

Geoscientist

The Art of the News Release

A short course on how to prepare a statement for release to the media, and how to get it out there. The course is written by science journalist and Editor of Geoscientist, Dr Ted Nield.

1. The News Release

Also known as a Media Release and (by old timers like the author) as a Press Release, the News release is a device originally invented by government for the orderly and timely dissemination of news about its doings. This tells us much about what a release is useful for, and what it is not.

Hard News, Soft News

Governments affect everybody, so news about their policies and practices are “hard”. Hard news is news that not only has to appear on the day it has to appear, but the paper or programme looks incompetent if it does not appear. Hard News is the news which, if not in the paper, the Editor will want to know why – with the implication that the news desk or its specialist correspondents or both are failing.

Every journalist will try to get exclusives, i.e., stories nobody else has, but "hard news" is information without which the organ is deficient, and which therefore must be in it if everyone is to keep their jobs.

So, it should be obvious therefore that for news that everybody MUST cover, a news release (which everybody gets) is useful because it cannot compromise the content. It is also important for informing journalists of the views of special interest groups, about public policy issues, for example. Such bodies, because their reactions represent factions of interested public opinion, can be the ancillary half of a hard news story. Thus in particular areas, it should be the case that a hard news story will look deficient if it fails to include the views of a well known representative lobby group.

There is a third function for the News Release, and that is to put on the public record the views of a particular body. Such releases are best thought of as “public statements” because this does not imply that they are expected on their own to command the attention of journalists. Journalists often forget that they are not the only audience for things called “News Releases” and sometimes laugh at the (from their point of view) hopeless statements put out occasionally by certain bodies apparently in the hope of gaining coverage. It is in the latter assumption that they are often mistaken. However it is true that such policy statements are best put somewhere visible and public, say on a Web site, so that they can be said to be "out there" without wasting journalists' time, and thus annoying them.

What are News releases not suitable for?

We have seen three potential useful ways in which News Releases can be used. However, all these uses centre on hard news emanating ultimately from Government or other bodies who may be considered “hard” within their limited spheres. Releases are not suitable however for “soft” news, news that has no role in public policy. Nevertheless, in terms of sheer numbers of releases issued, especially in science, this is the use to which they are most commonly put – by commercial companies, PR agencies, universities, institutes, learned societies, and so on. Why is this?

Let us take the example of a piece of university research which could, promoted correctly, bring the institution and its academics some good valuable positive public relations. Let us take the example of a lecturer in a department of paediatric medicine who had discovered the cause of a hitherto mysterious debilitating disease among children in a developing country, and had instituted the means of its eradication.

In the case that this story was perhaps a little old, or was not connected to an imminent publication (which would give the story a definite date on which it would be said to emerge) this would be a good exclusive for the Health or Overseas pages of a quality UK daily. However, in the absence of a publication or a conference date, which might carry it into more outlets, to put such a story on – for example – a University News Release promoted by the University’s PR department, would be to kill it stone dead for all except specialist news outlets for those particularly interested in appropriate technology and development issues – like for example the Web site SciDev.net.

Where news values are higher, as in UK dailies, no editor will touch a soft story compromised in this way so that everyone has it, whereas they might take it exclusively, for example, from a freelance contributor who is offering it to them, and them alone.

It is difficult to say why so much soft news is squandered in this way, though it is probably a combination of a) ignorance of the above facts and b) inappropriate management targets for PR personnel that involve counting press releases instead of resulting coverage.

This is important for science PR because nearly all science news is "soft".

[Incidentally, another rule of thumb about hard and soft news is that hard news usually finds you (as a press officer). You almost never see hard news coming. If on the other hand you are trying to get what you think is a good story out and having to persuade people, then you can be almost sure that it's soft. "Hard" science stories would include: "Cure for Cancer/Common Cold discovered", "Man lands on moon", and "Scientists discover limitless supply of free energy". Just about everything else is "soft".]

A good university press officer may produce a news release, but will carefully distribute this only to those whose news values are low enough to carry it. However the best method probably involves no press release at all, but giving the story instead to a trusted freelance who will then sell it exclusively. The other side of this coin is that institutions should adjust their expectations to getting one piece of good coverage for a soft news story, rather than holding out for blanket coverage that they are never going to get.

Summary - lesson 1

- Press releases work best for Hard News, or the views of representative bodies affected by hard news.
- Press releases can, even if they lead to no actual coverage, be useful instruments of public policy in that they are evidence of a body “going on the record”.
- News releases generally kill soft news stories stone dead, except for very specialist outlets with low news values.

2. Structure, dates, times, embargoes

A release always has a date, which in a printed version usually appears on the top, in the right corner, telling the journalist when the information may be used.

If a release is to be used as soon as it is received, it will bear the date and the word IMMEDIATE, in upper case. If a statement is being issued ahead of publication, then it is said to be “embargoed”.

An embargoed release is used to give journalists time to prepare their stories prior to some event, say the publication of a book. So, if the book appears three days hence (and long embargoes are strongly discouraged in Europe, though they are more common in the USA) the date line would read:

EMBARGO

00.01 hrs 3 February 2005

Embargoes are typically set for one minute past midnight on the day of release; however this is not a rule. And in the era of global communication, you must be aware that a story issued at midnight US Eastern Standard Time is not for publication until the requisite number of hours later in the day in London. Also, a story that is likely to do well in evening papers, such as the London Evening Standard, can be embargoed for, say, 1100 hours on the day of publication, to give that paper first bite if (for example) getting to all MPs regardless of political leanings, is important to you.

Embargo breaks

Embargoes are there to be observed, and by and large, they are. Naturally the temptation to break an embargo increases with the controversy associated with a big story, though in doing so journalists – especially those working on a particular beat like science, technology, law, education etc. – risk queering their pitch by doing so.

Also, journalists do (sometimes!) find stories by virtue of genuine journalistic acumen, without the help of news releases from anyone and without necessarily knowing that someone has issued an embargoed notice about it. In such cases, stories may break early for entirely legitimate reasons. This will not stop other journalists complaining, and there will often be a furious row about it. Embargoes and their breakage (or apparent breakage) cause more heat than any other subject and very little light is ever cast by these debates.

The news provider will also naturally be annoyed and disappointed at their failure to break their story in the orderly and timely fashion that the news release system is designed to achieve. However it is not always a case of someone breaking an embargo, even though it may look that way; and, let's face it, that's life and sh*t happens. Under these circumstances the best thing to do is reflect that nobody is going to die as a result.

Particular care needs to be taken with news that is released in advance for publication on a Monday. Sunday newspapers are, unfortunately, under particular pressure to break stories early because their peculiar timing means that they need to look for ways of "making" news, and hence dominating the week ahead – forcing the dailies to follow their lead.

An example of the "good" effect of this pressure was the legendary "Insight" team of investigative journalists set up by The Sunday Times in the 1970s. Their research gave the paper a regular flow of exclusives that were models of good journalism.

However, the "down" side of these pressures (more in evidence today) is the tendency among hard-pressed journalists on Sunday papers to break embargoed stories early, or to "harden up" stories that everyone knows about, often changing them out of all recognition in an attempt to make them sensational. (I should point out here, before I get hate mail, that it's not only Sunday journalists who are sometimes guilty of that.)

So, while releasing a story early over a weekend (as what is known as a "Sunday for Monday") is tempting (because advance copy for a Monday is very attractive), the material for the story must be carefully chosen so as not to place too great a temptation upon the Sundays to do something "they didn't oughter".

As a result of the decreasing regard for embargoes that many older journalists would rank alongside lack of respect and good table manners and all those other things that have been on the slide since the year dot, there is one definitely undesirable modern trend afoot. And this is an unfortunate creeping pomposity about embargoes, which leads some issuers to write "STRICT EMBARGO" or even "PLEASE NOTE – STRICT EMBARGO".

This is merely, one presumes, a measure of how upset the provider will be if their embargo is broken; but doing it cheapens the currency and implies that there are embargoes that can be ignored. All embargoes should be strict. If they are not, then do not use them. The world is already flooded with press statements under quite unnecessary embargoes, and this just makes the problem worse.

3. The Headline

A news statement has a headline, like a news story. A good headline for a release is (of course) short (one line, no more), eye-catching without being too clever or cryptic, and should clearly derive from the main story that the release is selling.

GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY ISSUES FIELDWORK CODE OF PRACTICE

Is perfectly factual, but rather dull and would be guaranteed to kill the story.

BEWARE FALLING ROCKS, WARNS GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Would probably do, in that it is at least slightly tempting, and the main message could be reserved for line one of paragraph one.

IF YOU HAVE A HAMMER – WEAR APPROPRIATE EYE-PROTECTION

Would attract attention, though perhaps the implication that here is another pompous attempt to swaddle everyone in cotton wool out of fear of the compo culture (unlike the good old days when the song to which it alludes was released) is perhaps a little inappropriate.

4. Content: varieties of research news story and how to treat them

We have already said that the title and first par of the release must do two things; the headline should attract attention, and the first par must do what all good first pars should do, name give you the nub of the story.

If you are a Science PR officer, never give in to academic objections to a good headline (remembering that what you know to be a good headline, most scientists will think is an awful headline). Just as the release is a matter between you, as PR officer, and the journalist – scientists get factual correction rights only – the headline is too important to be left to amateurs and only has the function of hooking the journalist's attention. For that reason it is entirely the PR writer's prerogative in what is really a technical document, engineered by a skilled professional with the object of attaining coverage.

Angle

Science news releases are easier to write than, say, a release covering the publication of a volume of complex statistics. Science stories usually have a simple message – usually it's "here's something we just found out and it's amazing". Science papers (for we are talking about releases covering individual pieces of research, chiefly) fall into several categories, only some of which can be made into news. Of those which might stand a chance of making news – perhaps two percent of the science industry's total output, we have the following main categories.

Something you did know and care about is different

This is potentially good material. Scientists say the Loch Ness Monster myth might be due to small earthquakes along the Highland Boundary Fault, causing hydrates to become unstable and so cause surface disturbances and wake effects. This combines an exciting explanation with something everyone in the world has heard of. This story surfaced in 2001 at the Society's Earth System Processes meeting in Edinburgh (note) and went global.

Something you didn't know or care about is different

Of those potentially newsy looking papers, this is the worst sort, and the most numerous. Most stuff hasn't been heard of. So you have to explain the "What" before you go on to explain how it has changed and why that is interesting. This is an uphill struggle. However the main problem occurs when such a paper has been written by a publicity-hungry academic who thinks it's news because he or she has known about this for years and in his or her world, it is ground-breaking stuff. It is hard to convince such people that nobody else

cares about it, and never will because the effort of explaining it will only ever elicit a shrug and a cry of “whatev” at best.

Something you thought was hot and sexy is really not so sexy after all

This is the way science goes. We imagine all kinds of interesting and exciting stuff that, on closer inspection, turns out to be less exciting than we thought on just a little bit of information. A good example - Mammoths did not die out as a result of a meteorite impact in the Younger Dryas after all. The theory was complete hogwash, based on misidentification of materials under the microscope during a period when impacts were used to try to explain everything.

Something that was already sexy is now more sexy

This ALMOST NEVER HAPPENS. Classic example - Dinosaurs were extinguished by a massive meteorite strike at the end of the Cretaceous. The Alvarez, Alvarez, Micel and Asaro paper of 1980 made a well-known subject even sexier. “Single cause” explanations favoured by physicists are of course easier for people to grasp, and do well in the media. The reality is probably that no single cause could be said to have been the dino-killer, but that many causes including major impact/s came together. It is debatable whether discoveries in the Deccan Traps, which are increasingly suggesting that the main eruptive phase was very short and dates right at the K-T boundary, constitutes a de-sexing of this story.

Scientists find some amazing stuff, and who’d have thought it (with pictures)?

Using faint trackways seen in low-angle light, palaeontologists have discovered a giant woodlouse two metres long whose body fossils still await discovery. With pictures, a personal story of the discovery of the traces, and perhaps a speculative reconstruction of the giant woodlouse, this would do well.

Scientists find some amazing stuff, and who’d have thought it (without pictures)?

Scientists discover platinum on a Scottish Island in potentially commercial concentrations. This might have rather unprepossessing illustrations, but it wouldn’t matter because the story itself would have intrinsic interest, and could be illustrated with moody pictures of Rum or wherever. Without-picture stories however need to have more news quality than those with.

As with all popular writing though, the way you present the story and the angle you take on it (the angle here consisting mostly of presentation in the headline and first par) can make all the difference.

5. Midsection, Conclusion, Quotations

The News Release is a technical document designed (ideally) with one aim in mind – to lure, hook and maintain the interest of a journalist wishing to write the story that it promotes. If you have ever spun for mackerel you know the technique.

A good release has an eye-catching but attractive headline that hooks the reader by making it stand out against the rest. It should offer the prospect of timeliness (there should be a news peg, tying the story to an event of some sort. Stories out of the blue with no particular time reference are useless for news). Remember, News is about what's happening – best of all, it's about what is about to happen.

The release should also seek to make the journalist's life as easy as possible by offering quotes from the main players. These should be short and pithy, and that is always the main problem. In radio, short pithy quotes came to be known as "soundbites". Although often derided as now forming part of the armoury of the hated "spindoctors" who collaborate in creating the "barrier to understanding" said by a few intellectuals to be endemic in media presentation, a good soundbite, cleverly encapsulating complex ideas in a few words, is almost as rare as good poetry – and for the same reason. Both take either a rare extreme of talent, or you have to be very lucky indeed.

Written quotes from bigwigs tend to be long, dull and full of caveats. These should either be edited to make them acceptable, or not used. Sensible bigwigs will allow someone who knows what they are doing to create quotes for them. (However, said bigwig should of course, always pass these before they are promulgated!) A journalist will always attempt (time permitting) to get his or her own quotes from the main players – see "Notes for Editors and further information", Lesson 6.

Make no mistake – you cannot control what a journalist will make of your story by putting all the caveats that surround your conclusions into your quote. The quote will simply not be used, and might jeopardise the entire effort to get coverage. By all means attempt to add complexity after you have secured a telephone interview with whoever is writing your story. However, the structure of journalism and its institutional methods means that qualifying information and complexity will be placed lower down in the copy that is eventually filed by the journalist to the desk.

Despite the fact that the story will have been written "to length", sub editors may then be faced with making the story fit the space available, a factor that will change as the day proceeds. It changes because (for example) other stories break, or advertising comes in (adverts always take priority over copy). The subs will then cut the story from the bottom. So there is good reason why inessential information is left out until later.

Often of course your story may not make the paper at all, in which case it is said to have been "spiked". Do not complain to the journalist about this – spiked stories are a fact of life. Newspapers are a bit like nature – wasteful. Also, do not complain to journalists about headlines. These are the responsibility of sub editors and there is never any redress against sub editors.

6. Notes and further information

Notes for Editors

It may be necessary to explain certain things to make the full meaning of a release clear, or to give details such as the publication details of the paper on which the research is based,

the time and venue of the conference at which the paper is being presented, and so on. This is useful information and should not be forgotten; it is part of making the journalist's life easier – golden rule number 1.

Notes are also the place for information about the sponsors of the research, or a word or two about the institution at which the researchers work. Some of this information may be of interest to journalists, but more often it is a requirement of employers and sponsors that they receive mention. In other words, this is the place to satisfy those requirements; the place to put all that guff that spoiled the bad opening paragraph about the dinosaur that evolved from a parsnip (see Lesson 4).

If you are writing a release – either as a scientist or as a media relations officer – then you should resist any pressure to place inessential information anywhere but in the notes. If you are a media relations officer, it is your duty to explain to those who would have you do otherwise that they are wrong, and that their actions will prejudice the chances of getting any coverage for anything in the release, that you are in charge and that you will not comply with instructions that make you look foolish and unprofessional. If necessary, this might involve explaining to them that to give such advice is why they employ you, and that if they are not happy with it, they should instead recruit one of those typing monkeys that will one day accidentally compose all the sonnets of Shakespeare. On the way to that, they might just happen to knock out the odd good press release too.

Further information

At the very end of the release you must give contacts for the story. If you have a media relations officer, his or her coordinates (email and phone are the most important, preferably offering 24hr contact, should be there as first port of call. They (or you, if you are doing this yourself) should make sure that also included are your full name and title (but not postnominals) as you wish to be quoted. Your coordinates for the embargo period (if there is one) and especially the day before publication, should also be given. Again, phone and email are the most useful.

Many novice scientists mistakenly think that their whereabouts AFTER publication are what is required. This is only true in case of follow-up coverage. If a story is likely to go over big, as they say, there will probably be demands for appearances on TV and radio. You should always plan for these, just in case. In these circumstances, the media relations officer handling the release should have a note of the movements of all those scientists who are available to give comment.

7. Worked examples

The following examples all derive from releases issue by the Society. The simplest possible case – an interesting paper with local news value

RESEARCH FINDS SCOTS ISLE PLATINUM RICH

Platinum on the Isle of Rum – a simple release that confines itself to the main bones of the story and does not go into unnecessary scientific detail. External constraints included Scottish Natural Heritage, owners of the land, who wished it to be made clear that mining on

Rum was not an option. The release was coordinated with SNH and gained considerable print coverage in the UK.

Launching a journal by highlighting a newsworthy piece of research presented in volume 1

ARSENIC IN WATER SUPPLY SOLVED BY REMEDIATION IN A BUCKET

The launch of a new scientific journal is of no news interest outside the very specialist field it is intended to serve. However the research it presents, might well be. One paper revealed that using a bucket, a stick and some crushed local rock, poor villagers could remove arsenic from their drinking water at no expense. This release gained considerable coverage in the science and “appropriate technology” press (unfortunately the hotlink to the New Scientist coverage no longer works).

Coinciding the launch of a report to Government with media tie-in.

SUPERVOLCANO

Reports to Government can command interest on their own, depending on subject; and one on the danger to civilization posed by super volcanic eruptions would have stood more chance than most. However the Geological Society’s Supereruptions Report was promoted in collaboration with the BBC to give both a greater chance of deeper penetration into the popular media.

Apart from the tie-in, this was a typical covering news release, announcing a major publication. It contains quotes from the two lead authors (written by the press officer from wordier statements in the report and then cleared with them) as well as links to the full online version of the publication. The release also finds room for a bullet point list of the main recommendations of the report’s authors.

This report was published to coincide with the launch of the two-part BBC docudrama Supervolcano, and the combined effect of a) providing a showbiz launch for the film with a legitimate news peg (the report’s publication) and using the BBC’s images and footage to illustrate the story was a winning formula. The combined effort of the two organisations created a whole week of coverage during which the Society’s report was always explicitly mentioned (because it was the main “peg” for the story) but also providing valuable pre-publicity for the BBC film. The combined viewing figures in the UK for film and documentary that followed each episode topped 10 million – a new record.

Previous GSL collaborations with BBC Horizon, in which this model was honed, gave rise to the two top-grossing Horizon documentaries ever – namely Megatsunami! and the forerunner of the supervolcano film, also called Supervolcano! Collaboration and nifty timing can achieve much greater results for less effort.

8. Getting it out there

Once you have your release written agreed and ready to go, you come to the important bit –

getting it in front of your target audience. I am presuming that this will be science correspondents on national papers, radio, TV, Web sites - and in your local region.

In a large institution, this function will be the responsibility of the media relations officer in your External Relations department. Corporate bodies have rules about making public statements, and you will be aware of these in those with stronger command structures. In corporate bodies with weak command structures, such as the so-called “old” universities, where staff may not be as aware of their duties as employees, it is important to find out about them to avoid major grief later. Nothing annoys the VC more than private-enterprise PR work by staff in the university's labs. And you will seriously disgruntle your press officer too, which is perhaps more important because he or she is in a position to help, and should be kept on-side. So – my advice is – in the first instance, find out who your institutional press officer is, and talk to them.

If you are publishing a paper, then the rights to the public relations activity associated with it fall firstly to the journal. If you are publishing in Nature or Science, they will make you forcibly aware of this. Other more specialist journals will not be so clued up, nor will they necessarily have media relations staff to handle such things. But they might. So once again, before doing anything, speak to your staff editor.

Ideally, your journal's press officer will communicate with your institution's press officer, so that the institution has an input to the release, approves the result and the level of credit given, and everyone is happy. Or possibly the journal will not consider your paper newsworthy enough to be worth the effort, but will then hand over to the more optimistic (and perhaps better staffed) institutional press office to have a go.

However, the rules of this part of the game are simple – see what help is to hand, keep the professionals on the staff informed and on side, and defer to them in all things except (of course) matters of science. But what if you look and find that you really are alone in the universe? Can you promote your work yourself?

Doing it professionally

Well of course you can; and it has become much easier to do this now, with the use of the Web to disseminate media information, than it was only quite recently. But before I tell you how to do it yourself, this is how a pro would do it without the aid of newfangled shortcuts.

First, an institutional media relations officer should be well known to and respected by the specialist journalists who cover science. This is essential because a real press officer will be able to call or email writers he or she knows personally – thus gaining access to a group of people who are so overloaded with information – almost all of it rubbish – that they are extremely defensive of their time and attention, and do not bestow either lightly.

For a university, this is also quite a tall order because science is only one of the beats whose journalists a press officer will need to know about.

Why no contact list?

The reason we do not, for example, provide a list of named contacts at various news outlets like newspapers and so forth, is because keeping track of all these folk as they switch beats and move from one paper to another is a daunting task that is in itself practically a full time

job. Even press officers have to rely upon a trusted media directory, probably updated every month, the subscription to which will be horrendously expensive – but worth it. Sophisticated CD-Rom directories can nowadays generate press lists for a range of criteria more or less at the touch of a button – and for the payment of very large wads of cash.

That said, though, no database can ever replace the most important element in media work, which is knowing people personally.

“Getting the message across”

So, assuming you have a list of a few hundred science journalists in all your favoured news outlets, covering a wide range of media (radio, TV, print, Web) and divided between national and regional, and including the news agencies – what next?

In the old days, you mailed your printed release to arrive (along with about a million others) on the journalist’s desk on the right day. You might then follow it up with a telephone call. This involved small armies of stuffers around a collating table in a post room, with labels, envelopes, and a franking machine. Some of us can also remember the smell of the Roneo or Gestetner machine that could be heard shaking itself to bits in the corner.

Later, through the 1980s, the FAX machine became the weapon of choice for press officers and journalists alike. At first this involved a press office minion standing over the hot fax machine all afternoon, dialling individual numbers. Then there were programmable faxes, with little memories; once scanned in, the machine could be left to chunter away on its own, redialling (five times) all those numbers it found to be busy. However, a follow-up phone call was still always advisable, because faxes had a funny habit of rolling up into tubes and falling down the backs of cabinets.

Then, from the mid 1990s, the Web really began to mean something; not only as a distribution mechanism, but as a news outlet in its own right. Now, nobody would dream of not making electronic copy available. It would be suicide.

And I recently threw my fax machine away.

Getting journalists to come to you

Now the situation is much simpler and cheaper and more devolved. Now, there are special web sites for science journalists, where news providers (who can be individuals or institutions) post releases. The Web site then emails all those people with an expressed interest in that field, telling them about it and replacing that troublesome personal follow-up phonecall. If the release is embargoed, only accredited journalists registered with the site can view the material, in a secure area. To be registered, all journalists have to provide the Site with their bona fides.

Another advantage for the scientist wishing to promote their own work (apart from the ease and convenience of the whole process) is that submission is driven by special online forms that ensure you have all the required information in the right places. So, if you have written your release according to the instructions in Lessons 1 through 7, all you will need to do (once you have registered with the Site as a provider) is to cut and paste it into the boxes provided

On submission, you receive two emails - one to say it is being looked at by the site editors, and another when it goes live. You also get a chance to see what the release will look like, before pressing the “submit” button.

There are two main Web sites offering this service. One, AlphaGalileo, is a European initiative, and (unusually for such initiatives) one that started here in the UK. It posts in Greenwich Mean Time. The other is American and is called Eurekalert, and typically posts in US Eastern Standard Time. This is run by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and was the first in the field.

Lastly, for a novice, there is yet another advantage of using these services. If any of the journalists registered with these sites is naughty and breaks an embargo, it is not long before – if they look up at the right moment – they will witness a ton of bricks descending upon them from a great height. In cases of extreme naughtiness the sites can use the ultimate sanction - putting entire newsrooms into a sin bin and denying any journalists from that paper (or group) access for a certain period. This has happened; it's not frequent, but everyone now knows they mean it.

To find out about these services, you should visit them and take a tour. Their URLs are:

Alphagalileo – www.alphagalileo.org

Eurekalert – www.eurekalert.com

To find out more about science writers and science writing, visit the Web site of their national body - the Association of British Science Writers (ABSW) on www.absw.org.uk.

Finally, don't forget – if you want to play the media game, remember it is their game, and they own the ball. They won't change their ways just for you, just for science, or indeed for just about anyone. Success in the media comes with learning to work with it, and learning to live with its limitations – and those it reveals in you.