How to get your press release in the Denton Record-Chronicle (or any other local media)

**Introduction**

Communication is the key to understanding. The more skillfully you communicate, the better you will be understood. Nobody understands that better than journalists. That’s the work they do every day.

Journalists also understand that it can be difficult and intimidating for first-timers to get their news in the paper or on the radio or television.

Journalists choose their words carefully to make sure that readers and listeners get what they want to know clearly and concisely. If you can do the same when you submit a press release for consideration, you have an excellent chance of getting your news to a wider audience.

**What gets in the paper, online, or on air**

There’s a lot of news out there. Any bit of news competes with other news for space and time, and, most importantly, people’s attention. Journalists typically focus on news that has a wide general interest for their audience. News that has **proximity** (people and places close to the listeners or readers), **prominence** (public officials and other public figures), **impact** (big dollar amounts or problems that affect many people), **conflict** (competing interests or forces) and/or **novelty** (a new business opening or other out-of-the-ordinary happenings) usually fits that criteria.

But that doesn’t mean journalists will overlook basic happenings in the surrounding community, such as a nonprofit’s effort to raise money and find volunteers to meet a local need. Journalists care about the community’s well-being, too.

If you can truthfully answer yes to the question, “is this of interest to anyone outside my club or group?”, then chances are good a news organization will consider it newsworthy, too.

**How to prepare a news release**

Journalists have always been really busy, but it’s even harder work these days as the media landscape shifts online. Editors, producers and reporters are expected to juggle many news tips and press releases every day. You can call in your news tip if you feel comfortable making a pitch, but don’t dial the phone until you know you can answer some basic questions about your tip (see the **who, what, when, where** and **why** bullet points below). Incoherent, untimely press releases get shoved to the bottom of the pile or ignored altogether.

Here’s how to make sure your news tip or press release gets full consideration by a busy news outlet:

**Send an email with a clear subject line.** If your news is event related, send the press release several days or more in advance. (The more notice you give, the better chance it will be considered.) For example, “News Tip: Club delivers drinking water to neighborhood Saturday morning.” You can send the email directly to a reporter, an editor, or the general email address for a newsroom. Check the “Contact us” page on any news outlet’s website for the best way to route your news tip. (Here’s the [Contact Us page for the Denton Record-Chronicle](https://dentonrc.com/site/contact.html).) If you aren’t sure, use the general email address for the newsroom, that way you don’t end up in an inbox when someone is on vacation, etc.

**At the top of the email, include your full name, hometown, and daytime telephone number.** No matter how well you prepare your press release, journalists almost always have additional questions and will need to contact you for answers.

**Keep your email or pitch short and to the point.** Don’t try to write the story, that makes the journalists go hunting for the information they need to evaluate your news tip. Instead, use bullet points to answer the famous “5 Ws”:

* **Who:** Who is sponsoring the event? Who arranged the program? Who will speak? List the names of groups and people, identifying them fully, avoiding acronyms (unless the acronym has become the name, such as Denton County MHMR), and spelling them properly. For example, “Domingo Garcia, of Dallas, national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens visits the Denton chapter.” Or, Daughters of the American Revolution. Not LULAC or DAR.
* **What:** Describe the event or program fully. For example, “a welcome reception and dinner with program to follow featuring basketball legend Magic Johnson.”
* **When and Where:** Time, date, place. Be exact so people can mark their calendars and set their GPS. For example, “7 p.m. Thursday, March 10, in Room 280 of the Tall Bank Building, 123 Main St., Denton.”
* **Why or What Else?** Do you need volunteers or donations? Are tickets for sale or is there more information available on a website? List the ticket prices. List relevant website addresses.

Answering these questions helps editors, producers and reporters determine the best way to route your tip through the news outlet and gives you the best chance that your news will get published or on air. When you can, tell journalists before things happen. Last week’s news isn’t news, it’s history. For example, even if you don’t know whether the marching band will win the competition, let the newsroom know that they are going.

Make your writing as clear as possible. If there is something of particular interest or a funny angle to your tip, include that information in the “what else” section. Also, it should go without saying, but don’t color the facts, use superlatives, exaggerate, or drop in your opinions or other self-promotional comments. Journalists aren’t interested in information that makes it harder for readers to get the news. Such “salesmanship” can cast doubt whether your news tip is trustworthy.

**Photo and video**

Photos are often welcome by news outlets, especially quality head shots.

Double check the news outlet’s suggestions before sending a photo or video. Editors typically want high-resolution jpegs and horizontal video, which means photos and videos taken from social media or compressed in order to send from your phone may not have enough pixels to look good. In addition, don’t embed photos and videos in any kind of document. Email them as a stand-alone file, separately attached. Then, add a “CAPTION” bullet to your press release where you fully identify each person in the shot, from left to right, taking care to spell first and last names and hometowns and job titles or similar associations correctly. If you are emailing photos and video in separate emails, provide all the same information you did in the press release, including your name, hometown and phone number.

Tip: Do you know what makes a good news photo? In addition to all the elements that make a good photo in general (focus, lighting, composition, attention to detail, etc.), a good news photo tells the story of the moment and captures people’s actions and emotions. That’s why photos of check presentations, groundbreakings and resolution signings aren’t particularly interesting. Instead, take photos of what the money is being used for or what community need will be fulfilled with the new building, or what action the resolution is supporting. These kinds of photos can be hard to take, but the good camera technology on smartphones can help.