What Reporters Want

• **A good press release / media advisory/ statement/ phone call**
  --Makes its central point immediately. Why is the reporter reading / listening to this? What is the alleged news here? *What is the lead?*
  --Backs up the lead. Why does this matter? What facts, events, authorities, statements document it?
  --Includes real people: direct quotes from named human beings saying sound bite-size pithy things.
  --Offers a source for more information. Who can the reporter contact with questions?
  --Does not ramble. One page is ideal, two is the maximum. No phone call over two minutes.
  --Puts the jargon in English. A reporter should never have to ask for a translation.
  --Does not induce sleep. Cliches, buzzwords, dead metaphors etc. indicate dead minds.

  --A good statement/ press release begins like a short wire service news story: *the inverted pyramid:* main point first, then the background. Your ending can be organization puffery.
  --Lazy or short-staffed papers may print the release as-is.

• **A good press kit**
  --Looks recent (not slick), is easy to skim, has bullet points for particulars, has no seas of gray print
  --Explains in an *Overview* why all this information is necessary and whose perspective the kit represents.
  --Divides the subject into chunks that each have *one central point* and might each be a story: *issue papers (fact sheets), profiles, examples.*
  --Documents all facts with sources in modified footnote/endnote style. Be prepared to supply copies of the original sources upon request. Make sure all Web site listings are current.
  --Offers background gravy: material to use in a grain-of-salt paragraph; the so-what paragraph; the human example; the good quotes; the kicker. Photos, brochures, posters.

• **A good op ed or letter to the editor**
  --Has one sharp point to make
  --Addresses a timely and controversial subject from a unique perspective
  --Is short: about 750 words for an op ed, 150 max for a letter
  --Is written in creative, forceful language

• **A good summary or digest**
  --Puts the central conclusions, findings or point at the top.
  --Uses bullets to list secondary points or supporting evidence
  --Indicates where in the main text (or at what Web site) to find the points and more data

• **A good flack**
  --Calls (or emails) only with BRIEF word of genuine news
  --Is always cheerfully available and accessible whenever the reporter calls, but never complains when the reporter isn’t available
  --Sends regular papers, releases, bulletins, email, etc. but never whines when it isn’t used
  --Provides reliable and pointed facts, insider info and analysis, instantly and on deadline
  --Provides articulate people who give good quotes, instantly and on deadline
  --Calls or writes politely to correct errors, offer new angles
  --Provides useful background materials before, during and after they are story-relevant
  --Never, ever tells a lie.

Author: Joanne Omang, writer and recovering Washington journalist