

The Elements of News Release Style

Your executive team includes the Chairman of the Board, Chief Executive Officer, Chief Strategy Officer, and Chief Marketing Officer of a company that sells your favorite good or service, such as movies, video games, books, skateboards, surfboards, a type of food, music from a certain artist, or something else. You have a new product—a good or a service—and you must write a news release to let the world know about it!

(For an example of a news release, see the “News Release” headlined “Amazon to Launch Library Lending for Kindle Books,” on the next page.)

The good news is your staff has drafted the news release. The bad news is that it has three sentences that fail to communicate your message as clearly as possible. Each sentence (which you will make up) violates a different rule of “The Elements of Press Release Style.” Your job is to:

- 1) Figure out what good or service you’re selling.
- 2) Write three sentences to promote that good or service, each of which must violate at least one rule. (One of the rules must be the same number as your group; your team can choose the two other rules from the list of 10.)
- 3) Rewrite each of the bad sentences sentence to comply with the rule.

You may use dictionaries, thesauruses, and one netbook per group to help. Put your sentences—one per slide—in a Google presentation and share it paul@paulwilkinson.net so your executive team can share them with our marketing department—the rest of our class. Put the bad sentence first and then the improved sentence. We will give you feedback on whether and how you improved the sentence.

A few hints:

- You and your executive team only need to write six sentences: Three “bad” sentences and three “better” sentences, such as those shown in “The Elements of Press Release Style.”
- Be sure to show **both** how the rule is violated and it can be applied.
- Pick a product, good, or service that you like! It’s much easier to sell something if you like it.
- Work quickly; executive teams will be required to present their “bad” and “better” sentences as soon as possible. Time is money!

News Release

Amazon to Launch Library Lending for Kindle Books

Customers will be able to borrow Kindle books from over 11,000 local libraries to read on Kindle and free Kindle reading apps

Whispersyncing of notes, highlights and last page read to work for Kindle library books

SEATTLE, Apr 20, 2011 (BUSINESS WIRE) -- (NASDAQ: AMZN)-- Amazon today announced Kindle Library Lending, a new feature launching later this year that will allow Kindle customers to borrow Kindle books from over 11,000 libraries in the United States. Kindle Library Lending will be available for all generations of Kindle devices and free Kindle reading apps.

"We're excited that millions of Kindle customers will be able to borrow Kindle books from their local libraries," said Jay Marine, Director, Amazon Kindle. "Customers tell us they love Kindle for its Pearl e-ink display that is easy to read even in bright sunlight, up to a month of battery life, and Whispersync technology that synchronizes notes, highlights and last page read between their Kindle and free Kindle apps."

Customers will be able to check out a Kindle book from their local library and start reading on any Kindle device or free Kindle app for Android, iPad, iPod touch, iPhone, PC, Mac, BlackBerry, or Windows Phone. If a Kindle book is checked out again or that book is purchased from Amazon, all of a customer's annotations and bookmarks will be preserved.

"We're doing a little something extra here," Marine continued. "Normally, making margin notes in library books is a big no-no. But we're extending our Whispersync technology so that you can highlight and add margin notes to Kindle books you check out from your local library. Your notes will not show up when the next patron checks out the book. But if you check out the book again, or subsequently buy it, your notes will be there just as you left them, perfectly Whispersynced."

With Kindle Library Lending, customers can take advantage of all of the unique features of Kindle and Kindle books, including:

- Paper-like Pearl electronic-ink display
- No glare even in bright sunlight
- Lighter than a paperback - weighs just 8.5 ounces and holds up to 3,500 books
- Up to one month of battery life with wireless off
- Read everywhere with free Kindle apps for Android, iPad, iPod touch, iPhone, PC, Mac, BlackBerry and Windows Phone
- Whispersync technology wirelessly sync your books, notes, highlights, and last page read across Kindle and free Kindle reading apps
- Real Page Numbers - easily reference passages with page numbers that correspond to actual print editions

About Amazon.com

Amazon.com, Inc. (NASDAQ: AMZN), a Fortune 500 company based in Seattle, opened on the World Wide Web in July 1995 and today offers Earth's Biggest Selection. Amazon.com, Inc. seeks to be Earth's most customer-centric company, where customers can find and discover anything they might want to buy online, and endeavors to offer its customers the lowest possible prices.

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TIMOTHY
M C S W E E N E Y ' S

RACEHORSE IS NAMED VIETNAMESE FOOD CART.



THE ELEMENTS OF PRESS
RELEASE STYLE.

BY [GARY KLIEN](#)

1. Omit needless words.

Vigorous writing is precise. A press release should contain no unnecessary words, for the same reason a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.

BAD

“The company regrets its role in this major environmental catastrophe, and we are fully committed to making the community whole.”

BETTER

“This environmental catastrophe is regrettable.”

2. Avoid the use of qualifiers.

“Rather,” “very,” “little,” “pretty”—these are the leeches that infest the pond of prose, sucking the blood of press releases.

BAD

“The chief executive officer's quite reasonable salary and benefits package reflects the rather challenging economic climate, and the highly competitive market for top-flight management talent, under which the compensation committee was forced to operate.”

BETTER

“The chief executive officer is undercompensated for the market.”

3. Place yourself in the background.

Write in a way that draws the reader's attention to the substance of the press release, rather than to the mood and temper of management.

BAD

“This wrongful death lawsuit is nothing more than a publicity stunt by bloodsucking extortionist trial attorneys for the benefit of their shiftless enablers in the news media.”

BETTER

“While our thoughts and prayers are with Timmy's family at this difficult time, their claim is baseless and without merit.”

4. Place the emphatic words of a sentence at the end.

BAD

“Aggressive outsourcing resulted in a 90 percent reduction in operating expenses, but after-tax profits still fell 37 percent year-over-year.”

BETTER

“While profit fell short of expectations, our proactive restructuring initiative nearly doubled productivity.”

5. Do not overwrite.

Rich, ornate prose is hard to digest, generally unwholesome, and sometimes nauseating. It is always a good idea to reread your writing later and ruthlessly delete the excess.

BAD

“The leadership is confident that its careful and prudent approach to the issue will increase prosperity for more American families in the long term.”

BETTER

“We gutted the job-killing entitlement.”

6. Do not overstate.

When you overstate, the press will constantly be on guard, and everything that preceded your overstatement as well as everything that follows it will be suspect in their minds.

BAD

“The local news and commentary site receives an estimated 2 million page views per minute, making our \$400 million investment a veritable bargain for our stakeholders.”

BETTER

“The blog deal is a stock play.”

7. Revise and rewrite.

Revising is part of writing. Remember, it is no sign of weakness or defeat that your press release ends up in need of major surgery. This is a common occurrence in all writing, and among the best writers.

BAD

“Our internal investigation has pinpointed the blast origin to a defective part slated for replacement in 1975.”

BETTER

“We are investigating the possibility of sabotage by eco-terrorists.”

8. Avoid fancy words.

Do not be tempted by a twenty-dollar word when there is a ten-center handy, ready and able. Anglo-Saxon is a livelier tongue than Latin, so use Anglo-Saxon words. In this, as in so many matters pertaining to style, one's ear must be one's guide.

BAD

“We are carefully monitoring the FDA's response to widespread Clostridium botulinum and Listeria monocytogenes contamination in our products, and are deeply troubled by reports of acute gastrointestinal hemorrhaging.”

BETTER

“We stand by our line of organic, free-trade products.”

9. Do not take shortcuts at the cost of clarity.

Do not use initials for the names of organizations or movements unless you are certain the initials will be readily understood.

BAD

“We are postponing our IPO in light of the SEC and CFTC investigations.”

BETTER

“We are proud to be a privately held concern.”

10. Do not affect a breezy manner.

The volume of press statements is enormous these days, and much of it has a sort of windiness about it. The breezy style is often the work of an egocentric person who imagines that everything that comes to his mind creates high spirits and carries the day.

BAD

“Mission accomplished.”

BETTER

“We are confident the humanitarian intervention was constitutionally sound, and deeply regret the civilian casualties resulting from our inadvertent annihilation of the farming village.”