

Guidelines for Preparing Press Releases About Discoveries Presented at AAS & Division Press Conferences

1. LETTERHEAD (this applies only to releases that will be distributed in hardcopy format at the meeting; many releases are distributed only electronically). You may use institutional letterhead or plain bond. Paper size should not exceed 9 by 12 inches. Please don't supply press releases in folders or "press kits." If there is more than one page, the press release should be stapled and collated. It's OK to print on both sides of the page.

2. EMBARGO Statement. At top left, please type:

FOR RELEASE: XX:XX a.m. [or p.m.] EDT [or meeting time zone], Mmmmm DD, YYYY

where the X's indicate the time and Mmmmm DD, YYYY indicates the date of presentation of your paper at the meeting.

The time of presentation is defined as the starting time of the session that includes your paper, except as noted below*.

If your paper is a poster paper, the embargo date is the date that it's scheduled for presentation, and the embargo time is the opening of the poster session on that date, except as noted below*.

**If you have been invited to speak about your paper in a press conference at the meeting, the embargo date and time for your press release are the date and time of the press conference, or the date and time as defined above, whichever is earlier.*

3. CONTACT INFORMATION. In many cases, reporters will want to talk to you after the meeting, because only a fraction of the press releases at the meeting will be the subject of instant stories in newspapers, broadcast media, websites, and weekly publications. Instead, many press releases lead to stories written weeks or even months after the meeting in monthly and bimonthly astronomy and science magazines in North America and abroad. So, be sure to provide contact information in your press release. Most institutions put contact info right after the date, before the title. It's OK if you or your institution prefer to put it at the end of the release, as long as it's there somewhere.

We recommend listing your PIO first (perhaps identified as "Media Contact"), then listing up to three authors/presenters (perhaps identified as "Science Contacts").

For each contact person, include name, affiliation, phone number (including country code and area code), and e-mail address. We recommend including cell-phone numbers to aid reporters who wish to contact you or your colleagues during the meeting, but this is not required.

If a reporter wishes to contact you during the meeting, we will put messages to that effect for you

on the members' message board near the registration desk. If you have a poster paper on display, we may also put a message right alongside your poster.

4. **TITLE.** One or two lines below the contact info, give a title in capital letters; it may be either centered or left-justified. Example:

ASTRONOMERS FIND STRANGE NEW PLANET

5. **LENGTH** of press release. We recommend no more than 750 to 1,000 words.

6. **LEAD PARAGRAPH.** The opening paragraph needs to briefly summarize what the story is all about and who is presenting the paper at the meeting.

Please provide the following in the lead paragraph:

a. "WHO." Identify the lead author and co-authors, with

- first names (not just initials!)
- institutional affiliations
- geographic locations.

b. "WHERE" and "WHEN." State that the result "is being presented today to the American Astronomical Society [or appropriate AAS division] meeting in [city, state and/or country]."

c. "WHAT." Give a one-sentence summing up of the results. (See sample lead paragraph below.)

d. "WHY." Add a sentence telling why this result is of special interest to scientists and/or others.

Sample Lead Paragraph:

Astronomers are announcing today that they have found a strange new planet orbiting a red-giant star in our Milky Way Galaxy. The report is being presented by Drs. Helen T. Doe and John R. Smith of the University of Higher Learning in City, State [or Province, or Country] to the American Astronomical Society meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii. The result is of special interest because it may shed light on what happens to planets as their parent stars swell to giant size.

7. **BODY OF PRESS RELEASE.** In the ensuing paragraphs, please mention any or all of the following items that are appropriate for the work that you are reporting:

- the **NAME** and **LOCATION** of the object(s) studied. Be specific; write "the planet orbits the star SAO 888888 in the constellation Camelopardalus (the Giraffe)," not just "the planet orbits a star in Camelopardalus."
- the estimated **DISTANCE** of the object studied in light years, for mass media reporters, and (where appropriate) also in red shift for science writers for magazines such as *Physics Today*, *Nature*, *Science*, or *Sky & Telescope*.
- the **TELESCOPES** and observatory facilities (and locations) that were used; give the telescope aperture in meters and English-unit equivalents, e.g., "the 10-meter (400-inch)



Keck I Telescope on Mauna Kea, Hawaii,” or give the satellite name and experiment, (e.g., “the Advanced Camera for Surveys on the Hubble Space Telescope.”

- SPELL OUT ACRONYMS the first time you use them: e.g., “Canada- France-Hawaii Telescope,” not “CFHT,” or “Very Large Array,” not “VLA,” or “Space Telescope Imaging Spectrograph on the Hubble Space Telescope,” not “HST/STIS.”

Special Note About NSF Facilities:

Please refer to NSF-sponsored facilities as follows in your press release: “The National Science Foundation’s Very Large Array in New Mexico,” or “The 4-meter (158-inch) telescope at the National Science Foundation’s Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory in Chile,” etc. Please help ensure that NSF receives this deserved credit.

ACKNOWLEDGING RESOURCES

- cite SPECIAL COMPUTER FACILITIES used, especially for national or regional facilities: e.g.: “the Blitz 2000 megacomputer at the National Center for Supercomputing Wizardry in City, State.”
- credit your FUNDING SOURCE, e.g., “This work was supported by NASA” (or the National Science Foundation, ESA, DOE, NRC of Canada, etc.). Program managers always appreciate it if you mention the specific agency program under which your research was funded, e.g., “the Supercomputing Grand Challenge on Binary Star Evolution.”

8. THE SIGNIFICANT QUOTE STATEMENT

As noted above, be sure to include in the body of your press release a sentence or paragraph that explains in simple terms WHY you believe the results are SIGNIFICANT; don’t hesitate to quote yourself; if you do, please ADD YOUR TITLE or job descriptor. It’s also appropriate to quote a second member of the research team, especially the leader of a collaborating group of your co-authors at a different institution than your own.

Example of Significant Quote Statement:

The findings may be significant because “until now no planet had been found in close proximity to a red-giant star, and this may help us to understand what will happen to the Earth several billion years from now, when the Sun becomes a red giant,” says Dr. Doe, who is Professor of Astronomy and Planetary Science at the University of Higher Learning.

9. THE POPULAR FACTOID

It is very desirable to include in the body of your press release a simple factoid that can be used by mass-media reporters. A factoid is a numerical example in common terms that helps to illustrate your findings to the average person.

Sample factoids (these are fictitious examples, but your factoid must be accurate):

The energy in the observed coronal mass ejection equals that of one-trillion Nimitz-class aircraft

carriers cruising at 20 knots.

The amount of acetic acid that we detected in Sagittarius B2 is equal in mass to 44 times all of the oceans on Earth.

The energy in the gamma-ray burst equaled that produced by the Sun at its present rate over 2,000 centuries.

The explosion described in this report occurred 65 million years ago about the time of the last dinosaurs, but was seen in March 2006 when light (which travels at 186,000 miles per second) from the distant galaxy where the star exploded finally reached the Earth.

10. THE “WE COULD BE WRONG” & “WE STOOD ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS” STATEMENTS

We recommend that you include near the end of your press release a sentence to the effect that, like all new findings, your work requires further confirmation by other scientists. Serious science writers will appreciate it if you include a brief mention of the area in which follow-up is especially needed, e.g., “The inferred atmospheric composition of this planet, which is based on observations made at the limit of the telescope and instrumentation that were used, could be clarified by further work, such as a series of longer exposures with a larger telescope.” And, it is always appreciated by writers and colleagues alike, if you mention important prior findings, e.g., “Earlier work on the possible existence of red-giant planets was published in 2005 by Dr. Creme Skinner of the National Laboratory for Prophetic Research.”

ONE DEFINITE “DON’T”: Never describe the errors in other scientists’ work in your press release; the appropriate place for technical criticism is in a scientific journal or in your actual paper at the AAS meeting, not in an unrefereed statement to the news media. Criticism given in a press release usually causes ill will that is out of all proportion to the circumstances. Emphasize the positive aspect of *your* work, not the negative aspect of others’ work.

11. ILLUSTRATION & CAPTIONS

Illustrations are much desired by the media. A story is more likely to run if there is a picture, and in many cases, only the picture and a caption will run if space is short. Please follow the Guidelines for Image Formats listed below. We strongly recommend that you make your illustrations available over the Internet, as those reporters who are writing for daily deadline, including reporters for Internet news providers, will not be able to get hard copies from the press room to their offices by the deadline. If you do this, please incorporate an appropriate Internet Access Statement.

Example of an Internet Access Statement:

EDITORS: This false-color X-ray photograph can be obtained online at <http://www-cr.scphys.kyoto.u.ac.jp/research/pix/GC.gif> as soon as the embargo expires.

Please arrange to have the image posted on your website **AT THE EMBARGO TIME** and not before. Or, you can post the image on a password-protected website and provide the username and

password for reporters in your press release.

GUIDELINES FOR IMAGE FORMATS

Here is advice from experts at Space.com and *Sky & Telescope* on how you should format images posted on the Internet:

(1) Format for use by website news providers:

- JPEG or PNG is preferred because the files are usually smaller
- GIF can be used if it is a simple graphic, not a photo or a complex illustration
- It is recommended that illustrations be posted in different sizes; many images are used by the website news publishers at just 630 pixels wide, but some run bigger images.
- It is desirable to provide preview or “thumbnail” images, just 100 to 300 pixels wide also; see for example the Hubble Heritage site at <http://heritage.stsci.edu/>.

(2) Format for use by newspapers & magazines:

- Large files are preferred
- TIFF format is the best
- JPEG is next best
- GIF should be used only for diagrams, which must NOT have smooth color gradients
- Image files should be 300 dots per inch (dpi) at 100%
- For images that you might like to see as full-page illustrations in, say, an 8.5 x 11-inch magazine, images need to be 2,550 x 3,300 pixels or more.

For hardcopy press releases only: While it is desirable to include the image in your release at the meeting, we recognize that most astronomers cannot afford to provide the necessary number of hardcopies, particularly in a form suitable for reproduction. If possible, then, please include at least a lesser-quality version of the image in an inexpensive format (e.g., as a small image embedded in the body of the release), so that readers of your release will know what’s available to them online.

12. DISTRIBUTION OF YOUR RELEASE. For those giving oral briefings, the releases should be transmitted to the Press Officer by e-mail or other electronic means (e.g., on a memory stick) as soon as possible, but at least one day prior to the date when the briefing to the media is being given.

The AAS will distribute your release via the AAS Press List of about 1,800 journalists with astronomy and space/planetary science on their beat. Appropriate AAS and/or Division headers and footers will be attached to the text before it is released via e-mail so that the recipients know where it’s coming from and know that while the AAS is distributing the release, the Society does not necessarily endorse its contents.

If you have any questions, please contact AAS Press Officer Dr. Rick Fienberg at +1 202-328-2010 x116 or rick.fienberg@aaas.org.