

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

2.1 Approaching the media

2.2 Techniques for working with the media



2.1

Learning objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- identify the different types of mass media;
- understand advantages and disadvantages of using mass media in your communication strategy;
- understand the media needs; and
- apply guidelines on maintaining a relationship with journalists.

Introduction

How can you use the **mass media** as part of your communication strategy?

In this lesson you will see what mass media are and how they can be used to convey information related to food security according to users' needs.

You will also learn how to provide your content to the media and keep a good relationship with media professionals.

What are the mass media?

Radio

International radio	A few broadcasters have worldwide coverage and are listened to widely. Examples: BBC World Service, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle.
National radio	Stations with nationwide coverage, often government-controlled. Some broadcast different styles of music, entertainment, news etc. on different stations.
Local radio	Stations with local coverage, often broadcast on FM frequencies (which can cover only a small area). Government or commercially managed.
Community radio	Small-scale, community-controlled stations, often run by an NGO or church. They focus on community issues.

Television

International TV	Usually available only if the viewer has a satellite dish. A few broadcasters provide worldwide news coverage (e.g. BBC World Service, CNN, Al Jazeera)
National TV	Government or commercial. Stations focus on different things: news, entertainment, children, etc.
Local TV	Many stations broadcast a few hours of locally oriented programming each day

Performance

Film	Cinemas may show international or locally made movies. They may include advertising or announcements at the beginning or end of the movies. In many countries, small cinemas show rented videos.
Music	Live performances and recorded music are popular throughout the world. It is possible to use song lyrics to convey messages about health, farming and other food security-related issues.
Drama	Street theatre and local drama groups stage plays for local entertainment. Puppetry has a long tradition in some cultures.

Newspapers

International press	Large foreign newspapers can be very influential. Those with international coverage and circulation include the <i>Guardian</i> (UK), <i>Le Monde</i> (France), the <i>International Herald Tribune</i> (USA). News magazines include <i>Time</i> , <i>Newsweek</i> and the <i>Economist</i> .
National press	Newspapers and magazines that circulate within the country. Magazines may carry general news and current affairs, or may focus on specific topics (such as farming or health).
Local press	Local newspapers or newsletters are often produced by community organizations.

Websites

Media websites	Many media organizations also have websites that allow users to view content even after a programme has been broadcast or the newspaper printed. Some media websites offer different content from what is broadcast or printed (eg, www.bbc.co.uk).
Special-interest websites	These sites focus on a specific topic, such as agriculture or nutrition. There may be a printed equivalent (such as <i>Spore</i> , http://spore.cta.int/), or have no printed or broadcast equivalent (such as the <i>New Agriculturist</i> , www.new-ag.info).
Humanitarian, food security and early warning websites	Sites such as Relief Web (www.reliefweb.int), the Global Information and Early Warning System (www.fao.org/gIEWS), and (www.fews.net) provide timely, reliable and relevant humanitarian, food security and early warning information and analysis. These provide access to current and historical reports, news items and alerts, and make extensive use of maps and images. Information is often classified by various categories such as country or region, crisis or event, and by information format. Many of them include social media tools and some allow you to contribute your content.

Social Media

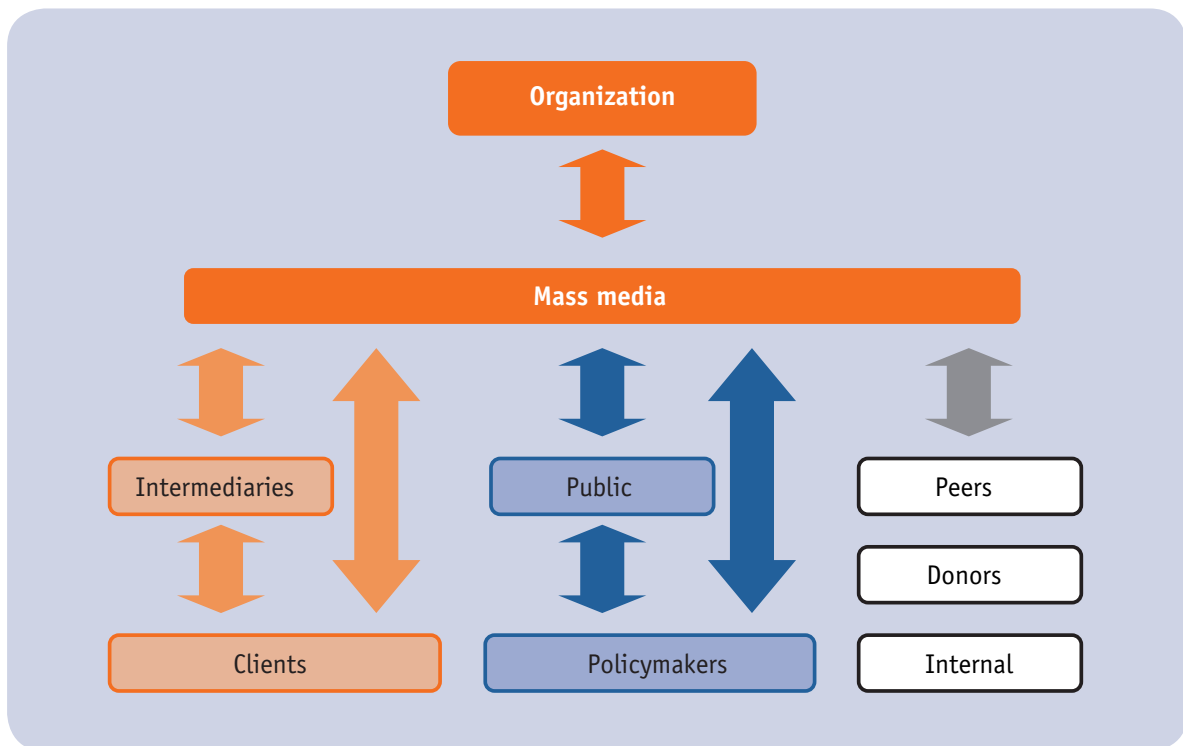
Blogs and micro-blogging	Blogs offer a convenient way to provide periodic updates on ongoing activities, and to keep people up-to-date on situations for which there is a continuous demand for new information. Micro-blogs provide a mechanism for continuous updates delivered over the web and by SMS. These can be used to transmit snippets of information as short updates from a cell phone. Micro-blogging has seen much use in providing real time field updates.
News feeds and e-newsletters	Newsfeeds provide a means for people to subscribe to automatic updates from your website or blog. A e-newsletter is an e-mail that is sent to your subscribed readers. Both can call attention to new alerts, capital reports and products.
Social Networking Sites	Social networking sites such as Facebook have gained in popularity over recent years. Many news outlets and groups are setting up social networking sites to develop their networks and to promote their activities and products.

Why work with the mass media?

The mass media act as important conduits and filters of information between your organization and its various audiences.

They may reach your audience both **directly** and **indirectly** - by reaching other people who then discuss your message with their friends.

How the mass media can help you reach your audiences



The mass media can reach **very large numbers of people**, at little or no cost to your organization.

The media are also good for **raising awareness and setting the agenda** on an issue. That makes them indispensable if you want to advocate a change in government policy or a widespread change in people's behaviour (for example, to persuade them to stop smoking).

For some audiences (such as scattered clients or the public in general), they may be the **only** way for you to communicate with them.

Advantages of mass media

Advantages	Comments
Large audience size	The media can reach very large numbers of people – far larger than the project could reach through other channels.
Low cost	The cost of distributing the message is generally borne by the media (and ultimately advertisers, readers or the government).
Awareness raising, agenda setting	The media are good at raising awareness and mobilizing public opinion on an issue, and at putting it on the political agenda.

Types of media content

Here are some media you might want to consider for food security information:

Content type	Description	How you could use it
All media (radio, TV, newspapers, magazines, websites)		
News	Short, objective story about recent events	Produce a press release about a project initiative, or to give the project's view about a news event
Feature story	A longer, in-depth story, examining different aspects of an issue. Often prepared in collaboration with an expert source	Work with a journalist to produce an in-depth story about the issues your project deals with
Advertising	Paid content, usually used to promote a product or service	Announce a conference or job vacancy
Newspapers, magazines, websites		
Opinion piece	Article that gives someone's opinion (rather than trying to be objective)	Submit an article to the editor about an issue your project deals with
Column	A series of articles that appears regularly	Agree with an editor to submit articles regularly
Supplement	A special section focusing on a specific issue (such as farming or health). Often contains how-to information	Work with a journalist to write items for the next supplement Sponsor a special pull-out supplement on your topic
Radio, TV		
Documentary	Programme that investigates an issue in depth (equivalent to a feature story in a magazine)	Hire a production team to produce broadcast-quality programme
Magazine programme	Programme consisting of shorter segments, each focusing on a different topic	Arrange for your topic or project to be covered in one segment
Drama, soap opera	Entertainment programme used to carry a development message	Commission a special series of programmes, or negotiate for your topic to be included in an existing development soap opera
Talk show	Interview with one or more people about a subject	Arrange for an expert from your project to be interviewed
Public service announcement	Non-commercial advertising that is in the public interest	Promote a service or change in behaviour (e.g. growing vegetables in home-gardens to improve family nutrition)
Jingle	Short, catchy tunes or slogans used to promote an organization, product or service. In effect, a very short advertisement	Remind listeners about something (e.g. Eating fruit helps keep you healthy!)

Disadvantages of working with the mass media

The following are potential disadvantages in working with the mass media. Let's look at them and at some ways to overcome them.

Disadvantages	Comments	Ways to overcome disadvantages
Audience location and characteristics	Their audiences tend to be concentrated in urban areas, and they do not reach the poorest people.	Select those media that serve your audience. For example, radio (not newspapers) in remote rural areas.
Difficult to target	Because the media have such large audiences, it is difficult to target your information to a particular group.	Choose media that you know are more likely to reach your target audience. For example, choose community radio or a local newspaper rather than a national station. Put your message into the format that your audience prefers. For example, produce a radio soap opera (rather than a documentary), or a newspaper farm supplement (rather than aiming to get on the news pages).
Low effectiveness	The media are less effective than some other channels – especially compared to face-to-face communication. They tend to be not very effective at convincing people to change their behaviour.	Use mass media to raise awareness and to keep the issue in the audience's mind. Produce media that grab the audience's emotions .
Loss of control	Because the information goes through a filter of journalists and editors, you lose control over it. It may not appear at all. The story or programme may be oversimplified or inaccurate. It may be presented alongside an opposing view.	Produce information in a form that journalists can use (such as press releases). Offer to check facts before a story is broadcast or printed. Be prepared to counter contradictory views Consider paying to broadcast programmes or to print articles (as advertisements or "placed articles").
Short-lived messages	Newspapers tend to get thrown away the next day. And if someone misses a TV or radio programme, they miss your message.	Get radio and TV programmes repeated Record them to reuse (e.g., in training courses). Target longer-lived media (such as magazines).
Cost of production and distribution	Some types of media can be expensive – such as staging events or producing broadcast-quality video. You may have to pay radio and TV stations to broadcast your programme.	Balance cost against audience size : spending \$10,000 to produce a TV programme is cheap if it reaches 1 million people – \$0.01 per person!
Coverage may be negative	Most news is bad news – and it may be critical of your organization.	Maintain good relations with the media, and respond appropriately to negative coverage. Always be honest and open . Appoint one person or department to manage contacts with the media.

Ways to reach the media

You can provide information to the media in many different ways.

Method	Comments
Direct contact	Phone calls, emails or personal meetings with reporters or editors. They are a good way to alert the media to breaking news or to tell them about a forthcoming story. Be careful not to overuse these methods.
Field visit	A visit by one or more journalists to a project site. The project arranges interviews with clients and staff. It may pay for the journalists' transport.
Interview	A staff member of your organization gives an interview to a reporter, perhaps as an "expert".
Letter to the editor	Appear on a special page in newspapers. Use them to start or contribute to a debate, or to respond to or correct information that has appeared in the paper.
Placed article	An article (often a feature story) written by a staff member or a freelancer and provided exclusively to a newspaper or magazine.
News conference	A question-and-answer session with several journalists and one or more news sources or spokespersons.
Press kit	A packaged set of information and promotional materials about the project or organization. Often given to reporters before an event, news conference or field visit. Include contact names, contact details, areas of expertise and short biographies.
Press release	The standard way of getting information to the media. A press release is 1–2 pages of information, written in the same format as a news story.
Staged event	A newsworthy event such as a ceremony, charity walk, exhibition or publicity stunt, designed (among other things) to attract media attention.
Website	Make sure your project has a website, and keep it up to date. Provide information such as contact details, a description of the activities, and the most recent publications and press releases.
Social media	Social media such as blogs, micro-blogging, feeds, e-newsletters, can be used to provide your subscribers with up to date information and content.

How to work with the mass media

To maximize your chances of getting your story covered, you have to:

- understand the needs of the media, and
- be able to provide the information they need, when they need it, in the form they need it.








Each type of mass medium needs different types of information.

These media...	... need this type of information
News desks in newspapers and in radio and TV stations	Fresh news each day.
Magazines and documentary producers	Feature stories that go into a topic in depth.
Local radio stations and newspapers	Stories that affect and interest their own listeners and readers. There should be some local angle to the story – maybe a local person is involved, or the activity has local implications.
International media	Stories that have a wider interest outside a single country.
News agencies (AFP, Reuters, UPI, etc.)	High-interest stories. News agencies rewrite these stories and make them available to other news organizations.
Freelance reporters	High-interest stories. They make their living by writing and selling stories to media companies.

What makes news?

Here are some elements of a successful news story.

Make sure your news stories have at least two or three of these elements.

News value	Explanation	What to do
<p>Timeliness</p> 	<p>The story must be new. Old news is no longer news! (Note, though, that “new” means “new to the outside world”, not necessarily “new to your organization”).</p>	<p>Make sure your story is up to date. Relate your information to a current event (e.g. World Food Day). Put out farming information in the right season (e.g. information on seeds at planting time).</p>
<p>Interest</p> 	<p>If your story is boring, journalists will not report it, and people will not read or watch it.</p>	<p>Find an angle to show how your story relates to the audience. Find an interesting story, and tell it in an interesting way.</p>
<p>Audience fit</p> 	<p>Different groups have different interests. Young people are interested in different things from older people; men in different things from women.</p>	<p>Tailor your topic so it fits your target audience.</p>
<p>Proximity, relevance</p> 	<p>People are interested in what happens in their community. “Proximity” may be psychological – people feel close to other people they can identify with.</p>	<p>Find a local angle: your project has a site in the district, or perhaps a local person is involved.</p>
<p>Impact, significance</p> 	<p>The story should have major implications for the community, the country or the world.</p>	<p>Show why the story is important.</p>
<p>Conflict</p> 	<p>The conflict may be real (e.g. a fight over land) or metaphorical (a disagreement), or a fight against a threat (“the battle against hunger”).</p>	<p>Find elements of conflict in the story (without overdramatizing them).</p>
<p>Novelty, unusual angle</p> 	<p>Things that are new, weird or offbeat attract attention.</p>	<p>Highlight something new, odd or unusual.</p>

Making contact

How to make contact with the media? Simple: get their phone numbers, and call. Find out who is the editor or reporter in charge of your topic, and introduce yourself. Let the media know...

- Your organization or project exists
- What it does
- What the staff's expertise is
- Where you are
- How to contact you

For key local media, visit the media offices.

Once you know who to contact in each media organization, make a list of their names and contact details.

You can now send them press releases, invite them to events and field visits, and get in touch with them if you have newsworthy items.

Maintaining a relationship with the media

You and **journalists** need each other: you need journalists to get your stories into the media, and journalists need good, reliable sources of news and background information. It's important to cultivate good relations with journalists.

You should **keep in contact** with them and maintain mutual respect, trust and cooperation.

You should also provide your content **in time** and in the **form and language** they need.

Tips for maintaining a good relationship with journalists

- Give them a friendly welcome when they visit.
- Give journalists information in a **form and language they need**: send them a press release, not a technical report.
- **Respect deadlines**: call journalists in mid-morning, when they may have time to talk. Don't wait until late afternoon, when they will probably be fighting a deadline. And when a journalist calls, don't say "Come back next week, when we're not so busy".
- Add your media contacts to your **mailing list** for press releases, newsletters and annual reports. But do not flood the media with trivial or technical information that they cannot use.
- **Keep up with the news**: you may be called upon to comment on it.
- When a major story that touches your area of expertise hits the media, even if your organization has nothing to do with it, **offer your expertise** to help the media produce a better-informed story.
- If a story appears about your project, get in touch with the journalist to say "**Thank you**". Don't complain about minor errors.
- During the holiday season, send your media contacts a **greetings card** or message with good wishes.

When the media approach you...

Sometimes **journalists may approach you** for a story.

This may happen if something happens where your organization has expertise, such as a drought, a nutrition-related story, or a change in government policy on food imports.

You should always return journalists' phone calls **promptly**, and always **tell the truth**.

Most journalists are **generalists**: they probably are not experts in your topic. That means they need detailed **explanations**, and a lot of **help** to get technical information into a form that they – and their audiences – can understand.

You may also offer to check a story they have written for **technical accuracy**. If you do it, correct only the factual errors – not the opinions or story structure.

Press officer or media relations coordinator

You may want to appoint someone as **press officer** or **media relations coordinator** to provide information regularly to the media.

Give this person's phone number to your media contacts.

This person should have the information and expertise to be able to respond to most calls from journalists. He or she should be good in front of the camera or microphone, and should know which other staff members to contact for details.

He or she should know what the media are doing, the stories they are covering and how the media operate.

Because reporting deadlines are tight, he or she should be ready to field phone calls late at night.

If a **crisis** occurs in your organization (a scandal, a failure, criticism from a prominent politician), the media may want to report it.

Will my story appear?

A journalist cannot guarantee a story will actually appear in the evening news or next day's newspaper.

After the journalist writes a story, it is sent to an editor, who may change it, cut it, slant it, or kill it.

The story that appears may be very different from what you hoped for.

If the story contains errors...

- If the errors are minor, don't do anything. You are probably the only person to notice. Even if others notice, the errors are not important enough to matter.
- If there is a major error, consider contacting the journalist to point this out.
- If the error is very serious, contact the editor and ask for a correction.

If the story does not appear...

- Don't give up: only a small proportion of press releases ever make it into a newspaper or broadcast.
- Journalists often keep good story ideas on file and come back to them later.
- Journalists may remember you as a good source of information, and contact you in the future on another story.

Summary

The mass media are usually taken to include **newspapers, magazines, radio** and **television**. They may also include performing arts (**film, music, drama**). Many media organizations also run **websites**.

Different **types of content** may be considered to convey information related to food security. For example you may use news, feature stories or advertising.

Analysing **the way your audiences use the various media** is essential for communicating your information in the best way.

You can **provide your content to the media** in several ways. For example, through direct contact, interviews, news conferences, press releases, etc.

Understanding **media professionals' needs** and journalistic ethics is also important for maintaining a good collaboration with them.

Annex: Analysing your audience's use of the media and developing a media strategy: an example

Analysing **the way your audiences use the various media** is essential for communicating your information through the right media.

Example

Sonia works as a communication specialist for a food security project. She wants to use the mass media as part of her communication strategy.

She managed to get some questions about information sources and media use into the project's baseline survey. And she has visited the field several times and got to know some of the project's partners and clients. She's also familiar with the institutional and policy environment.

Here is her analysis about the use of mass media:

Audience	Analysis
Clients	The clients are poor and live in remote areas. They do not read newspapers or magazines. There is no electricity in their area, so they do not watch TV. The baseline survey found that some have radios , and they listen to the farming programme on one of the stations.
Intermediaries	The project aims at influencing various service providers: microfinance organizations, farm input suppliers, retailers, extension agents, and so on. Most of them are located in the towns where they do get newspapers and watch TV . They listen to the same radio programme as the clients.
Polymakers	Most work in government ministries in the national capital, or in the provincial administration. It's hard to get appointments with them. Amina knows that newspapers and television are important in setting the policy agenda. One of the project's goals is to persuade the government to change its policy on food security, so the project needs to make its voice heard.
The public	The public are not one of the project's major audiences, But the project's management want it to have a reasonably high public profile: they want the public to see the project as one of the leading food security organizations in the country. That means using newspapers and TV .
Peers	Amina's project is one of several organizations working on food security in the country. Amina wants to raise her project's profile among these organizations, and perhaps influence them to adopt some of its approaches. Most of the organizations have offices in the national capital, and the staff there read newspapers and watch TV .
Donors	Some of the project's donors are based in the national capital, where they read the national newspapers and watch TV . Others are outside the country and use the international media.
Internal	The project's field staff live in remote areas, but they sometimes listen to the radio or watch TV . The office staff in the capital read newspapers and watch the TV news in the evenings.

Sonia realizes that the mass media are not the main information channel between the project and most of its audiences. Other channels – printed materials, meetings, and so on – are more important. But the media can play an important supporting and reinforcing role. They are also useful for raising awareness about issues that the project thinks are important.

The project serves a large number of **clients**. It runs various field activities, training courses and demonstrations. However, these reach a relatively small number of people. To reach more people, the project must rely on two channels – intermediaries and the mass media.

The mass media are the **only** way Sonia's project can communicate directly with one audience: the **public**.

Sonia has developed her communication strategy for the mass media.

Sonia's mass media strategy

- The project will develop segments on growing food for broadcast on the **radio** farming programme.
- She will produce a **video** for broadcast on TV (project staff can also use this video in their training courses).
- It will promote two or three project staff as "experts" to be **interviewed** on radio and TV programmes.
- Sonia will produce occasional **press releases** for newspaper and TV journalists.
- She will invite journalists on **field visits** to view project activities and meet field staff and clients.
- She will take advantage of **outside events** such as World Food Day (16 October each year) to publicize aspects of food security.
- The project will also **stage events** (such as inviting prominent people to open a new water supply system) that will attract media coverage.
- Sonia will produce a **press kit** with information about the project, its work and the policy implications, contact names and details, plus the latest press releases. Amina will give this kit to visiting journalists. She will update it every few months.

She will make sure the **project website** is up-to-date: that is where journalists often go for information on what a project is doing and who to contact.

To convert this strategy into a workplan, Sonia estimates the budget, staff skills, equipment and time needed for these activities.

She also draws up a calendar showing when each activity will take place and how long it will take.

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Learning objective

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to identify the main components and uses of press releases, news conferences, feature stories and interviews.

Introduction

The following are four common ways to provide content through the media:

- Press releases
- News conferences
- Feature stories
- Interview

This lesson will describe their main characteristics and how to deal with each of them.

Press releases

A **press release**, or **news release**, is a short, **1–2 page statement** written in the form of a news story.

Press releases are sent to the mass media – wire services, daily newspapers, magazines, radio or TV stations.

They are used for:

- reporting a **recent activity**;
- announcing a **future event**;
- announcing something new that may **interest people and influence them**; or
- providing **basic facts** that the media may use in reporting the story.

A press release contains information about a newsworthy activity, topic or event that the sender wants to have covered by the media.

It has a **maximum of 500 words** (2 pages, double-spaced).

Example of a press release

The Coast Development Authority is to increase the water supply and acreage under irrigation to boost food production.

Under the five-year strategic plan unveiled by the authority's managing director, Mr Nesbert Mangale, more than Sh10 billion will be required for projects to make the region self-sufficient in food.

Dr Mangale said food security would only become a reality through irrigation.

The agency intends to put 2,000 hectares under irrigation.

While the bulk of the funding is expected to come from the government, Dr Mangale said they planned to create a regional development trust fund.

This will help in mobilising resources in the region including co-funding from the Constituency Development Fund.

The 2008-2012 strategic plan laments that the region is poor despite its rich resources. Some 62 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.

The recovery plan is, however, threatened by the degradation of water sources, which could cause negative social, economic and ecological impact.

With the recent climate change, the banks of Lumi, Tsavo, Voi, Mwatsama, Ndzovuni, Mwache Marere, Sabaki and Tana rivers are likely to bust their banks.

"The authority will develop projects to protect river banks and conserve soils, water and forests", Dr Mangale said.

The plan was launched by Regional Development minister Fred Gumo who urged the authority to come up with project proposals that included the input of key ministries.

He said funding from the Treasury depended on the involvement of ministries such as Water, Agriculture, and the Environment. The proposed projects include coastal and marine management, water supply and livestock development.

Source: *The Daily Nation*, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200908190884.html>

Structure of a press release

Press releases must be brief and accurate. Editors and reporters don't have time to dig for information, so the most important information should go upfront.

They should read like a newspaper news story: the most important information goes in the first paragraph. The supporting details come later.

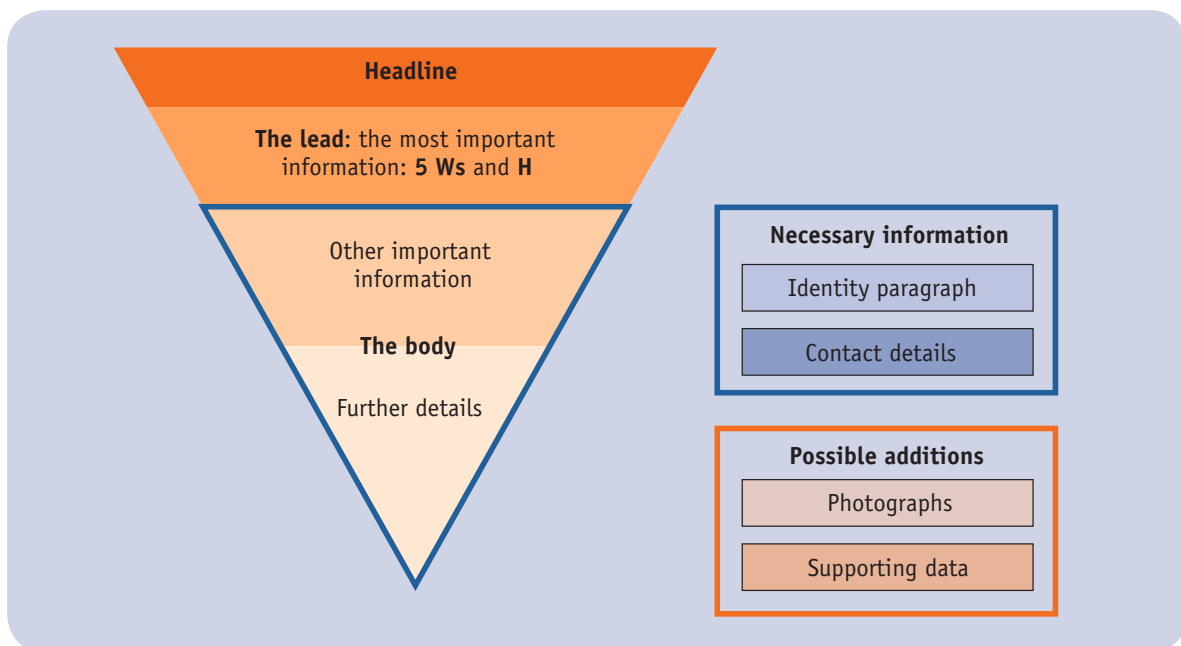
A press release contains the following elements:

- The headline or title
- The lead (the first paragraph)
- The body
- An identity paragraph
- Contact details

It may also contain:

- Photographs
- Supporting data

This style of writing is called an “**inverted pyramid**”, because it is like an upside-down pyramid.



Reasons for using an inverted pyramid structure

There are two reasons for this structure:

- **Readers tend to read headlines first, then the first paragraph.** If they find the story interesting, they then continue reading. By putting the main points right at the front, a newspaper can be sure the readers see them even if they stop reading immediately after.
- **Editors have only a limited amount of space on a page.** If there is not enough space for a complete story, the editor will cut off the bottom to make it fit. Any information there will be lost.

You should use the inverted pyramid style in news releases:

- **You save the editor work.** The editor can see the story quickly, and may decide to use the story with only a few changes. If your news release is not in inverted pyramid format, the editor may decide it is too much work to rewrite it in the right style.
- **You avoid errors.** If a lot of rewriting is needed, errors can creep in.

The following are some guidelines for writing various elements of a press release.

The headline

The **headline** should summarize the story in a **few words**.

It tells the reader what to expect in the story.

Many readers skim through newspapers reading only the headlines, so an attention-grabbing headline is important.

The headline might also be used to deliver your key message.

But remember, most of all, it should arouse the reader's curiosity.

Here are three styles of headlines and some examples:

Headline - Examples

Informational

- More money to promote good nutrition
- New pipes for the Northeastern Province
- Asian water reform urgent to prevent severe food shortage

Teasing

- Do Grenadans have the Caribbean's best diet?
- Climate change: A high price to pay

Cute

- Prime Minister goes bananas over new variety
- Trouble brewing for Colombia's coffee

It's probably easiest to write your headline last, after you have finished writing the rest of the press release.

The editor may use your headline, or (more likely) may change it.

The lead: the most important information

The lead is the first 1–2 sentences in the story.

It summarizes the story in a few words and tells the reader what the story is about. It should be short, but not too short.

News stories tend to have informational leads, which answer the **five Ws and the H**:

- **Who** is the story about?
- **What** happened?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen?

Here are three examples of informational leads.

Informational leads - Examples

Mobile phones are helping farmers in remote areas to source drought-tolerant seeds in a pilot project launched in Kenya.

What (yellow box pointing to 'Mobile phones are helping farmers in remote areas to source drought-tolerant seeds')

Where (white box pointing to 'in remote areas')

Why (blue box pointing to 'are helping')

Who (orange box pointing to 'farmers')

notes:

Who - not included in the lead, but stated in next paragraph

When - a current activity (shown by verb "are helping")

Source: Spore, http://spore.cta.int/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&lang=en&id=952&catid=7

The body

The body of the press release contains **details of your story**.

Put these in a logical order, most important first, followed by progressively less important details.

Some do's and don'ts when writing:

DO's

Write short sentences and short paragraphs. In newspapers and on websites, paragraphs are often only one sentence long. Try reading out loud what you have written: if you find yourself stumbling over a sentence or having to take a breath in the middle, try to simplify your wording.

Write for a 14-year-old. Most newspapers are written so that an educated 14-year-old can understand them. Radio and TV programmes are even easier to understand. Rewrite any jargon in plain language, then get it approved by a specialist.

Microsoft Word has a useful feature, called "Readability statistics", that checks how easy your writing is to understand. Check Word's Help function to find out how to use it.

Make your point clearly, preferably in a short, memorable statement.

Give the evidence. Back up your points by providing the most important evidence, stated in a simple way.

Be honest and accurate. Quite apart from the ethical considerations, journalists are trained to cross-check "facts", so may well find out if your story is inaccurate.

Use quotes. Use real quotes (something that someone actually said) where possible. A useful trick is to "manufacture" quotes: put what you want to say in the mouth of a staff member, like this:

"Malnutrition rates among under-fives have fallen by half over the last three years", says Osman Farouk, the project director. "That shows the mothers' education programme is working."

Another trick is to use a member of your key target audience as your spokesperson. For example, a quote from a well respected policy maker praising your programme's work may hold more clout among other policy makers. Make sure to check manufactured quotes with the source first!

Provide human interest. Give people's names and positions (e.g., "project director" or "a farmer in village X"). If you do so, get their permission first – a journalist may want to interview them. A story might feature one or two people: often a staff member and a project client or beneficiary.

KIS MII. Keep It Simple, Make It Interesting!

DON'Ts

Do not give lots of details, or hedge your statements with many "ifs" and "buts".

Avoid jargon and abbreviations. Your audience will not understand them; nor will the journalist.

Do not use lots of numbers. Three or four figures are probably enough for a press release. If you must provide extra figures (for example, data on malnutrition in several provinces), put them in a table at the end so the journalists can choose the ones they want to use.

Do not use bullets or lists. Newspaper articles very rarely use them.

Do not mention too many people or organizations. Readers find lots of names confusing.

Don't make your project too prominent. Editors and journalists will ignore material they think is merely public relations for your project or organization. They want facts and objective information, not a promotional piece.

Press releases as announcements

A press release may be a simple **announcement** of a forthcoming event, such as a conference or book launch. Such press releases should include:

- The date, time and place of the event
- A description of the event
- Background information: why is the event taking place?
- Information about the host project or organization
- An invitation to attend
- Contact details for further information

If there is to be a speech or award made, the press release may contain a copy of the speech or details of the awardee. If this is to be kept secret until the event itself, mark the release clearly “Do not use before...” (and give the date and time).

Don't start with your Director's name: most editors will change this.

Using the right style

Many newspapers and magazines follow strict rules for spelling, punctuation, etc.

The most common style guides in English are:

- **The Associated Press stylebook** (US usage), <https://www.apstylebook.com/>
- **The Times online style guide** (British usage): http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/tools_and_services/specials/style_guide/
- **The Economist style guide** (British usage): <http://www.economist.com/research/styleguide/>

If you write a lot of press releases, you should find out what style your main newspaper and magazine contacts use, and follow their style.

Necessary information

Identity paragraph

At the end of each news release, you need to include a standard identity paragraph which describes your organization and what it does.

Avoid self-promotional phrases like “the leader in water management” or “the best-known advocate for land rights”.

A hypothetical organizational identity paragraph and contact details

The Northeastern Food Security Project operates in five districts of the Northeastern Province in Kenzania. Funded by the World Food Programme, the project helps local people build irrigation and domestic water supply systems, promotes home gardening, and provides education on nutrition and marketing.

Contact: Amina Hassan

Tel. +123-456 789

Email amina@nefsp.org

Website: www.nefsp.org

Contact details

This is where the journalist can contact you for more information. It should have the names, telephone numbers and email addresses of your organization's press officer and the staff members named in the release.

Possible additions

Photographs

If you have a suitable photograph, include it with the press release: it will increase the chances of the release being used, and of readers actually reading it.

Write a **caption** for the photograph, for example to name the people it shows and say where they are and what they are doing.

Photographs are usually sent **digitally**. They should be good enough quality (at least 300 dots per inch, dpi), or at least 3 megapixels for a standard-sized photo. Send photos as separate files, not embedded in a Microsoft Word document (which can make them impossible to convert into the right format).

If you do not have a photo that is good enough, **don't use one**.

Supporting details

If you have a technical subject or one that uses a lot of numbers, consider providing these details in a separate **fact sheet**, perhaps as a table or graph.

For example, you might provide a table of malnutrition rates in each province in the country. The journalists in each province can then use the numbers for their area.

Logistics of press releases

You can **distribute press releases** in various ways. Here are six:

- As hardcopies (printed double spaced, on your organization's letterhead), sent to media offices by post
- As hardcopies given to journalists at events or as part of a press kit
- Faxed to a media office
- Emailed to a media office
- Uploaded onto your website
- Distributed via email or web-based networks.

Ask your media contacts how they want to receive press releases from you – by mail, fax or email, and to what address?

News conferences

At a **news conference**, or **press conference**, you invite a group of journalists to hear a prepared statement and ask questions.

There may be one or two speakers (often the organization's director or a specialist on a particular subject), or a panel.

You should consider calling a news conference:

- **To make important announcements**, such as a technological breakthrough, a major expansion, or a merger with another organization.
- **To respond to criticism** that has appeared in the media.
- **To make high-profile statements**, for example at an international conference being covered by the media.

There are two main reasons for holding a news conference:

- **To save time:** you can answer a lot of questions at the same time and avoid many individual phone calls.
- **To attract media attention** to something that journalists were not interested in before.

News conferences can be very useful. But they can also be **difficult** and **risky**.

What if no one attends? What if a journalist asks aggressive questions about something you don't want to talk about?

You need to plan news conferences and manage them carefully.

You should **think like a media editor**. Ask yourself:

- Why should I send a reporter?
- What kind of story will the reporter get?

If the answers are not positive, then don't call a news conference.

A number of activities must be done **before, during and after a news conference**. The following are some guidelines for managing each of these stages.

Before the news conference

Plan carefully

You can hold a news conference indoors or outside. If the location is outdoors, make sure there is an alternative if it starts to rain.

Provide a speakers' table, podium or platform so everyone can see and hear the speakers.

Check if there is a good sound system for speakers and journalists' questions, along with audiovisual projection and recording equipment. Make sure there is electricity with enough multi-way adapters.

Provide enough chairs for the people you expect to attend, and have sufficient refreshments and enough serving staff.

Check the venue beforehand

1–2 hours before the start, check the venue. Is the equipment working? Is everything ready?

Cater to the press

Know their deadlines and constraints. If the announcement is aimed at the evening TV news, don't call a news conference for 4 pm. The journalists will not have time to get back to the office and submit a story before the deadline.

Back at the office

Have someone to respond to phone calls during the news conference. Reporters who cannot attend may call to ask for press kits.

During the news conference

Make people feel welcome

Have enough staff to manage the number of visitors you expect. Give them name badges to wear. Greet journalists as they arrive. Have them sign a sign-up sheet with columns for phone numbers and email addresses, before you give them the press kit. Exchange business cards – you will be able to contact them in the future.

Manage time

Allow time at the beginning for latecomers to arrive. Provide snacks and refreshments, but make your announcement within 30 minutes of the starting time. If you wait too long, the busiest reporters may have left.

Provide a press kit

This may consist of a folder containing the following:

- Copies of the speeches or statements to be made
- Photographs of the organization's building, the director or staff involved
- An organizational brochure
- A factsheet about the project
- Information about other relevant activities or products
- Perhaps your most recent annual report.
- Have more than enough materials to go around: journalists are competitors, so do not expect them to share.

Use visuals

Prepare visuals (charts, diagrams, photos) for use during the presentation. Make them large, with big letters (visible from the back of the room) and colourful graphics. Display them so cameras can zoom into them.

Consider providing video footage as part of the press kit, or offering to take journalists around the site so they can shoot extra photos (for example, of one of the speakers in a crop field).

Think of good places for photographs – in an experimental plot or laboratory, or with a group of farmers in the field.

Stage-manage the presentations

Keep the number of presenters to a minimum. Make sure their prepared remarks are short and to the point. Put a large-type name card in front of each speaker. Have someone introduce each speaker and perhaps manage the questions afterwards. If the speakers are inexperienced, get them to practise beforehand.

Manage the questions

Have a facilitator chair the news conference and invite questions from individual journalists. Ensure that the speaker does not get into an argument with a journalist. It is normal to allow one question and a follow-up from a journalist before moving to the next question. Make sure that as many different journalists as possible have a chance to ask questions.

Keep it short

45 minutes is long enough for a statement and questions. Many news conferences at larger events (such as international conferences) take place during the lunch break.

After the news conference

At the end

Thank everyone for coming. Have the speakers stay a short time for follow-up interviews – broadcast journalists in particular may want an opportunity to ask questions one-on-one.

Update your mailing lists

Use the sign-up sheet and business cards you have collected.

Respond to further questions

Journalists may call with further questions and requests for clarification.

Follow up contacts

News conferences are a good way to meet and build relationships with journalists. You can find out what they are interested in and provide them with new story ideas.

Feature stories

A **feature story** is a journalistic article that covers a subject in some depth.

It is normally longer than a news article and does not have to follow an inverted pyramid structure.

Feature stories are common in the **inside pages of newspapers**, in newspaper **supplements**, and in **magazines**.

They may be directly related to a news event, only somewhat related, or not related at all.

Types of feature stories

There are **many types** of feature stories, and many ways of classifying them. Here are some that are useful in writing about food security, and some ideas on how you could use each one.

Types of feature stories

Backgrounder

Accompanies the main news story. It gives the background information necessary to understand the main story. It may appear as a “sidebar” (a small article in a box) next to the main story. Backgrounders often use one of these formats:

- **Background briefing format.** A statement of the facts, in a logical and easy-to-understand order.
- **Question-and-answer format.** A series of questions and answers.

Biographical profile

An article about an individual, like a mini-biography. It may contain multiple perspectives (for example, interviews with various people who know the individual).

How you could use it: Do a profile about a local innovator who developed a technique your project is promoting.

Colour story

Portrays a scene, or a “slice of life”, or conveys the atmosphere or “feel” of event.

How you could use it: Describe a day in the life of a refugee in a camp, showing how residents cook, wash, eat, feed their children, and get food. Show how your project is helping them improve their lives.

Types of feature stories

Column

A regular feature in a newspaper or magazine, written by one author. It may show a combination of knowledge, wit and personality. There are five main types of columns:

- **Service and advice** – like a regular lifestyle feature (e.g., on gardening)
- **Gossip** – who said what, what’s “hot”
- **Pundit** – gives an opinion rather than trying to be objective
- **Personal** – any topic the columnist wants to talk about
- **Specialist** – expert advice on a particular topic

How you could use it: Persuade a newspaper or magazine to let you write a regular column about food security in your area. In your project newsletter, write a column of nutrition tips using local ingredients.

Human interest story

Focuses on a person or group. It may focus on a dramatic event or difficult situation, and show how the person or group has overcome this.

How you could use it: Tell the story of how a widow has managed to keep her late husband’s land despite local customs that would have given the land to his relatives.

Interview piece

Confined to a single interview with a prominent or interesting person. It is often in question-and-answer format. It may also include background information about the person.

How you could use it: Interview one of your staff members about how they found a solution to a particular problem.

Investigative feature

An in-depth study of a topic or issue, giving the background and different points of view. It is well-researched, and contains revelations or controversy.

How you could use it: Show how the increased production of biofuels is having unintended consequences on food prices and production.

Types of feature stories

Lifestyle feature

A service story, or “news you can use”. It gives the reader information about life and how to live it better.

Here are three major types of lifestyle features:

- **List** (e.g. “Six nutritious vegetables to grow”).
- **Issue** (e.g. “Vegetable growing for a better diet”).
- **How-to** (e.g. “How to grow carrots”).

How you could use it: Find a topic you deal with and look at it from your audience’s point of view. Then write up advice on how they can deal with the issue.

News feature

The most common type of feature in newspapers. It starts with the news, then explains why the events occurred or examines their implications.

How you could use it: Show how a national news event (such as a drought or flood) affects people in your project area, and show how your project is helping people deal with the aftermath.

Describe the government agencies that are involved in making decisions about food imports.

Project profile

A description of a project, initiative or activity. It typically describes a problem, then shows how the project has solved it, or is helping to overcome it.

How you could use it: Describe a food security issue and show how your project has successfully dealt with it. If you are submitting the story to the mass media, be careful not to make it appear too promotional or self-serving.

Review

A review of a book or film.

How you could use it: Write a description of a book or guide that your project has produced, saying what is in it and who might find it useful. Write a critique of a government policy, and show how it can be improved.

Writing a feature story

Writing a feature story consists of the following steps:

- Developing story ideas
- Gathering information
- Finding a focus
- Organizing the information
- Writing the lead
- Writing a draft
- Reworking the draft

Let’s go step by step...

Developing story ideas

Looking for **ideas** for a feature story? Here are some questions to ask:

- What interesting thing has happened in your project?
- What problem do people in your area face?
- What topic interests your audience?
- What topic is in the news now? How does your project relate to it?
- What bigger issue does your organization want to focus on?
- What new thing do you have to say?

Gathering information

Once you have chosen your topic, start **collecting information**.

Read reports, and visit the field to observe and ask questions.

Make lots of notes, especially of interesting details that might add colour to your story.

Soak up information like a sponge.

While you are gathering information, think of what interesting angles you can use in the story.

Finding a focus

The focus is the point you are trying to make in your story.

It is what the story is all about. It answers the question “**So what?**”.

Everything else in the story depends on it. Establishing a focus helps you decide what bits of information are relevant and which should be dropped.

Examples

For example, you may want to make the point that **villagers can plan a new irrigation system themselves**. Your story would tell how the villagers got organized, how they made decisions, and how they put their plan into effect. Or, you might decide to focus on the **impact of the new system**: people can now grow more crops, and their standard of living has improved. Your story would then describe how the irrigation system has done this.

Organizing the information

You need to organize the information around the focus. You should decide what bits of information to use, and what is irrelevant.

Develop an outline that shows the order the information will appear.

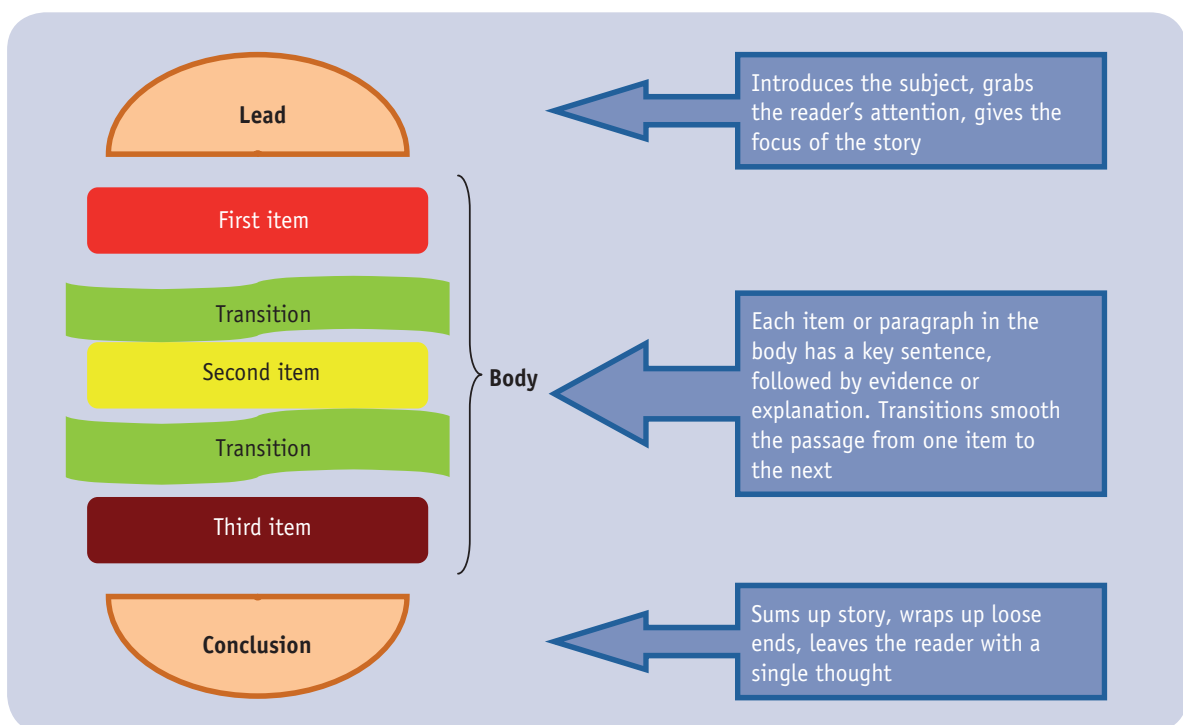
Feature stories may have many different possible structures. Here we look at three possibilities:

- the hamburger,
- problem–action–result and
- lead–quotes–conclusion.

However, many other story structures are possible. Check articles in newspapers and magazines and see if you can spot the structure each story follows.

The hamburger

The hamburger is the simplest structure for a feature story. It consists of three parts, like a hamburger: a beginning (the introduction or lead), middle (the body), and the end (the conclusion).



More information: <http://www.gc.maricopa.edu/english/essay/>

Problem–action–results

This structure is useful if you are describing **a project or other intervention**.

It consists of three main parts:

- a statement of the **problem** that was faced;
- a description of the **action** taken to overcome the problem; and
- a summary of what happened as a **result**.

One way to start writing a story like this is to write three sentences, one each for the problem, action and results.

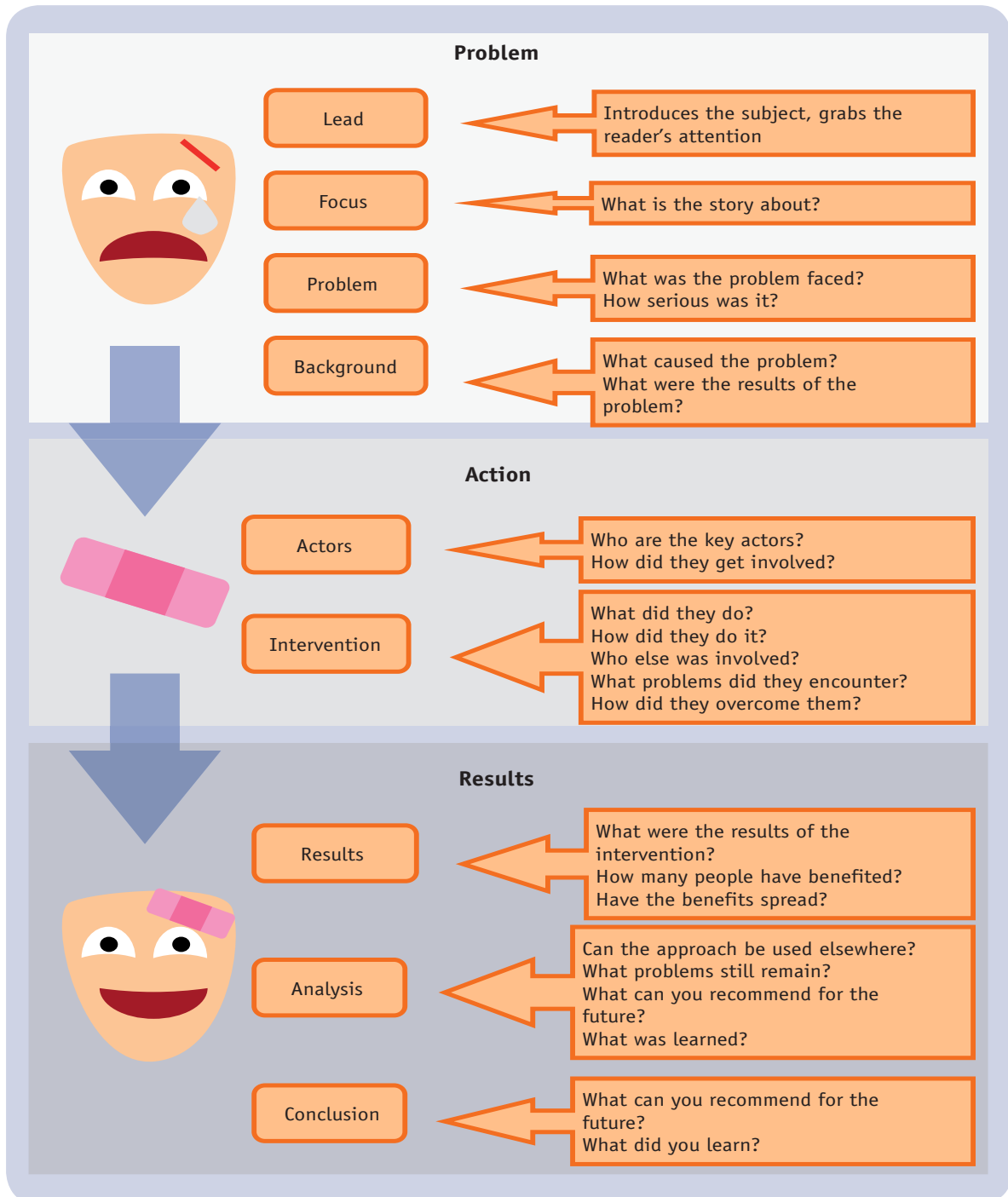
Here are some examples:

Examples

Problem	Farmers in Zimbabwe find it difficult to sell goats, so they are not interested in raising them
Action	The project has introduced an auction system that gives farmers a good price for their animals
Results	As a result, farmers in 10 villages are now investing in goat raising
Problem	Schools in District X lack basic facilities such as classrooms, desks and textbooks
Action	The project is encouraging parents and local people to get involved in managing the schools
Results	In five schools, parent associations are now helping build classrooms and raising money to buy textbooks
Problem	People in District Y defecate in the open, spreading diseases
Action	Another donor has found a way to persuade them to build and use pit latrines
Results	Our project will use this method to promote latrines in 50 villages

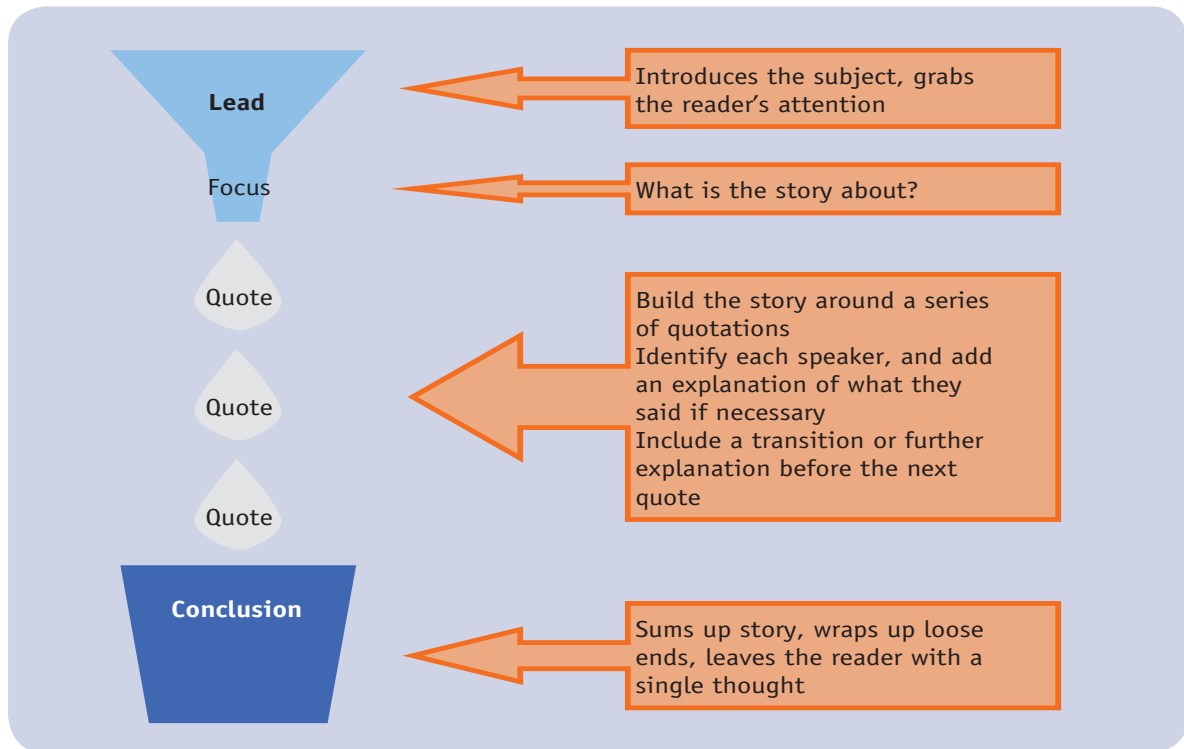
You can then expand each of the three sentences to provide more information. You can add sub-elements to each part:

- **Problem:** Lead, Focus, Problem, Background
- **Action:** Actors, Intervention
- **Results:** Results, Analysis, Conclusion



Lead-quotes-conclusion

This structure is useful if you have good interview material with one or more people.



How to get your feature story into the media?

You can prepare a **press release** following a feature story format.

Be sure to label the piece as a “feature” (perhaps in an accompanying message).

The media like to have **exclusive rights** to feature stories – so consider sending it to just one journalist or editor rather than to your whole media mailing list.

Feature stories on radio and TV

Feature stories are not confined to newspapers and magazines.

Lifestyle and current affairs programmes, documentaries, interviews and magazine programmes on **radio and TV** also use a feature story format.

The mass media are much more likely to carry a feature story if they are already **familiar with you** and your organization.

Rather than spending a lot of time and effort to produce a feature story and then have it rejected, **try first contacting the media** with a story idea and offer to write a story (or offer to identify people to interview).

Other uses of feature stories

You can use feature stories in many other ways:

- Annual reports. Many annual reports consist of a mix of feature stories and technical information.
- Case studies. Feature stories are very similar to case studies that appear in books and specialist publications and that are used in training. (Case studies are more analytical and systematic, and they tend to have a more formal structure.)
- Donor reports. Feature stories can add colour and human interest to donor reports.
- Newsletters. Features make good articles for newsletters aimed at staff and clients. People especially like to see their own name in print – but make sure that the article is not critical of their work.
- Public relations materials. You can use feature stories in brochures, handouts, letters to contributors, and many other types of materials to publicize your work.
- Video. You can convert a feature story into a video for use in training and publicity activities.
- Websites. Features can be a valuable addition to your project website.

You may have to adapt your feature story somewhat to suit each of these formats. Do not be afraid to reuse a good story several times in different forms.

Interviews

Interviews are a standard way for all kinds of journalists (print, radio, TV and web, as well as freelancers) to collect information.

You might also want to conduct interviews yourself with staff members or clients to gather material for recordings or publications.

Interviews are normally **one-on-one**, with a single reporter posing questions to one person. But similar techniques apply to other situations, such as group interviews, panel discussions, debates, and question-and-answer sessions during news conferences.

You may have to deal with print, radio, telephone and TV interviews.

The following are some guidelines on how to prepare for being interviewed, what to do during the interview, and how to control the interview.

Preparing for the interview

The best interviews are where both the interviewer and interviewee are **well prepared**.

Here are some tips on how to prepare for an interview:

- **Find out what the interviewer wants to ask you about.** Give him or her background information (articles, press releases, brochures) so he or she can read up beforehand.
- **Select the image and a short specific message you want to convey,** and prepare

some suitable phrases, words and issues. Even if the interview is about a different topic, think of ways you can relate it to something you want to talk about. Repeat your key message several times.

- **Get information about the reporter:** his or her views and interviewing style.
- **Be up-to-date** on events relating to your organization – the reporter may ask you about them.
- **Anticipate the questions the reporter may ask**, and practise your responses.
- **Choose the right location.** Find a suitable place to conduct the interview, free of disturbances (especially for radio and TV interviews). Turn off your mobile phone and ask not to be disturbed.

Surviving the interview

During the interview...






- **Answer the questions.** Listen to the interviewer's questions carefully and answer them directly, confidently, and in few words. If a question is unclear, ask for a clarification, or rephrase it before answering.
 - **Be natural.** Look the interviewer in the eyes; forget the microphone or audio recorder. Speak clearly and in a relaxed way. State your ideas clearly, using simple words and short sentences. Do not mumble or use jargon.
 - **Don't be afraid of silence.** Leaving a long pause is a common technique reporters use to get you to say something. Just wait for the next question.
 - **Avoid giving figures.** They may obscure your message, be misheard or misquoted, or be open to dispute. If they are needed, write them down or give the interviewer a factsheet.
 - **Correct errors.** If you or the interviewer make an inaccurate statement, correct it immediately.
 - **Don't argue.** If the interviewer is argumentative, you run the risk of sounding hostile (the recording of the interview may be edited before it is broadcast). Stay calm and don't argue back.
 - **If you don't know the answer.** Say you don't know. Refer the interviewer to someone who knows, or offer to check the information and get back to the interviewer later. Never say "No comment", but give a valid reason for not answering.
 - **Don't say anything off the record.** Assume that anything you say (even before or after the interview proper) may get reported. Some reporters suggest going "off
-

the record” in the hope of getting you to divulge sensitive information. Never give information off the record: some reporters misuse the information, and it may get traced back to you. Don’t say anything you don’t want attributed to you.

► **Keep the ultimate audience in mind.** The interviewer is only a conduit.

Controlling the interview

Here are five **techniques** you can use to **control an interview**.

Technique	What to do	Examples
 <p>Repetition</p>	<p>Repeat your message to help the interviewer and audience remember it</p> <p>State main message several times</p> <p>Vary the words a little</p>	<p><i>“Let me say that another way...”</i></p> <p><i>“I’d like to repeat what I said earlier...”</i></p> <p><i>“I think we’re getting away from the main point, which is...”</i></p>
 <p>Bridging</p>	<p>Use a phrase to “bridge” to your message</p> <p>Deal with question, then follow with the message</p>	<p><i>“You’re correct...(answer) but in addition, let me say...” (bridge)</i></p> <p><i>“That’s not 100%... (answer) let me explain...” (bridge)</i></p> <p><i>“Well, that’s the way it used to be (answer), but here’s what we do now...” (bridge)</i></p>
 <p>Flagging</p>	<p>Emphasise the most important points</p>	<p><i>“The most important thing you have to remember is...”</i></p> <p><i>“We’ve talked about a lot of things today, but I think it comes down to these three main points...”</i></p> <p><i>“Finally, let me make one thing perfectly clear...”</i></p>
 <p>Hooking</p>	<p>Add on an additional bit of information to attract a follow-up question – like a fishing hook with bait</p>	<p><i>“We are currently developing a major project with mothers in.....” (reporter may ask for more info)</i></p> <p><i>“I believe that the countries in the Caribbean can overcome their nutrition problems” (reporter may ask how)</i></p>
 <p>Sound bites</p>	<p>Find a memorable phrase, or a short, snappy summary of your main message</p> <p>The reporter may well use this as a quote or use it in a broadcast</p>	<p><i>“In this project we have three priorities: education, education and education”</i></p> <p><i>“Local people should have the say, not someone sitting behind a desk”</i></p> <p><i>“In this area, water is life. We are trying to help people get water while they are still alive”</i></p>

After the interview

After the interview...

- Make sure the audio recorder and camera are **turned off** (some reporters keep them running in the hope of recording something interesting).
- **Thank the reporter.**
- Tell him or her **how to reach you** if more information is needed. Offer to introduce the reporter to colleagues who can provide details.
- Offer to **check the story** for factual errors only. The reporter may not agree to this, but some appreciate the opportunity to do so.
- Ask **when and where** the story is to be printed or broadcast.

When the story appears in the media...

- Record the broadcast or collect the newspaper cuttings.
- If the story is **positive**, consider sending it to key stakeholders.
- If story is fairly **accurate**, don't complain about minor errors.
- If story **very inaccurate**, ask the editor or producer for a correction.
- Keep in touch with the reporter: add him or her to your mailing list for news releases, and offer to provide information on other stories.

Print, telephone, radio and TV interviews

Print interviews

Interviews for newspapers, magazines and websites are generally longer than radio or TV interviews. A printed article can have more words than a broadcast interview.

This gives you an opportunity to say more about your issue or your organization, and you can give more details.

Tips for dealing with print interviews

The following are a few suggestions for dealing with print interview:

- Ask beforehand **where and when** the story will appear. This will help you pitch your story: for example, you can give a reporter from a specialist publication more technical detail than one from a general magazine.
- The reporter may **record** what you say. Don't be afraid of the audio recorder – it increases the chances that you will be quoted correctly. If you are dealing with a controversial subject, consider bringing your own recorder so you can verify what was said.
- Bring along some **written facts and figures** to refer to, and give a copy to the reporter.
- Offer to **check the text** for factual errors before it is published.
- Ask the reporter to **send you a copy** of the finished article, or to let you know where and when it appears.

Radio interviews

Interviews for the radio may be on-air (live) or recorded, to be aired at a later date. The recording may be used as is, or it may be edited.

They may take place in a studio, on location, inside or outside (for example, in your office) or over the telephone.

Tips for dealing with radio interviews

Before the interview...

- **Find out the interview situation.** What is the location? Is it live or recorded? (Hint: If you cannot find a quiet room for the interview, try sitting with the reporter inside a parked car. Close the windows to shut out outside noise.)
- **Find out the topic and reason for the interview.** That will let you prepare some messages and phrases beforehand.
- **Find out who the audience is.** Is the interview to be broadcast on a farming programme, a programme aimed at mothers, or a news programme? Then, during the interview, you can imagine you are talking to the audience and pitch your message accordingly.
- **Set yourself at ease.** The reporter may chat with you first. This is a good opportunity to give the reporter some ideas about what to talk about.
- **Get familiar with the microphone** and other equipment (audio recorder, headphones). The reporter may ask you to do a sound check (to check the audio recording levels).

During the interview...

- **Control your voice.** Open with a confident voice, and do not speak in a monotone. Vary the speed, tone and volume of your voice.
- **Use the interviewer's name** in some answers: "Well, James, that's one question I can answer."
- **Put your key messages** in several short responses (combine repetition and sound bites). If the recording is edited, you hope that some of these messages will remain.
- **Use conversational language.** Avoid long, rambling responses. Use short sentences, and make sure you state your message clearly.
- **Steer the conversation.** If the reporter asks a question you could answer with just "yes" or "no", expand on your response. For example, "Yes, but that also means that..." Use the techniques of repetition, bridging, flagging, hooking and sound bites to steer the conversation.
- **Don't mumble.** Sit or stand upright, and keep your hands away from your face. Don't say "um" or "er". Avoid quirks of speech such as "like", "you see" or "if you know what I mean".
- **Don't be afraid of silence.** Clever interviewers may create silences, to lure you into talking. You don't need to fill gap. Let the interviewer break the silence.
- **Avoid distractions.** Disconnect your phone and ask your colleagues not to disturb you. Don't fidget, hit the table, jangle coins or click your pen.

Telephone interviews

If a radio reporter calls and asks you to give a telephone interview immediately, you may...

- Ask what they want to talk about, then say that there's someone with you and you'll call back in a few minutes: this gives you time to prepare.
- Make sure nothing will disturb you: close the office door and turn off a noisy air conditioner or fan.

TV interviews

Television interviews are like radio interviews, but now you can be seen as well as heard, so your appearance and actions are important.

If the interview is in the studio, get there early so you are familiar with the set and camera positions.

Think "the audience is interested in this topic". If you think they are interested, you will be able to present it in an interesting, lively way.

Tips for dealing with TV interviews

Here are some do's and don'ts for television interviews.

DON'T

DO

Clothing

Don't wear white: it can reflect the light.
 Avoid unusual styles or vivid colours.
 Don't wear loud checks or stripes, or small prints.
 Don't wear sunglasses or light-sensitive glasses.
 Don't wear rings, bracelets, necklaces, or flashy watches.

Dress conservatively, in solid colours.
 Make sure your jacket pockets are empty: no bulky items.
 Keep your jacket pulled straight so there are no wrinkles.

Body language

Don't slouch.
 Avoid sweeping arm movements or other eye-distracting movements.
 Don't fidget: swivelling your chair, playing with your pencil, drumming with your fingers.

Look directly at interviewer, not at camera (unless told to do so).
 Sit erect.
 Lean forward slightly from time to time to give the impression that you are alert, in control and interested in the questions.
 Use gestures to emphasize something.

It is difficult to do a good interview. So it's a good idea to practise.

You may want to practise delivering your message in front of a mirror, or record yourself on video.

Another way is getting a colleague to interview you and asking him/her how you might improve.

After an interview, it may be useful to get a copy of the recording and go through it critically to see how you can improve.

If you anticipate that others will be in the news, you should help them prepare, and offer to give them some practice.

Summary

Press releases, news conferences, features stories and interviews are common ways to provide content through the media.

A **press release**, or **news release**, is a short, 1–2 page statement written in the form of a news story.

At a **news conference**, or **press conference**, you invite a group of journalists to hear a prepared statement and ask questions.

A **feature story** is a journalistic article that covers a subject in some depth.

Interviews are a standard way for all kinds of journalists (print, radio, TV and web, as well as freelancers) to collect information.