



# AMERICAN ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

## Press Releases in a Nutshell

A good press release should read like a good news story, with the important new results in the first paragraph.

Don't "dumb down" the science, but do use clear and straightforward language rather than the technical jargon and equations you'd put in a research paper.

Establish the context within which your result is important/significant. Answer the question, "So what?"

Provide a few "quotable quotes" that could be extracted for use in a news story.

Be concise and to the point. Use "inverted pyramid" style, i.e., essential information at the top, useful information next, and "nice to have if there's room" information last.

Consult with your institution's public-information officer(s) and any relevant observatory, mission, and funding-agency PIOs — they're there to help you and prefer to coordinate their efforts.

### Elements of a Press Release

1. Release date (usually today's date) or very clear embargo statement (date, time, time zone).
2. URL of online release text/images/videos (if password protected, provide access info).
3. "Hed" (headline) that is short and pithy, but not cryptic.
4. "Dek" (subhead) that complements the headline and summarizes the story in at most one sentence.
5. "Lede" (opening) paragraph with who (principal names and affiliations), what the main result is, where and when the result is being presented (e.g., at the AAS meeting), and why it's significant/important.
6. Subsequent paragraphs with details, explanation, background, etc., with acronyms spelled out on first use, familiar units of measure, etc., ideally totaling no more than 1,000 words (including the lede).
7. Optional (items a and b are always helpful; some PIOs prefer to avoid items c and d):
  - a. a quote elaborating on why the result is significant;
  - b. a simple factoid that relates the result to something more familiar, e.g., "The amount of water we've detected in the nebula is enough to fill all of Earth's oceans 15 times;"
  - c. a "we could be wrong" statement of your confidence in the result and noting that, like all new findings, your work requires independent confirmation; and/or
  - d. some mention of relevant/important prior findings by other scientists.
8. If the result is featured in a paper or abstract, include the reference and, if it's online, the URL.
9. Be sure to credit your funding source(s).
10. Contact information, first for your institution's public-information officer, then for you and perhaps one or two key colleagues. Include name, affiliation, phone number (preferably cell), and email address.
11. Have your PIO send your press release (or, at least, the headline and URL) to [press-release@aaas.org](mailto:press-release@aaas.org) for promotion via the AAS website and @AAS\_Press Twitter account.

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