

HOW TO PREPARE THE MEDIA CARDS FOR MODULE 5, PART III – MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS

You will need to prepare a set of exercise cards for each of the four content areas listed under “Content for Media Cards” on the following pages. The first topic is “Writing a Media (Press) Release” – an example of how to prepare cards for this topic is shown directly below:

EXAMPLE OF HOW TO PREPARE MEDIA CARDS (each text box represents a sheet of A4 paper):

<p>Writing a Media (Press) Release</p> <p>(print heading in large font on one sheet of A4 paper)</p>	<p>Press releases should appear on your organization’s stationery. They should try to cover all the classic questions that journalists are taught to ask in relation to the topic being addressed: who, what, when, where, how, and why.</p>	<p>Press releases should have short, informative headings, and should be written so as to grab the reader’s attention. It can be very effective to compose press releases according to the so-called “inverted triangle” format: the most important information in the initial paragraph(s), tailing down to the less important information lower down (such as background about the organization and more in-depth details).</p>	<p>Provide concise and interesting quotes within the body of the press release and attribute them to organizational spokespersons. For example: “The head of the Give Us Medicines campaign, Moreblessings Lopez, says, “The government has repeatedly denied that medicines are out-of-stock. Our spot check shows that shortages do exist, and we hope the government will now act quickly to ensure that these drugs are available in clinics countrywide.””</p>
<p>Standard information about the organization (such as the organization’s mission and key background details) should be included at the end of the press release.</p>	<p>Once a press release is distributed (by fax, email, or other means), it is important to follow up with a phone call to key journalists and editors to make sure the release has been received and that it has been noticed.</p>	<p>It is important to include a release date (and embargo details, if applicable), along with the name/s of the contact person/people, and associated telephone and email details, to enable journalists to follow up, if they want further</p>	

It is recommended that each topic/set of cards be printed on a different color of paper. For example, “Writing a Media Press Release” cards can be printed all on blue paper, then the set of cards on “Guidelines for Press Conferences” can be printed on green paper, and so forth.

CONTENT FOR MEDIA CARDS:

1) Writing a Media (Press) Release – example used above

- Press releases should appear on your organization’s stationery. They should try to cover all the classic questions that journalists are taught to ask in relation to the topic being addressed: who, what, when, where, how, and why.
- Press releases should have short, informative headings, and should be written so as to grab the reader’s attention. It can be very effective to compose press releases according to the so-called “inverted triangle” format: the most important information in the initial paragraph(s), tailing down to the less important information lower down (such as background about the organization and more in-depth details).
- Provide concise and interesting quotes within the body of the press release and attribute them to organizational spokespersons. For example:
 - “The head of the Give Us Medicines campaign, Moreblessings Lopez, says, “The government has repeatedly denied that medicines are out-of-stock. Our spot check shows that shortages do exist, and we hope the government will now act quickly to ensure that these drugs are available in clinics countrywide.””
 - Standard information about the organization (such as the organization’s mission and key background details) should be included at the end of the press release.
- Once a press release is distributed (by fax, email, or other means), it is important to follow up with a phone call to key journalists and editors to make sure the release has been received and that it has been noticed.
 - It is important to include a release date (and embargo details, if applicable), along with the name/s of the contact person/people, and associated telephone and email details, to enable journalists to follow up, if they want further information.

2) Guidelines for Press Conferences

- Press conferences should be held rarely. As a rule of thumb, only hold a press conference when issues are so complex that you need to provide detailed explanations as well as interaction with journalists to ensure that all questions are dealt with, or when you want to intentionally dramatize an announcement. Journalists are busy and will not attend a press conference unless the matter is especially important or dramatic.

- Press conferences should be held as close to most media organizations' offices as possible, and at times that take into account the deadlines of the key media in which you want the news to appear.
- At the press conference, take a register of journalists who attend. This will help you track which reporters and media outlets are actually interested in your issue, as well as provide you with useful contact names and numbers. The register can also be used to identify the media that should be monitored afterwards, in order to monitor coverage.
- Press kits should be prepared beforehand and handed out to reporters. These should contain hard copies of all statements or speeches to be made at the press conference, as well as any useful background information. This should come in the form of press-friendly briefing sheets rather than long academic papers. Photographs are also a good idea. It can be a good idea to provide a CD or DVD containing photographs, background material, and short audio and video clips. However, it is important to investigate beforehand which technologies invited media have access to in order to ensure you provide material in the most useful format.
- It is a good idea to have two or three speakers, so that journalists can gain a variety of quotes and perspectives – but not too many. Journalists should not feel their time is being wasted for the sake of letting organizational office bearers feel important. Be sure to allow enough time for questions from the floor.
- It can be a good idea to provide opportunities for media to interview individuals who are affected in some way. For example, at a press conference to announce the results of research into the number of gun-related deaths, Gun Free South Africa arranged for some people who had lost family members to gun violence to be present and tell their stories. This provided powerful emotional content and gave a human face to the statistics presented in the research.

3) Guidelines for Interviews

- Ahead of any interview, it is important to be sure of the purpose of the interview.
- If the interview is requested by a journalist, it is important to find out not just the purpose of the interview, but also when and where it will appear, the length (size of story, number of words, time in minutes), when and where the interview will be held, and the name of the interviewer.

- For television and radio, it is important to know whether the interview will be live or prerecorded (and probably edited beforehand).
- It is advisable to settle on no more than three key points that you wish to get across during any specific interview, and to stick to these. For television and radio news and current affairs, answers to questions should generally be short and to the point – around 20 to 40 seconds. Answers should never exceed a minute.
- It is important to prepare key quotes or “sound bites” that are catchy and effective. Sound bites are short audio clips that journalists use in television and radio news reports. The standard sound bite used during a radio news bulletin lasts about 12 seconds; during a current affairs report, perhaps 30 seconds to a minute. Television news sound bites are short – 10 to 15 seconds. Thus, prepare punchy, memorable phrases that are 10-12 seconds long, which encapsulate a key point you want to make.
- Language should be kept clear and simple. Steer away from excessively complex arguments as well as too many facts and figures. However, two or three well-chosen statistics can be used very effectively. It is important, though, to think about the simplest ways of getting figures across (for example, say “five out of every ten people,” rather than “fifty percent of the population.”).
- It is always a good idea to provide one or two concrete examples to illustrate each key point being made – particularly if the points being made are relatively abstract issues of process or policy.
- Practice and preparation are key. It is a good idea to rehearse with a colleague beforehand and to anticipate possible negative questions and pitfalls. It is also a good idea to have someone record all interviews and to listen to them afterwards in order to identify mistakes or areas for improvement.

4) Making Presentations

- Presentations are crucial. Whether you are addressing journalists at a press conference or members of the parliamentary health committee, you need to be able to get your message across clearly and effectively. Remember also that the members of your audience hear many presentations; yours needs to stand out so that they remember it. Here are some tips:

Preparation

- Your presentation starts long before you stand in front of your audience. Preparation is crucially important.

- Defining the objective of your presentation. Be clear about what you want to achieve, or what you want to convey to your audience.
- What do you want them to remember? Think about ways to make your key message stick.
- Engage your audience by building on what they already know. Use familiar reference points.
- Make what you say important to your audience. Put yourself in their shoes and think about why they would care about your issue.
- People remember firsts and lasts. Pay attention to the end and the beginning.
- Give them reason to listen. Break their pattern. Present the unexpected.
- Have a strong, clear ending.

Ensuring Impact

- Plan your words, one idea per sentence.
- Use active verbs.
- Paint pictures: SHOW, don't tell.
- Use the power of visual communication – use graphics, photographs, and maps to help your audience understand your research and what it means.
- Everyone has a preferred sense for learning -- make use of the five senses as much as possible. Use visuals and audio if you can.

Delivery

- Take control of the room. You must be in charge.
- Start with energy. Show enthusiasm.
- Position yourself in the same area as your visual aids. Don't make your audience divide their attention between you and a screen.
- Keep looking forward. Always focus on your audience. Don't have your back to them while you look at the screen.
- Signpost important points. You can literally say, "Now this next point is very important!"
- Consider the wider environment: Are there noises outside the room, are people too cold or too hot? Often, if you briefly acknowledge distracting factors, the audience will be able to put the distraction out of their minds and refocus on you.
- Pay attention to your voice: clarity, projection, pace, and pauses.
- Make eye contact with your audience.

- If possible, handle questions and answers before your ending, then wrap up with a strong take-home message, a definite, clear climax.

Visual Aids

- If you use PowerPoint, use it effectively (see below).
- Remember PowerPoint is just one possible tool among many. You don't have to use it.
- Think about using other types of visual aids, such as flipcharts, whiteboards, and others. Be creative.
- Have handouts for your audience.

Use PowerPoint Effectively

- PowerPoint can be a powerful tool, but too often it is used badly, putting audiences to sleep.
- You don't want your audience focused on the screen and not on you. Your slides should support you, not take over.
- *Don't* write your presentation using PowerPoint. Prepare and structure your presentation and *only then* go to PowerPoint and think about how you can use slides to support your presentation.
- Keep slides simple. *Less is more!* Leave the detailed notes for the handouts. One idea per sentence. Short sentences. Maximum three sentences per slide. Some of the most effective slides can consist of just one word. Or an image.
- Be sure that any graphs and other illustrations with your budget information are clear, that they can be understood and interpreted at first glance.
- Avoid busy backgrounds, fancy colors, and other visual gimmicks. Plain black on white is often the best. Every element should support your message, not detract from it.
- Don't be a disembodied voice in a darkened room, with everyone just staring at your slides.
- Continually bring your audience's focus back to you. (Tip: You can use the "W" key to make the screen go white, or the "B" key to make it go black.)
- Remember that the most memorable speeches in history were given without slides. Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela never used PowerPoint!