

Show, Don't Tell

OPENERS FOR EMAILS, APPEALS,
SOCIAL MEDIA & MORE



**Attention Grabbing Phrases
That Drop Donors Into Your
Fundraising Story**

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Attention Grabbing Phrases That Drop Donors Into Your Fundraising Story

Most openers tell people what to think—but the best openers show them a moment they can feel.

A "Show, Don't Tell" opener drops your donor right into the middle of the action, making them feel like they're witnessing a story unfold in real-time.

Instead of saying "Help a family in need," imagine leading with "Andy sank in his chair." That single image sparks curiosity, emotion, and connection—and your donor has to know what happens next.

Whether it's an email subject line, direct mail teaser, or social media post, these openers will grab attention and pull readers into a story where they become the hero. This toolkit gives you the formulas and examples you need to transform your fundraising communications from overlooked to unforgettable.

What's Inside:

1. **Opener Formulas & Swipe Files:** Examples and formulas to immediately engage your audience.
2. **Copy-and-Paste Swipe Files:** Ready-to-use openers for emails, direct mail, and social media.
3. **Customization Tips:** Techniques to tailor openers for your specific cause and audience.
4. **Delivering on the Story:** How to fulfill the promise of your opener and build donor trust.

Opener Formulas & Swipe Files:

The right opener can be the difference between a donor scrolling past your message or stopping to engage.

In this section, you'll find two powerful types of openers:

1. **Action Openers** that pull donors into an emotional moment
2. **Impact Openers** that highlight the consequences of inaction.

Each comes with formulas and real examples you can copy, customize, or use as inspiration.

Use these for email subject lines, direct mail teasers, social media posts, or anywhere you need to grab attention fast. Let's dive in and start turning your stories into irresistible invitations for donors to act.

Action Openers – Drop Donors Into the Moment

1. [Name] [Verb] in [Unexpected Emotion/Action]

- “Andy sank in his chair.”
- “Maria froze at the sound of the phone.”
- “James clutched the envelope like it was gold.”

2. [Emotion] Without Saying It:

- “Tears blurred her vision as she read the letter.” (Instead of saying “She was overwhelmed with gratitude.”)
- “He stared at the empty fridge.” (Instead of saying “He was hungry.”)
- “She ripped the rejection letter in half.” (Instead of saying “She was frustrated.”)

3. Physical Reactions to Emotional Moments:

- “Her hands trembled as she turned the key.”
- “His voice cracked before he could finish the sentence.”
- “She exhaled for the first time in days.”

4. Unexpected Contrasts:

- “He smiled as the eviction notice fluttered to the ground.”
- “She laughed at the worst moment possible.”
- “He felt lighter carrying twice the burden.”

5. Unfinished Stories:

- “She stood at the door, unsure if she’d knock.”
- “He held the check, but couldn’t sign it.”
- “She opened the letter and gasped.”

Impact Openers – Show the Consequences

1. It [Negative Impact Statement]

- “It destroyed our budget.”
- “It crushed her dreams.”
- “It broke his spirit.”

2. [Simple Subject] [Dramatic Consequence]

- “One mistake cost him everything.”
- “A single letter shattered her future.”
- “One call changed his life forever.”

3. The [Unexpected Villain] That [Did the Damage]

- “The tiny pill that ruined everything.”
- “The cold winter that emptied our shelters.”
- “The missed call that cost her a second chance.”

4. [Dramatic Verb] + [Essential Resource or Value]

- “Wiped out our food supply.”
- “Shattered the community’s trust.”
- “Gutted our emergency fund.”

5. Financial/Resource Impact Phrases

- “It drained our emergency fund.”

- “It blew a hole in our budget.”
- “It wiped out our supplies.”
- “It tripled our costs overnight.”

Customization Tips:

- Choose a Strong Verb: The action should suggest emotion without explicitly stating it. Instead of “sat,” use “collapsed,” “slumped,” or “perched.”
- Hint at a Bigger Story: The opener should raise questions in the reader’s mind. Why did Andy sink in his chair? What did Maria hear on the phone?
- Make It Relatable: Even if the situation is unique, the emotion should feel universal. Everyone understands fear, hope, or relief.

Delivering on the Story: How to Avoid the Bait and Switch

A powerful opener grabs attention, but it’s what comes next that earns trust—and donations.

To keep donors engaged and feeling valued, your story must deliver on the promise of the opener.

Here’s how:

1. Stay True to the Tone and Emotion: If your opener is dramatic or emotional, ensure the story matches that intensity. “It destroyed our budget” should lead into a story about a real financial crisis, not a minor inconvenience.

2. Provide Context Quickly: After hooking readers with an action-packed or impactful opener, immediately explain why it matters. For example, “Andy sank in his chair” should be followed by, “He just learned his family wouldn’t have enough to cover rent this month.”

3. Keep the Focus on the Donor’s Role: Once the story unfolds, highlight how the donor can change the outcome. Make them feel like the hero of the story’s next chapter. For example, “But with your help, Andy won’t have to face eviction.”

4. Avoid Overpromising: Don’t exaggerate the stakes in the opener if the story can’t back it up. Authenticity builds long-term donor relationships.

5. Close the Loop: Ensure the emotional thread from the opener runs through to the call-to-action. If you start with a problem, show how the donor’s gift solves it.

Why These Openers Work:

- **Instant Stakes:** The reader immediately senses something bad has happened, triggering curiosity and concern.
- **Implied Urgency:** Openers like “It destroyed our budget” suggest there’s a problem right now that needs fixing—perfect for motivating donations.
- **Relatable:** Everyone understands financial strain, loss, or damage, making these openers universally resonant.

Ready to Take Your Storytelling to the Next Level?

Join us at the Nonprofit Storytelling Conference, where we dive even deeper into powerful storytelling techniques like these. You’ll learn tips and tricks from masters of storytelling and audience engagement, tailored specifically for nonprofit fundraising.

Imagine creating donor communications that feel like the climax of a blockbuster film—where your donors aren’t just spectators but the heroes who save the day.

Get your ticket now and transform your fundraising with stories that stick.

To learn more, go to <https://nonprofitstorytellingconference.com>

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