

# *Unit Media Guide*



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## Unit Media Guide

**The purpose of this guide is to assist units in the successful authorship and placement of articles in local community newspapers.**

The Boy Scouts of America is active and relevant. However, we need your help in getting that word out. Scouting articles and photos printed in your local community newspaper can carry a strong, positive message about the presence and vitality of the Boy Scouts of America in your community.

Your community newspaper is looking for items with local relevance. News releases on a council-wide basis are generally considered too broad for publication by your community newspaper. Therefore, your pack, troop, team, or post is the **only** source of local Scouting information your community newspaper has.

### **This guide contains the following information:**

- A quick overview of news writing
- A few words about your community newspaper
- Preparing the news release
- Some helpful hints
- Photos should not make you shutter
- Frequently asked questions
- Media contact worksheet

**Thank you** for your help!

## **A quick overview of news writing:**

**News is a current event which may be of interest and value to readers, such as:**

- Conflict
- Progress or change
- Human interest
- The unusual

**Editors judge news on:**

- Timeliness – Is the event “now?”
- Proximity – Is the event “close” to the reader’s location, frame of reference, or field of activity
- Importance - Is the event significant or of value to the reader?
- Policy – Is the event consistent with the publication’s editorial policy? If possible, talk with editors with whom you deal to discover their objectives, expectations, needs, and wants.

**Ideally, every news item should answer the questions:**

- **Who** did it?
- **What** did they do?
- **When** did they do it?
- **Where** did they do it?
- **Why** did they do it?
- **How** did they do it?

**Significance is important.... What does it mean to the reader? How is the reader affected? How may he apply the information? What should he do about it?**

### **Story Organization**

- The lead (first paragraph or two) should summarize the relevant information so the reader needn’t read the entire story to learn what happened. Most readers don’t read most of the article. Therefore, if you don’t write a complete lead, the point usually will be lost
- Then, clarify the relevant details in descending order of importance so editors can cut the story from the bottom up without losing the meat of the article.
- When putting sentences together, they should follow a logical sequence of events, immediately answering the questions a reader might ask as he reads. A simple format to follow is: State principal or subject; State clarification or justification; explain the clarification or justification.

## **A few words about your community newspaper:**

A newspaper is a business. At the same time, a newspaper recognizes its responsibility to be a service to the citizens of a community.

The individuals who work on a newspaper are no different than those who staff other businesses, with the exception that they may be more pressed for time than others. Most newspaper staff members are engaged in writing, editing, and printing – in a few hours – enough material to fill the average novel. **To help make your job easier, try to keep in mind the deadline pressures under which newspaper people must work.**

Your community newspaper has an editor who is directly responsible to the publisher for the non-advertising content of the newspaper. The Editor is just like you, sharing the same concerns for their families and community that you do.

The news room has a managing editor. This individual handles the day-to-day news production for the paper, including making reporter and photographer assignments. They are also responsible for the section editors. Section editors cover areas such as real estate, business, and sports.

The editors make the ultimate decision as to what is – and isn't – news. It's easy for virtually anyone to recognize the news-worthiness of information. **If it's something you think your neighbor or the people on the next block should know and would like to read, then it's news!**

When you hand a legitimate news story to an editor, he or she appreciates it. Because of the increasing complexity of reporting major happenings on the national and regional scene with a limited staff, editors rely on volunteers – just like you - for local news.

It will surprise you how soon you will begin to develop a news sense, to know instinctively when an event is news and when it isn't.

One of the best ways to develop this sense is to study newspapers. Notice the types of stories used and which go on the front page, which on the opinion page, and which on the "inside" of the paper.

Try to adopt a simple pattern for writing your stories. Imitation can aid you greatly in developing skill in presenting the facts with a minimum of effort and training. **Follow the style and construction of articles that already have appeared in the paper.**

The cornerstone of a news story is to tell who, what, when, where, why, and how. Journalists call it the "five Ws and H."

The newspaper wants all the facts and the necessary details, including the full names and addresses of local persons involved and any identifying titles they may have. **The newspaper naturally will want every story you give an editor to be as accurate and impartial as if it had been prepared by one of their reporters.** In fact, when you give a news release to an editor, you in effect become a member of his or her reporting staff. They will rely on you as a dependable and discriminating news gatherer by publishing the material you prepare, **if it's newsworthy.**

When possible, the newspaper will want the news **no later than the week it happens.** An event that is weeks old is no longer news.

Much of the time, you can get your story to the newspaper **before it happens.** For example, you know well in advance that your group is going to conduct a recruiting night, Blue and Gold Banquet, Court of Honor, or other activity.

Experience tells us that although an "advance" story on a certain event is beneficial, there is little benefit derived when the story runs a month or more ahead of the scheduled date. People tend to forget about a coming event if they see it in the paper too soon. There is also the risk that the story will get lost under the sea of paperwork that continually engulfs an editor's desk.

**A good rule is to submit a story about a scheduled event about two weeks in advance of the event.** This gives the paper the chance to find room for the story. Waiting for the final edition preceding the event will only lessen the chances for publication, since available space is always a problem.

## Preparing the release:

There is one thing that all newspaper editors have in common: they insist on **complete honesty and accuracy**

### Following these ten additional basic rules when preparing a news story will go far in building prestige for yourself in the mind of the editor:

1. All stories, without exception, must be typed.
2. Check, check, and recheck your spelling. Nothing will leave more doubt in an editor's mind about the validity of your facts than misspelled words.
3. Typographical errors – called “typos” – show you were lazy, in a hurry, or simply didn't care.
4. Double-space your story, one side only, on 8 ½ x 11 paper. Avoid “easy erase” paper when possible because typewriting easily smears into illegible smudges.
5. At the upper left corner, type your unit's name, address, and then your own name and telephone number. This will identify both the unit and you as a news source, and the editor will have no trouble reaching you if there are any questions about the story. This information, of course, will not be published. **Do your best to keep away from Scouting “jargon.”**
6. Start typing the story about one-third of the way down the page.
7. Keep the story as accurate, brief, and concise as possible.
8. Head all following pages with the unit's name and a page number.
9. End each page with the word “-more-“ centered at the bottom so the editor will know to continue reading.
10. End the article with a centered “-30-“ so the editor will know that he has reached the end of the story.

**Some helpful hints:**

These helpful hints will further clarify your role as your own public relations counsel and better enhance your chances of getting your story printed in your community newspaper.

- The telephone is beneficial in newsgathering, but it is not necessary to call the newspaper to see if you may send a story in. Simply send it in.
- Don't expect an editor or reporter to take your routine story over the telephone. It consumes too much valuable staff time, not to mention the increased probability of error caused by the verbal transfer of information.
- Give the full name of your unit in the story, then fully identify it. Don't assume readers know and understand the Scouting organization. Sufficient identification is normally contained in a brief description, such as, "a local group of Cub Scouts," or, "St. Martin's Boy Scout Troop 445."
- Since your community newspaper is dedicated to the community it serves, it naturally is interested in those aspects of any story which directly reflects or affects that community.
- Be sure those aspects – called "local news angles" – are at the beginning if the story concerns a larger area, such as north-east Dallas county, which may be beyond the community's borders or the newspaper's circulation area.
- Don't begin a story with a time, day, date, or name.
- Don't submit carbon copies or duplicated copies which are impossible to decipher.
- Don't submit a story typed in all upper case or capital letters. If you are unsure about capitalization, don't worry – journalists have simple copy-reading marks which will correct any flaws.
- Use a person's full name the first time it is mentioned in a story. After that first mention, use that person's last name alone. Nicknames are discouraged in newspaper copy, and the terms "Mr., Mrs., and Ms." are seldom used.

- Women's names should be presented as follows; Mary Smith. The use of husbands' names in reference to married women (e.g.: Mrs. John B. Smith) are not used.
- Don't use the term "ladies;" use "women" instead. The same holds true for "gentlemen" vs. "men."
- Save flowing tributes, flowery descriptions, and glowing adjectives for your advertising copy!
- If you wish to convey an opinion, do so in a letter to the editor. News stories must be objective and should never contain editorial remarks. The exception to this rule is when you are being quoted.
- Facts will always carry the importance of the story. Many news releases are unnecessarily long, due to excessive editorial remarks. If your story takes more than three pages, read it over carefully and do a little editing of your own.
- Names make news. Don't leave the names of anyone pertinent to your story out. At the same time, avoid long lists of names when possible. Newspapers don't like to publish membership rosters.
- Don't "bug" the editor by calling and asking, "When will my story run?" There are stories of editors who actually search through their pile, find the story a caller inquired about, and purposely throw it out because of the annoyance.
- Keep the "plugs" for services and products to a minimum. Editors receive stacks of mail daily. Most find their way to the wastebasket. They have no "local news angle." They are poor attempts to get advertising for which space should have been purchased.
- When you hand in a story to an editor, do not casually mention that you, your office, relative, or neighbor is a big advertiser and wants to see your story published. Most newspapers draw sharp lines between the news and advertising departments. News stories find their way into a paper on *their relative merit, not the merit of a relative!*

## Photos should not make you shutter:

### *To request a photographer*

Telephone the newspaper's managing editor (this person is also responsible for photo assignments) not less than one week before a scheduled event. He will determine whether the newspaper can use the photo and if an appointment time is available.

### *To take you own photo*

If you take your own photo it must be sharp, preferably black and white, and preferably a 5 x 7 print. Many of the instamatic-type snapshots are not sharp enough for newspaper use, but don't be afraid to have them look at one. The worst thing they can say is "no."

### *Three subject limit*

Most newspapers prefer photos of no more than three subjects...the fewer the people, the better the photo! Individuals in a photo should be doing something, not just looking at the camera. Identify people in the photo from left to right by typing (or printing clearly) full names on a full sheet of paper. Clip or tape (don't staple) the paper to the photo. Never write or type on the back of a photo as it may show through when it is converted into a half-tone for publication

**A final word:** A photo staff and accompanying darkroom is geared to serve its newspaper only. Please don't ask for extra copies of photographs.

The prints used in the paper are usually available on a first-come, first-served basis. Photos submitted to the paper for publication will be returned upon request and should be so designated at the time of submission.

**Frequently asked questions:**

**Q:** *Must all my stories be typewritten?*

**A:** Yes, if you want your story met with a favorable reaction from the editor and preclude the possibility of mistakes.

**Q:** *Why wasn't my story used?*

**A:** There could be dozens of reasons, including:

- The story arrived after the newspaper's deadline.
- There was no room in the paper.
- The story was not as important as the other news of the week.
- The story was never received.

However, keep at it! Study the stories that are used and don't be afraid to contact the paper for help. You'll soon find your batting average going up steadily.

**Q:** *Will the editor save me a clipping of the story if I ask?*

**A:** Don't even ask! Good manners and common sense dictate that you buy a copy of the newspaper and do your own clipping. Remember, the newspaper is like your corner grocery store—both are businesses and they simply don't give things away.

**Q:** *Does it help to know the editors personally? Should I invite them to social gatherings?*

**A:** By all means, invite them. Their busy schedules may force them to kindly turn down an invitation. However, they do like to talk with members of the community and editors have been known to make good guest speakers.

**Media contact worksheet:**

<b>Name of community newspaper:</b>	
_____	
<b>Contact name:</b>	_____
<b>Business title:</b>	_____
<b>Best time to call:</b>	_____
<b>Address:</b>	_____
<b>Telephone:</b>	_____ <b>Fax:</b> _____
<b>E-mail:</b>	_____

<b>Name of community newspaper:</b>	
_____	
<b>Contact name:</b>	_____
<b>Business title:</b>	_____
<b>Best time to call:</b>	_____
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<b>E-mail:</b>	_____