

Using Universal Language to Move Donors

How to connect through emotion, not explanation



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Some truths don't need translating.

A baby's cry. A sigh of relief. A piano chord that sounds like heartbreak.

These are all forms of *universal language*—and they speak straight to the emotional brain, no matter where you're from.

The best donor communications don't just use words.

They use *feeling*.

They use *imagery*.

They use *sound, gesture, rhythm, and contrast* to create a moment that needs no over-explaining.

This guide shows you how to do it.

PART 1: UNIVERSAL LANGUAGES THAT MOVE PEOPLE

These are forms of communication that bypass logic and speak directly to shared human experience.

1. Emotion

We know it instantly—often before we realize it.

- Crying (grief, relief, joy)
- Laughter (recognition, nervousness)
- Facial expressions (pain, pride, shame, awe)
- Tone of voice (fear, calm, urgency)

TRY THIS IN STORYTELLING:

“She stared at the envelope—the one stamped in red with *FINAL NOTICE*. Her hands shook so badly she couldn't open it.”

That's fear. You didn't have to say the word. We *feel* it.

2. Music & Sound

You don't need lyrics to know when a song is sad—or hopeful—or dangerous.

- Minor keys = sadness or seriousness
- Major keys = joy or celebration
- Silence = tension or reverence
- Crescendo = urgency, excitement
- Heartbeat rhythm = life, suspense

TRY THIS IN A VIDEO OR IN A LIVE APPEAL:

Use one low cello note to underscore a turning point.

Or silence after a powerful sentence to let the donor's heart *catch up*.

3. Visuals & Body Language

We recognize slumped shoulders, bright eyes, and outstretched hands instinctively.

- Open hands = invitation
- Turning away = shame
- Clenched jaw = restraint
- Tears on a cheek = sorrow or release
- Clutching a worn object = longing, memory

TRY THIS IN A PHOTO CAPTION:

"You can't see her face—but look at her hand. That's how tightly she's holding on to hope."

4. Rhythm & Repetition

Certain sentence patterns trigger a feeling before the brain catches up.

- Short, sharp sentences = urgency
- Long, winding sentences = reflection or grief
- Repetition = emphasis and emotional build

TRY THIS IN YOUR NEXT APPEAL OPENING:

They told her to give up.

They told her she'd never make it.

But she did.

5. Universal Situations

Some human experiences are recognizable in any culture:

- A mother protecting her child
- A person grieving a loved one
- A moment of relief after surviving something hard
- A community gathering to rebuild

TRY SOMETHING LIKE THIS IN A STORY HOOK:

“When the floodwaters hit, everyone ran—except Maria. She stayed to grab the neighbor’s baby.”

That moment doesn’t need translation.

PART 2: UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE NEEDS CONTEXT

A trembling hand could mean:

- Fear
- Age
- Excitement
- Withdrawal
- Cold
- Weakness

Universal *cues* need emotional *clues*.
That’s where your *storytelling* comes in.

Bad: “Her hands shook.”
(But why?)

Better: “She stared at the envelope—the one stamped in red with *FINAL NOTICE*. Her hands shook so badly she couldn’t open it.”

Now the donor *knows* what emotion to feel.

Show the cue. Then give the clue. That’s what makes the feeling clear.

Cue (universal signal)

“He laughed.”

Clue (emotional anchor)

“...like his body couldn’t hold the relief.”

Cue (universal signal)

"She went silent."

"Tears streamed down."

Clue (emotional anchor)

"...after hearing the test results."

"...as she looked at her daughter's new backpack."

Don't leave the donor guessing.

Anchor the emotion.

PART 3: RECOGNIZABLE FORMULAS FOR UNIVERSAL IMPACT

If you're stuck writing a story that feels flat, try one of these five shortcuts.

Formula 1: An Object Tells the Story

Use this when an object carries emotional weight.

Template:

*[Character] held / stared at / touched [specific object]...
...like [emotion] had taken physical form.*

Example:

She kept folding the hospital bill—over and over—like she could crease the numbers into something smaller.

Formula 2: Sound as an Emotion Signal

Use this when silence or sound conveys the mood better than words.

Template:

*After [turning point], the only sound was [specific, ambient sound].
(Or: "The silence was the kind you only hear when...")*

Example:

After the nurse spoke, no one said a word. The only sound in the room was the soft crinkle of tissue in her hands.

Formula 3: The Sensory Snapshot

Use this to anchor emotion in a visual or tactile detail.

Template:

*[Character] did [small physical action] with [specific object or body part],
...[optional context or emotional hint].*

Example:

He sat on the edge of the cot, pulling his sleeves down to hide the bruises—eyes locked on the floor.

Formula 4: Flip the Ending

Use this to rewrite a flat fact as a felt moment.

Template:

*Start with what happened. Then show how it felt.
→ [Action]. [Reaction or transformation.]*

Example:

She walked through the door and let out a breath she'd been holding since the fire.
It was still her home.

Formula 5: Let the Object Speak

Use this when something physical says what the character won't.

Template:

*They didn't say [emotion]. They just [interacted with object]...
...as if [internal experience or memory].*

Example:

She didn't cry until she saw the backpack—still zipped, still dusty.
That's when it hit her that her son wasn't coming back.

These formulas work because they combine:

- A **universal cue** (body language, object, sound)
- A **concrete anchor** (the thing we see, hear, or touch)
- A **story beat** that makes the donor feel the emotion without naming it

PART 4: DONOR COMMUNICATION SWIPE FILE

Steal these lines. Or use them as inspiration to write your own.

Thank-You Note Openers (Emotion-Based):

- “I wish you could’ve seen the look on her face. It said everything.”
- “You didn’t just give a gift. You gave someone their voice back.”

Appeal Closers (Rhythm-Based):

- “One story. One chance. One moment to say yes.”
- “You’ve helped before. You care deeply. You’re needed again.”

Video Script Voiceover (Sound + Visual):

“At first, no one spoke.
Just the scratch of a pencil on paper.
Then—
‘I know what I want to be when I grow up.’”

QUICK PRACTICE: USE THE FORMULAS

Try rewriting these flat lines using any of the 5 formulas:

1. “He smiled.”
2. “She cried.”
3. “They clapped.”
4. “He didn’t say anything.”

Tip: Use one small, physical detail + one anchor or consequence.

YOUR SHORTCUT TO TRUST, CONNECTION, AND GENEROSITY:

Storytelling isn’t just about plot or persuasion.

It’s about *transmission*.

A way to speak directly to the heart—without a translation guide.

Universal language is your shortcut to trust, connection, and generosity.

Use it wisely. Use it truthfully. Use it to create moments they’ll never forget.

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