

HEADLINE HELPER

A Mini-Course on Writing
Fundraising Headlines



a Nonprofit Storytelling Conference Publication

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This mini-course gives you the formulas, examples, and exercises to write fundraising headlines that grab attention and inspire action.

A strong headline is the start of a great story. It pulls donors in, sparks emotion, and makes them want to help. The right words can boost engagement and drive more donations.

Your headline is everything.

It decides whether a donor keeps reading—or moves on.

This guide will show you how to write headlines that create curiosity, connect emotionally, and get results. Use these proven formulas to craft compelling, story-driven headlines that make an impact.

Keep this guide handy for the next time you need to write a donor engaging headline.

Part 1: The Anatomy of a Great Headline

A strong headline should:

- Be clear and specific
- Create curiosity or urgency
- Tap into the donor's emotions
- Highlight a problem or solution
- Include a call to action when needed
- Tell a compelling story that draws readers in

Part 2: Proven Headline Formulas & Examples

1. The Story-Driven Headline

Stories captivate audiences and make headlines more engaging.

Formula: [Character] + [Struggle or Transformation] + [Call to Action]

Examples:

- "Emma Slept in Her Car Last Night. Tonight, You Can Change That."
- "A Tiny Gift Transformed James's Future—Will You Help Another Child?"

2. The Emotional Hook

Tap into emotions to make the donor feel the urgency of giving.

Formula: [Emotion] + [Problem or Solution]

Examples:

- "Heartbreaking: Kids Are Going to Bed Hungry Tonight. You Can Help."
- "Tears of Joy: See What Your Gift Did for This Family."

3. The Curiosity-Driven Headline

Make the donor want to read more by sparking curiosity.

Formula: What happens when [something unexpected]?

Examples:

- "What If You Could Save a Life for the Price of a Coffee?"
- "She Opened the Envelope and Cried—See Why."

4. The Urgency Headline

Create a sense of now, so the donor takes immediate action.

Formula: [Time constraint] + [Action or Consequence]

Examples:

- "Only 24 Hours Left to Help! Double Your Impact Today."
- "A Child Needs You Right Now—Will You Help?"

5. The Donor-Centric Headline

Put the donor at the center of the story and make them feel important.

Formula: You + [Action] = [Impact]

Examples:

- "You Can Change a Child's Life in Just 30 Seconds."
- "Your Gift Today Will Feed a Family Tomorrow."

6. The Problem/Solution Headline

Present a problem and immediately hint at the donor's power to solve it.

Formula: [Problem]? Here's How You Can Help.

Examples:

- "This Family is Without Clean Water. You Can Fix That."
- "A Struggling Student Needs Help—Can You Step In?"

7. The 'Oops, We Messed Up' Headline

Honest mistakes or surprising admissions get attention.

Formula: Oops! [Mistake or Surprise]

Examples:

- "Oops! We Underestimated How Many Kids Need Lunch."
- "We Almost Didn't Send This... But You Need to See It."

8. The List Headline

Numbers make headlines more digestible and compelling.

Formula: [Number] Ways to [Do Something]

Examples:

- "3 Simple Ways You Can Save Lives Today."
- "5 Reasons Why Your Gift Matters More Than Ever."

9. The Question Headline

Engage donors by making them answer in their minds.

Formula: [Thought-provoking question]?

Examples:

- "Would You Help a Neighbor in Need?"
- "What's the True Cost of Hunger?"

Part 3: Quick Tips for Writing Headlines

- Test multiple versions before sending an email or posting online.
- Keep it short and impactful (aim for 6-12 words).
- Use power words like "urgent," "heartbreaking," "life-changing," "now."
- Make it donor-focused (use "you" more than "we").
- Use numbers and specifics instead of vague wording.
- Use storytelling elements to draw in the reader emotionally.

Part 4: Headline Practice & Exercises

Exercise 1: Improve These Headlines

Rewrite the following headlines using the formulas above:

1. "Please Donate to Help the Homeless."
2. "We're Helping Children Get an Education."
3. "Support Our Cause Today."

Before and After Examples:

1. Before: "Please Donate to Help the Homeless."
 - After (Story-Driven): "David Lost His Home. You Can Help Him Find Shelter Tonight."
 - After (Emotional Hook): "Freezing Cold & Nowhere to Go—Help a Homeless Person Today."

2. Before: "We're Helping Children Get an Education."
 - After (Story-Driven): "Sarah Dreamed of School. Now She Needs Your Help to Stay in Class."
 - After (Donor-Centric): "You Can Give a Child the Gift of Education Today."

3. Before: "Support Our Cause Today."
 - After (Curiosity-Driven): "What Happens When You Support This Cause? Lives Change."
 - After (List Headline): "3 Powerful Reasons to Join Us in Changing Lives Today."

Exercise 2: Write 3 Story-Driven Headlines for Your Own Fundraising Campaign

Use different formulas and test them out.

Writing great headlines takes practice, but using these formulas will help you quickly create compelling, donor-focused messages. Try them in emails, social media, direct mail, and donation pages.

Now, go write some amazing, story-driven headlines that inspire generosity!

Want more storytelling-driven fundraising tips? Go to:

<https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>

If you found this helpful, please forward it to a friend who could benefit from writing better headlines.

Get help raising more money. Come to the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference. For more information, go to:

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