

How to Take a Story Prompt and Turn It into a Story

This worksheet has six sections:

1. Gathering Raw Materials for Your Story
2. Example Raw Materials
3. General Story Template
4. Example Story
5. Checklist for Editing and Polishing Your Story
6. Other Resources

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To learn more, go to:

<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>

SECTION 1 – Gathering Raw Materials for Your Story

1. Choose a Story Prompt:

- Select a story prompt that aligns with your organization's mission and resonates with your audience.

2. Define the Job of the Story:

- Decide what you want your audience to think, feel, or do at the end of the story.
- Examples: Make a donation, feel inspired to support the cause, become a volunteer, etc.

3. Identify Your Audience and Communication Channel:

- Define your target audience (demographics, interests, values).
- Determine the communication channel you'll use to tell the story (direct mail, social media, in-person, event, etc.).

4. Choose the Main Character/Beneficiary:

- Select a protagonist who will resonate and connect with your audience.
- Consider their background, challenges, and connection to your organization's mission.

5. Identify the Problem or Obstacle:

- Define the problem or obstacle that the beneficiary is facing.
- This problem should evoke empathy and create a sense of urgency.

6. Gather Details about the Beneficiary's Situation:

- Collect specific details about the beneficiary's situation that elicit emotion and empathy in the audience.
- Use sensory details, personal experiences, and real-life examples to create a vivid picture.

7. Define the Solution and Key Details:

- Determine the solution or intervention provided by your organization to overcome the problem.
- Note any specific details that will help the audience connect with the situation and understand the impact of your work.

8. Craft a Compelling Call to Action:

- Create a clear and compelling call to action that aligns with the job of the story.
- Encourage your audience to take specific actions, such as making a donation, volunteering, or spreading the word.

9. Edit and Polish the Story:

- Review and revise the story for clarity, coherence, and emotional impact.
- Ensure that the story flows well and effectively communicates the desired message.
- Pay attention to grammar, tone, and readability.

SECTION 2 - Example Raw Materials

1. Choose a Story Prompt:

- Describe a program that has helped to provide arts programming for veterans.

2. Define the Job of the Story:

- Inspire readers to support the "Art for Warriors" program and donate to help veterans heal through art.

3. Identify Your Audience and Communication Channel:

- Audience: Veterans, their families, and supporters of the arts
- Communication Channel: Social media, Direct mail, and in-person events

4. Choose the Main Character/Beneficiary:

- Sarah, a retired veteran struggling with PTSD and anxiety after returning from active duty

5. Identify the Problem or Obstacle:

- Sarah is facing emotional challenges and lacks a healthy outlet to express her feelings, impacting her overall well-being.

6. Gather Details about the Beneficiary's Situation:

- Sarah joined the military to serve her country, but the traumatic experiences she endured during her service left her emotionally scarred. She battles nightmares, anxiety attacks, and a sense of isolation, struggling to reintegrate into civilian life.

7. Define the Solution and Key Details:

- The "Art for Warriors" program provides therapeutic art workshops and a supportive community for veterans like Sarah. Through painting, drawing, and other artistic activities, veterans can express their emotions, build connections, and find healing.

8. Craft a Compelling Call to Action:

- Will you help a veteran who feels isolated and alone by donating \$50 to give them a month's worth of healing art classes?

9. Edit and Polish the Story:

- After reviewing and revising the story, ensure that it effectively conveys Sarah's journey, the impact of the "Art for Warriors" program, and the call to action. Pay attention to grammar, tone, and readability.

SECTION 3 – General Story Template

Use this template as a starting point and feel free to customize each section based on the specific story you want to craft. Add vivid details, emotional language, and unique elements that make your story compelling and relatable to your audience.

Opening Paragraph

Set the stage and introduce the protagonist or the context of the story.

Hook

Capture the reader's attention with a compelling statement or question.

Background Information

Provide relevant details about the protagonist's situation, challenges, or goals.

Conflict Introduction

Introduce the main conflict or obstacle the protagonist faces.

Rising Action

Build tension and develop the story by presenting additional challenges or obstacles.

Turning Point

Describe the pivotal moment or event that propels the story forward.

Climax

Present the most intense or critical point in the story where the conflict reaches its peak.

Resolution

Explain how the conflict is resolved or addressed.

Conclusion

Reflect on the impact of the protagonist's journey or provide a key takeaway.

Call to Action

Encourage the reader to take a specific action, such as donating, volunteering, or spreading awareness.

SECTION 4 – Example Story

I want to share a story that has touched my heart deeply. It's about Sarah, a retired veteran who had an extremely rough time adjusting to civilian life. [Opening Paragraph]

When Sarah returned from her years of service, she had many scars . . . some physical, many emotional. Memories of harrowing battles and fallen comrades haunted her days and tormented her nights. Anxiety and nightmares gripped her, leaving her sleepless and on edge. [Hook]

Sarah felt trapped in a constant struggle, battling not only the invisible wounds of war but also the physical pain that clung to her body. [Background Information]

But the greatest struggle for Sarah was the isolation she felt. [Conflict Introduction]

The trauma from her experiences seemed too heavy to share, and she longed for understanding and connection. The civilian world seemed cold, distant, and indifferent. Nobody understood the depth of her pain. [Rising Action]

Then, Sarah found a glimmer of hope. She found Art for Warriors—an organization dedicated to supporting veterans like her. Surrounded by fellow warriors who shared similar battles, she discovered a community of unwavering support and empathy. They became her lifeline—a collective embrace that understood the depths of her struggles. [Turning Point]

Within this community, Sarah went on a journey of transformation through art therapy. As she picked up a paintbrush, she found a way to express the turmoil within her soul. Each stroke she made on the canvas became a release. [Climax]

Through her art, Sarah confronted the demons that haunted her. As she painted, a renewed sense of purpose and self-discovery emerged, guiding her out of the darkest corners of her mind. [Resolution]

Through this art journey, Sarah has become calmer and can sleep peacefully through the night. Sarah told me the other day that she feels like the world is much warmer and friendly than it used to be. In fact, Sarah has been helped so much through the “Arts for Warriors” program that she is starting to mentor other veterans who need help. Her courage and determination have inspired other veterans. It shows them that healing is possible, and they are not alone in their struggles. [Conclusion]

Will you help a veteran, who feels isolated and alone, by donating \$50 to give them a month’s worth of healing art classes? [Call to Action]

SECTION 5 – Checklist for Editing and Polishing Your Story

1. Clarity is Key:

- Ensure that the story is clear and easy to understand
- Use concise and straightforward language
- Check for any confusing or ambiguous statements
- Remove any unnecessary jargon or complex terminology

2. Emphasize Emotions:

- Enhance the emotional impact of the story
- Use descriptive language to evoke empathy and connection
- Incorporate vivid details that create a strong emotional response
- Ensure that the emotions align with the overall message and tone of the story

3. Stay Authentic:

- Preserve the authenticity of the beneficiary's voice and experiences
- Avoid exaggerated or overly dramatic language
- Ensure the story remains true to the individual's journey
- Remove any elements that may undermine the story's credibility

4. Trim the Excess:

- Remove any unnecessary or repetitive details
- Keep the narrative focused and concise
- Identify sections that may be digressing from the main message
- Consider whether each sentence and paragraph contribute to the overall impact of the story

5. Maintain a Compelling Flow:

- Check the flow of the story to ensure a smooth reading experience
- Transition between paragraphs and sections seamlessly
- Identify any areas where the story may feel disjointed or lacking coherence
- Consider rearranging or rephrasing sentences to maintain reader interest

6. Proofread for Errors:

- Carefully proofread the story for grammar, punctuation, and spelling mistakes
- Check for typos or inconsistencies
- Ensure that sentence structure and syntax are correct
- Consider using grammar and spell-checking tools for assistance

7. Read Aloud:

- Read the story aloud to assess its rhythm and pacing
- Pay attention to the flow of sentences and paragraphs
- Identify areas where sentences may be too long or require rephrasing
- Listen for any awkward phrasing or repetitive patterns

8. Seek Feedback:

- Share the story with trusted colleagues, friends, or individuals who can provide constructive feedback
- Consider their suggestions and insights on areas that may need improvement
- Seek feedback on the emotional impact and clarity of the story
- Use the feedback to guide your revisions

9. Maintain Consistency:

- Ensure consistency in the tone, voice, and style throughout the story
- Check that the story aligns with the overall messaging of your nonprofit
- Avoid abrupt changes in writing style or tone
- Make necessary adjustments to maintain a cohesive reading experience

10. Test Emotional Response:

- Read the final story and gauge its emotional impact
- Assess whether it elicits the desired response from the readers
- Consider if the story evokes empathy, compassion, or a desire to take action
- Make revisions as needed to amplify the emotional connection

SECTION 6 – Other Resources

A great video to watch on different ways to use and tell stories is at the link below:

<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com/what-story-to-tell>

YouTube - Subscribe to the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@nonprofitstorytelling>

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