

## Unit Introduction

While knowing how to communicate with your internal audience is important, it is equally important to be able to communicate with the American public. It is critical that the military's story gets told to the taxpayers who support us with their minds, their hearts – and their pocketbooks. Since one of the best ways to communicate is through the media, you must be able to first communicate your story with civilian print reporters and editors and TV and radio news assignment editors. And, since you are not the only one trying to get your story into civilian publications, you must be able to compete successfully for space on the pages of your local newspaper and on the television screen and airwaves. This unit is designed to help you pass the civilian editor's first muster.



## Unit Objective

- Write an external news release in inverted pyramid style.

## Unit Overview

- Datelines
- Local angle
- Military tie
- External newspaper dateline
- External release format

## External releases

**External releases** are used as a means to communicate to the American public via the external news media.

Before you send an external release to the media, be sure to carefully evaluate the news value of the information to that external audience. The level of readership interest is paramount in determining whether your story will be printed.



## News/Media/Press releases

The primary difference between the internal news stories you write for your command publication and the external release written for the news media is the **audience**.

External releases are used to send stories outside your internal audience area. Most public affairs offices have release forms and established formats.

While form styles and formats may differ from shop to shop, the information is released basically the same way.

## Types of external releases

Hard news external releases sent from military bases fall into four general categories:

- "Kudos" stories feature hometown releases or award programs where local women or men are commended for good deeds (but do not release proposed awards).
- Announcement stories feature contract awards, public safety announcements, gate closings, exercises and their impact on communities, etc.
- Public event stories feature open houses, changes of command, etc.
- Accident releases feature accidents involving military assets, including people and proper

**Note:** *An external release can also be a feature story. You'll learn more about features in an upcoming unit of instruction.*

## Datelines

The purpose of a **dateline** is to tell the reader where the story originated (was written). It does not necessarily tell where the news event happened, which is why we often use words like "here" as the where element in leads.

Datelines must be used on all releases sent to external media.

They should also be used on all stories you receive from outside sources and then print in your internal publication. The reason for this is to make sure the reader understands the story was not written at your unit but is filed or submitted from another source. Commonly, you will see datelines from Navy News Service, Army News Service, Air Force Print News, etc.

Datelines are *not* needed for internal stories that appear in your internal publication.

A little history: When news took days to travel across the Atlantic or across the country, the date the story was written was much more in doubt than it is today. Therefore, the date the story was written appeared in the dateline -- hence the name. Today, the date is usually within 24 hours and can be easily determined by reading the time reference in the lead. So while we still call them datelines, a more accurate description might be "placelines." You may still see dates in datelines in news sites on the Internet, but they are not commonly used elsewhere.

**The datelines you will write for DINFOS assignments do not require a date.**

## Datelines

There is a specific format that must be used when writing datelines. Look at the following examples.

**FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, Md.** -- A new ...

**ELMENDORF AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska** -- Testing of ...

**COAST GUARD SECTOR BOSTON** -- President George W. Bush ...

The place name (Fort George G. Meade, Elmendorf Air Force Base, Coast Guard Sector Boston) is written in all capital letters.

Some units include place names that can be used without the state designator, such as Coast Guard Sector Boston; in the "datelines" entry, the AP stylebook lists place names that can stand alone. When the state is necessary, it is either abbreviated or spelled out, according to the AP stylebook "state names" entry. (Be sure not to use the postal/ZIP code abbreviation for the state!)

The dateline also includes a DASH (not a hyphen). The punctuation section in the back of the AP stylebook says that a space must be placed before and after a dash.

## The local angle

The lead for an external story differs from a lead for an internal story. One of the 5Ws or the H is still used for lead emphasis, but the information is evaluated and applied a little differently. In an external release lead, you must always establish two things. The first is the **local angle**.

- The local angle lets an editor immediately recognize why the story was sent to him and how it affects his readership.
- The local angle also lets readers see immediately that the story involves someone from their town.
- The local angle is the lead emphasis; it will be the first few words of the lead, immediately following the dateline.

Say you are in Peoria, Ill., and you see a story with a lead that reads:

MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE, Idaho -- A captain now assigned to the 366th Maintenance Squadron here won the Mr. Idaho body-building competition Friday and will move on to the East Regionals scheduled for May 10.

Why would anyone in Peoria care? But what if it said:

MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE, Idaho -- A 1992 graduate of Peoria High School, now assigned with the 366th Maintenance Squadron here, won the Mr. Idaho body-building competition Friday and will head to the East Regionals scheduled for May 10.

This would be more appealing to the Peoria editor and his readers. Now they have a reason to be interested.

## Military tie

The **military tie** is as important as the local angle. This is the reason that we -- the military journalists -- are making the release.

This is the PR side of PA ... if you do not include it, why did you bother to send the release? It helps explain to the editor why it is coming from your base on your news release letterhead. It answers, "So why are they sending it?" for the editor. And it gets the military service in the lead for the readers.

In stories about individuals, the individual's job title and unit often double as the military tie. In these cases, the military tie is used as a separate clause set off by commas:

FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, Md. -- An Augusta native, **now a journalism instructor at the Defense Information School here**, today was awarded the Air Force Levitow Award here.

In stories about events, the military tie isn't quite so blatantly obvious, but can be expressed using one or two indicative words:

FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, Md. -- A Bowie construction company was awarded a \$4.8 million contract **here** today to build a child care center **here**.

MOUNTAIN HOME AIR FORCE BASE, Idaho -- A free air show is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday on the **base** flight line.

## The rest of the lead

Remember, whether a lead is for internal or external publication, you must still ensure:

- it contains a who, what, when and where (at a minimum)
- it is one sentence only, 30 words or less

## External dateweek

The dateweek for an external release is figured the same way as for an internal release, **but the publication date is different.** It's not automatically Thursday. Instead, it's the date you send the release to the external media, which is also the date you put in the release header (more on headers in a bit).

So when you use the word "today" in an external release, it means the date on the release. When an editor sees "today" in the lead, she will look at the date on the release and then, if she publishes it, she will change the when to fit it into her publication's dateweek.

Be sure to get the date correct! If you put the wrong date on a release and use the word "today" in the story, you have created a major error in fact. **For DINFOS assignments, the external release date is the same as the deadline date.**

You will still avoid writing "tomorrow," "yesterday," "next" and "last."

## External dateweek

**Remember, the dateweek is not a tool for determining when an event took place!** It is simply a method of determining how to write the date. Review the Leads unit of instruction if you have forgotten how the dateweek works. The only change to how it operates for an external release is that the release date and the publication date are the same.

## The bridge

Rules and guidance for writing the bridge of an external story remain the same:

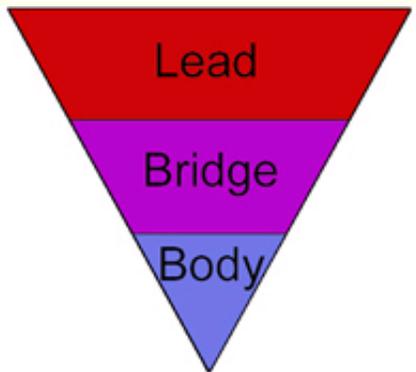
A bridge is a one-sentence paragraph of 30 words or less.

The acronym WAITS is used to determine the type of information that can/should be used in the bridge, depending on what is in the lead.

## The body

In the body of an external release, you will still use the inverted pyramid style of news writing, but your audience changes from an internal one to an external one. An external audience is usually more interested in different things than an internal audience. Therefore, the order of the information should change to include any local angle information up front.

To help organize the information, ask yourself what impact the story has on the reading audience. Provide that information first.



## External release format

Your Public Affairs Writing Handbook provides an example of how the header of an external release should look. **Please print out and refer to that page as we move through header requirements.**

**First**, the phrase "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" should appear across the top of the page, indicating to an editor that he or she can publish that information immediately.\*

**Second**, point-of-contact information should be provided. This information, which includes rank, name, phone and e-mail address, should be blocked together on the left. For your DINFOS releases, you should also include the name/number of your group.

*\*Another option is to use "EMBARGO UNTIL <date>", which means the editor must hold the information until the date specified. You could also use this technique when you're writing a release ahead of time and do not mean to release it immediately. However, your external releases at DINFOS should all say "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE."*

## External release format

**Third**, the release must contain a date. Use the date according to AP stylebook rules.

**Fourth**, you'll want to somehow track releases you send to the media, so you need to have and use a numbering system. For your DINFOS assignments, release numbers will look like this:

051106-01

051106-02

051106-03

The first two numbers represent the month the release was written. The second two are the day of the month. The third two are the last two digits of the year the release was written. These six numbers are followed by a hyphen and the number associated with the release, because you may send out more than one release on any given day. So the first example above was written May 11, 2006, and it was the first release of the day. The second example was the second release of the same day, and the third example was the third of the day.

The release number is an important part of internal office record keeping. You should keep a log with release numbers, dates released, the subject of the release and to whom the release was sent.

## External release format

**Fifth**, provide the name of the unit given for the assignment. This tells the editor where you, the PAO, are.

For instance, if your data sheet tells you that you're the PAO at MCAS Miramar in California, you should include "Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Calif." in your header. (You would also use that information to write the dateline!)

**Everything else you need to know about formatting your external release is explained in your Public Affairs Writing Handbook. Be sure to refer to it!**

## Unit Summary

- External releases must contain a dateline.
- The lead emphasis is the local angle.
- The lead must include a military tie.
- The inverted pyramid is based on the local angle.
- The external dateweek is determined by the date of the release
- Specific information must be included in the external release header.