The main goal of Plan 2020 is for all students to leave high school prepared for college and/or career. ACT assessments help to show the trajectory of a student’s learning and can be used for instructional guidance and customization of teaching.

For the second year, ACT has launched a College and Career Readiness Campaign to celebrate achievement and create awareness around the goal of college and career readiness for all.

This year, ALSDE has submitted state nominees for all four categories:

- Student Readiness Award — Jared Crawford
  Section High School, Jackson County Schools

- College and Career Transition Award —
  Spain Park High School
  Hoover City Schools

- Career Preparedness Award —
  Shelton State Community College

- Workplace Success Award — Rheem Manufacturing, Inc.

The Alabama State Department of Education has submitted the nominations to ACT and they will soon choose a national winner from all states’ submissions for each category. On April 9, we are celebrating our nominees with a luncheon before, and a resolution at, the board meeting.
What’s the perfect press release headline?

Mickie Kennedy is the founder of eReleases. A version of this article first appeared on the PR Fuel blog. Is there such a thing as a perfect press release headline? Clearly, there are good and bad ones. Some headlines that grab attention and some are easily skipped. But what would be the characteristics of the perfect headline?

LENGTH

You can’t really say “four words maximum for a headline” or “no more than 50 characters and no less than 14,” as that doesn’t take any other factors into account. Still, there are a few rules to follow when it comes to length.

For instance, you absolutely cannot have some gigantic headline. Long headlines automatically scare away anyone who might even be remotely interested in reading your press release. A giant headline (“Despite the explosion of its factory, Fantasy Teddy Bear Fun Inc. declares it will survive forever”) implies the rest of the release will be a nightmare to get through, and a busy reporter or intern will skip over it as fast as possible.

On the other hand, a teeny tiny press release headline can also terrify a reader. They could take it as a sign you’re not confident in the material or don’t even have enough to fill out an entire press release. A one-word headline (“Explosion!”) does not give the reader any idea what it’s about, so why would they read it?

So while there’s no set, ideal length, you should strive to cram as much information into a small as place as possible. Something like “After disaster, Fantasy Teddy Bear Fun will continue” gets the idea across without boring anyone.

EYE-POPPING

Your headline has to capture the attentions of readers or the release is doomed. Again, there’s no universal way to do this, and sometimes there is no telling what people will react to.

However, you should have some idea of what will grab most people’s eyeballs. For instance, if there was an explosion at your factory there’s undoubtedly news about it, which means you can play with that in the headline. People want to know more about it, especially people in your community.

In this case a headline like “Local Company vows to stay open” isn’t exactly amazing, but “Teddy Bear Fun Inc. stays open despite disaster” could perk up some editors’ ears. It’s possible they’ve all covered the news of the explosion already and are anticipating the arrival of your comments.

It doesn’t have to be anything as dynamic as an explosion to capture eyeballs, though. The most mundane thing in the world can be amazing with the right headline. If your vice president of sales moved up to position president, that’s not earth-shattering, but a human interest headline like, “Local man completes journey from janitor to president” could get some attention.

Have you ever written a perfect or near-perfect press release headline? What was it?
1. REMEMBER THAT NOBODY CARES.
"I always imagine that the idea I'm pitching is the least attractive for an obscure organization on a topic that nobody wants to hear," Long says. It's a good mental exercise. It forces you to strive to find an interesting angle. Long used to ghost-write, he says, and most clients were way more interested in themselves than everybody else could ever be. The same is true for your news release. Face it: Journalists aren't nearly as impressed in your new hair gel/toboggan wax as your bosses are. They seldom are moved to tears by the golden phrases that trip from your tongue. Just tell them what your product, event, or service has to offer the reader.

2. KEEP YOUR GOAL IN MIND.
The purpose of a press release isn’t to make your poobahs happy by touting minor product developments that no reporter would ever cover. Long says you should treat a press release as a purposeful document with a single goal: to elicit a call back from a reporter.

3. CONSIDER 'DO' VS. 'APPLAUD' PRESS RELEASES.
There are two styles of press release, which Long labels "Do vs. Applaud." Either your organization did something and is bragging about it, or you are applauding something — possibly someone else’s achievement — so you can "bask in reflected glory." Think of a nonprofit’s endorsement of a bill offered in Congress. So as you do your pre-writing thinking, also consider which kind of news release this is.

4. FIT IT ALL ON ONE PAGE.
Every press release should fit on an 8 1/2-by-11 sheet of paper, Long says. Better yet, don’t fill the sheet. This is not a place for an essay on your event or product. Write short paragraphs—four lines maximum. Use lots of white space. The point of a press release isn’t to give them everything. "It's bait," Long says. Lure them.

5. LIST REAL CONTACTS UP TOP.
Long offers a helpful template for a press release. Some of it may seem like common sense, but apparently a reminder is needed, given the number of organizations that put out badly structured press releases. Starts with a contact name, phone number, and email address. This is not the place for the name of your narcissistic CEO, unless he plans to field reporters’ calls personally. "The reporter just wants to know who to talk to," Long says.

6. BE DIRECT IN YOUR HEADLINE.
Here’s Long’s template: "Headline: Client Does Something." The client usually wants its name up front. Also, this style of headline deals right away with the "Guess what" aspect, Long says. Obscure your message with wordplay or a witty surprise, and you’re only delaying the moment when journalists find out what this is all about. Tell them immediately.

7. REMEMBER THE LONG GAME.
The pitch is a long game. If you begin to deliver straightforward press releases, journalists “will understand that’s how you do business,” Long says. "You're an honest broker. You talk directly to them."

Think of a husband — well, like Michael Long’s father — whose wife asks him to tighten a loosened screw or fix some doohickey around the house. Rather than go down to the basement to rummage about in the toolkit, Old Man Long would use a butter knife from the cutlery drawer. The knives got dinged, the screw was never tight enough, and Mom was unhappy.

"The press release is basically the butter knife of the PR writers’ toolkit," says Long, who is director of writing at MPS/PRCC at Georgetown University. "They end up dragging it out for everything in the world, and most of the time it’s a poor choice."

In a Ragan video titled, “Press releases: Create a killer pitch that grabs the media every time,” Long offers a format that he says works for every organization: government, political campaigns, corporations, celebrity publicity, nonprofits. “You name it, this will work," he says. There’s a catch, though. You can’t use the press release like a broom to sweep all the junk topics off your desk and get your boss or client off your back. These catch-all announcements are part of why press releases have such a bad reputation among reporters and bloggers.
Public school advocates have another tool to help them keep up with the myriad of attacks on one of America’s key institutions. “50 Myths & Lies That Threaten America’s Public Schools” provides a valuable roadmap for pinpointing and learning more about today’s numerous attempts to discredit the nation’s system of public education. Written by educational psychologist David C. Berliner and education Professor Gene V. Glass, the book was highlighted recently by the Washington Post’s Valerie Strauss in her Answer Sheet column.

In the book’s introduction, Berliner and Glass say their motivation came from the warped opinions of many close acquaintances about the nation’s public schools: they are inferior to private schools; they are among the worst in the world in math and science; teachers should be fired if their students don’t score at the national average, and on and on. “Many citizens’ conception of K–12 public education in the United States is more myth than reality,” they note, adding that this mythical failure has been created and perpetuated in large part by political and economic interests that stand to gain from the destruction of the traditional system. “There is an intentional misrepresentation of facts through a rapidly expanding variety of organizations and media that reach deep into the psyche of the nation’s citizenry. These myths must be debunked. It is essential that the truth replace the fiction.” Berliner and Glass don’t pull any punches. Their method of debunking is to argue against the logic of each item on the long list of myths and lies, or to criticize the data supporting the myth, or to present more credible contradictory data. Where possible, they name the hoax promoters and point out how their interests are served by encouraging false beliefs. Strauss promises to quote the work liberally in the days ahead in her blog.

While schools everywhere look for ways to contend with the impact of social media, members of a high school athletic conference in Southeastern Minnesota are taking the lead in shaping their students’ digital citizenship. The movement began last fall when the Hayfield School District adopted a policy requiring student athletes to agree not to use social media to abuse classmates or sports rivals. “Social media is the one place, as administrators and schools, where we don’t have a lot of control, and those things come back to bite us,” Z-M Superintendent Tony Simons said.
Kid President to Teachers and Students: “Life Is School and You Gotta Show Up!”

You may have seen some of the “Kid President” videos during the past year. At this point, when spring breaks are rolling throughout our country, it’s a good time to share a morale-lifting video for our hard-working staff members. This brief video is for teachers and students (but as he says, we’re all teachers and students). Kid President’s inspirational words of wisdom may make you laugh, make you think, and make you proud of what you do for the education system in which we all work. Consider taking a few moments to watch this video and remember that life is about continually learning and improving.

Mark Twain once wrote that the “difference between almost the right word and the right word is the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” So it is with quotations. Finding the right quotation can solidify your message, bring a smile to a reader, or even offer perspective at a tough time. Thanks to q.utoe.it, a Provenio Software project, quotes about education, action, success, perspective and many other subjects are just a click away. Just click on your topic, and a quote will appear. Then click the left or right arrows above the quote to scroll through other quotes on the same topic. Whether you need “words of wisdom” to open or close a speech, a quip for a newsletter, or the right line to set the tone in an op/ed, this resource can help you find the right words for every situation.