteorology	Meteorology	Mathematics	Oceanography
Oceanography	Oceanography	Physics	Paleontology
Physics	Sociology	Statistics	Psychology

Notes

1. The idea for the PR template occurred to us in January 2002, after we became supersaturated in short science articles. January is traditionally a good time for Press Releases and short science articles, as many science magazines pick this time to publish their “Top 10/20/50/100 Science Stories of the Past Year.”

2. Well, okay, one of us read a whole bunch of “Top 100 Science Stories of the Past Year” articles while laid up to recuperate from knee surgery, and it seemed like 87.3% was about the right number. The principal author’s inability to reach his calculator with the end of his back-scratcher abrogated his ability to do an in-depth statistical analysis. The secondary authors are simply lazy and shiftless people who leech off of the primary author’s hard work.

3. This template has been optimized for the physical sciences. It can easily be altered to accommodate discoveries in sociology, parapsychology, astrology, etc. by replacing all the words in the quotes with synonyms, preferably arcane ones, having three to four times as many syllables.

4. This is one of the few places in the form where a bit of creativity is needed. Just as examples:

- “I Came, I Sew, and I Conquered” – PR about a new means of doing surgical stitches.
- “The Proof is in the Puddling” – PR about rising sea levels due to global warming.
- “Charmed, I’m Sure” – PR about quarks.
- “A New Twist on Molecular Shapes” – PR about molecular structure of a protein.
- “Astronomers Piss Themselves” – PR on the debate over radio telescope detection of urea in interstellar clouds.

5. This text should be controlled by the nature of science and may require some creativity on the part of the writer of the PR. However, we would note that many Public Affairs offices require their PRs be written at about the sixth-grade level.⁹ As a result, it is generally impossible to fully describe the nature of the actual discovery, so the typical writer of PRs need not worry too much about the contents of this portion of the text.

6. Examples are:

- (a) "It's as if we were shown how to pull the finger of God."
- (b) "I feel as if I can now call Einstein a Special Relative."
- (c) "This proves that all oxidants are preventable."
- (d) "Superconductivity has shown that resistance is futile."
- (e) "It would be gneiss if it weren't full of schist."
- (f) "We have demonstrated that clumsiness is not genetic, but a Freudian slip."

7. It is mandatory that this comment be included, even though it is quite likely that everybody in the field has long been aware of the possibility.

8. Photo credits (left to right):

(a) TRACE 07-14-2000, Stanford-Lockheed ISR and NASA: <http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap000720.html>

(b) Apollo 17, 12-07-1972, NASA:

<http://grin.hq.nasa.gov/IMAGES/SMALL/GPN-2000-001138.jpg>

(c) Ames Laboratory, Novel Materials and Ground States

<http://cmp.ameslab.gov/personnel/canfield/photos.html>

(d) Penuk Island, Bering Sea, Alaska, 07-1977, Captain Budd Christman, NOAA Corps: <http://www.photolib.noaa.gov/coastline/line0179.htm>

9. It should be noted that the definition of "sixth-grade level" changes depending on the year and quality of elementary school education of the Public Affairs Officer.

Mel says...
"It's Swell!"



Scientist/supermodel
Symmetra says

Watch Out For Chatter!

In designing mechanical systems, one must always watch out for chatter and unwanted forms of oscillation.

When I'm feeling out of balance, I drink SymmetraCal. It ensures that I get enough topology, stereochemistry and diuretic biomechanical zing each and every day!



SymmetraCal

The topical drink that evens you out.
Available by prescription if at all.

SymmetraCal has been approved by the International Council of SymmetraCal Manufacturers.
WARNING: The Surgeon General's office has determined that smoking may be hazardous to your health.