

A SESSION FOR FIRST READERS

# First Readers Workshop

The book gives you the full system. This session shows you where to start.



**Chris Davenport** Author of *Stories That Raise Money* · Wednesday, July 22 · 10:00 AM PT

# Arc. Story. Scene.

**ARC**

The donor's whole relationship

**STORY**

One message (an appeal, a report, a thank-you)

**SCENE**

**The moment they remember**

**Most fundraisers think at the Story level. Donors remember the Scene.**

LET'S START WITH A QUESTION

**Think of your favorite  
movie or show.**

What came to mind first?

**Drop yours in the chat.**

NOTICE WHAT JUST HAPPENED

**Nobody gave me the plot.**

**You gave me a moment.**

We hold onto scenes.

**Some scenes  
keep you in your seat.**

**Some scenes  
send you for popcorn.**

A seat-keeping scene is not the loudest scene. It is the moment where you need to know what happens next.

# Fundraising has popcorn paragraphs.

“We provide wraparound services.”

“We served 1,200 families.”

“Your support is critical.”

“We are committed to community impact.”

**A popcorn paragraph explains the work. A Scene keeps the donor in the story.**

## SUE'S STORY

**Sue did not have a passion problem.**

**She had a Scene problem.**

Sue cared. The mission mattered. But the story never gave the room a moment to care about.

# David: summary vs. Scene

## SUMMARY

“David grew up in poverty and struggled in school. After connecting with our mentorship program, he turned his life around. Today he is a college graduate with a full-time job.”

## SCENE

**“The day David got his college acceptance letter, he didn’t call his mom first. He called his mentor.”**

**The Scene is often smaller than the outcome.**

*“We do such important work. Why aren’t more people giving?”*

# Understanding isn’t the same as caring.

A donor can understand exactly what your organization does and still not give. Story turns understanding into caring. The scene inside the story is what makes a donor care enough to act.

WHY WEAK APPEALS STILL RAISE SOMETHING

**Some donors will give anyway.  
That's who they are.**

They care about your organization at a low level, and when your envelope lands, they give. That's loyalty and it's also why a weak message still “works.”

**But if you want people to give you more, give them someone or something to care about.**

## AMELIA AT THE GALA

The goal

**\$30,000**

Raised in fifteen minutes

**\$65,000**

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**The room didn't change. The donors didn't change.**  
**The story changed.**

**Your donor woke up this morning  
with two wallets.**

Not literally. Emotionally.

# Donors give money. They receive meaning.

A donor has two emotional wallets.

## The Must Wallet

Obligation. Bills. Pressure.

A donor who gives because they *should* gives the smallest gift that makes the pressure go away.

## The Choice Wallet

Desire. Meaning. Joy. Identity.

A donor who gives because they *want* to help gives from meaning. A Scene connects here.

# The three pieces

## STORY

### **Makes the donor care.**

A beneficiary they can picture, a problem, a hopeful future.

## OFFER

### **Shows what the gift does.**

A specific amount and a specific outcome they can picture.

## ASK

### **Invites them to act.**

A specific action. The part where you actually ask.

## STORY

# A story doesn't have to be long.

One sentence can be a story. What matters is whether it plants a specific image in the donor's mind. It needs three things:

### **A beneficiary.**

A specific person, animal, or place. Not “the community.”  
Specific enough to picture.

### **A problem.**

Something the beneficiary is up against.

### **A hopeful future.**

A version where it gets solved, with the donor's help.

## OFFER

# “What will my gift actually do?”

Every donor asks it silently. The offer answers it in a way they can picture.

### NOT AN OFFER

“Your support makes a difference.”

### AN OFFER

**“Your gift of \$50 provides a week of meals for a family in crisis.”**

ASK

**The part where you actually ask.**

**“Will you give \$50?”**

A donor can be moved by your story and sold on your offer, and still do nothing — because nobody told them what to do next. They feel good, set the letter down, and go make dinner.

# Story carries most of the weight.

Make someone care and you can usually find the offer and the ask. But if nobody cares, there's no offer clever enough to rescue the message.

# Three ways to find a Scene

- 1 Start with a statistic**
- 2 Start with a Desk sentence**
- 3 Start with a stand-in**

## WAY 1 · START WITH A STATISTIC

**“If that is true, what else must also be true?”**

**“One in five children in our county does not have enough to eat.”**

Then a child opens the fridge and already knows there’s nothing in it. A teacher sees a student save half a sandwich for later. A mom adds water to the soup so there is enough for everyone.

**There is usually a person hiding inside the number.**

## FOLLOWING THE CHAIN

**“Two-thirds of our patients have no health insurance.”**

**If that is true** — seeing a doctor anywhere else means paying out of pocket.

**If they cannot pay** — they wait.

**If they wait** — something small may become serious.

**If they are waiting** — they may be afraid the whole time.

“Right now, somewhere in our county, a woman has found a lump and is telling herself she’ll wait. She can’t afford to know.”

## WAY 2 · START WITH A DESK SENTENCE

# “Where would I see that?”

**“Our organization reduces isolation among seniors.”**

A quiet apartment. A calendar with nothing written on it. A table set for one. A senior center two blocks away and a woman standing at the door.

**Desk sentence → Field question → visible moment.**

### WAY 3 · START WITH A STAND-IN

**Make up the kind of moment you need.**  
**Then go find the real version.**

*“A widow whose husband died last year. She still sets two plates at dinner. The senior center is two blocks away and she hasn’t been since the funeral. Last Tuesday she put on the cardigan he gave her and walked over. She stood at the door for a minute, then walked back home. First time she had made it that far in a year.”*

**You cannot find what you cannot picture.**

# Collect the five pieces

Don't write the whole story in the hallway. Just capture these.

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## Beneficiary

Who or what is this about?

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## Situation

Where are we and what is happening?

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## Stakes

What could be lost?  
What might not happen?

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## Moment

What did someone say or do?

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## Shift

What changed, even slightly?

# Collect the five pieces

Don't write the whole story in the hallway. Just capture these.

## Beneficiary

Who or what is this about?

A widow whose husband died last year.”

## Situation

Where are we and what is happening?

She still sets two plates at dinner. The senior center is two blocks away and she hasn't been since the funeral.

## Stakes

What could be lost?  
What might not happen?

She may remain alone and disconnected from life outside her home. (Implied)

## Moment

What did someone say or do?

She put on the cardigan he gave her and walked over. She stood at the door for a minute, then walked back home.

## Shift

What changed, even slightly?

First time she had made it that far in a year.

# You found the moment. Now it's flat on the page.

It felt electric when you heard it. Four writing tips keep it that way.

## THE WRITING

# Four ways to make a story more engaging

- 1 Don't start at the beginning
- 2 Find the detail that sticks
- 3 Use dialogue to drop the donor into the story
- 4 Drive it with But / Therefore

**Do not start at the beginning.**  
**Start where the story becomes alive.**

*“Elena has been sitting in the parking lot for ten minutes. The engine is off. Her hands are in her lap. Through the windshield she can see the front door of the food bank. She knows she needs to go in. She just cannot make herself open the car door yet.”*

**Start in the middle. Then explain how we got there.**

THE DETAIL THAT STICKS

Find your red coat.

Then get out of its way.

A crib means safety. The feeding tube beside it means her body cannot do what it should. The contrast creates the feeling. The donor's brain does the rest.

LET THEM SPEAK

“Can I keep the blanket?”

Instead of: “The child had very little and had become attached to the blanket.”

**The right quote does not explain the Scene. It drops the donor into it.**

# But / Therefore

## FLAT

Tanya struggled. She called us. She met with a counselor. Things improved.

## MOVING

Tanya was working two jobs, **but** she still could not cover rent. **Therefore** she fell behind. **But** she was too ashamed to tell anyone. **Therefore** by the time she called, she had thirty days before eviction.

Every time you write “but,” something shifted. Look there for the Scene.

## THE DIAGNOSTIC

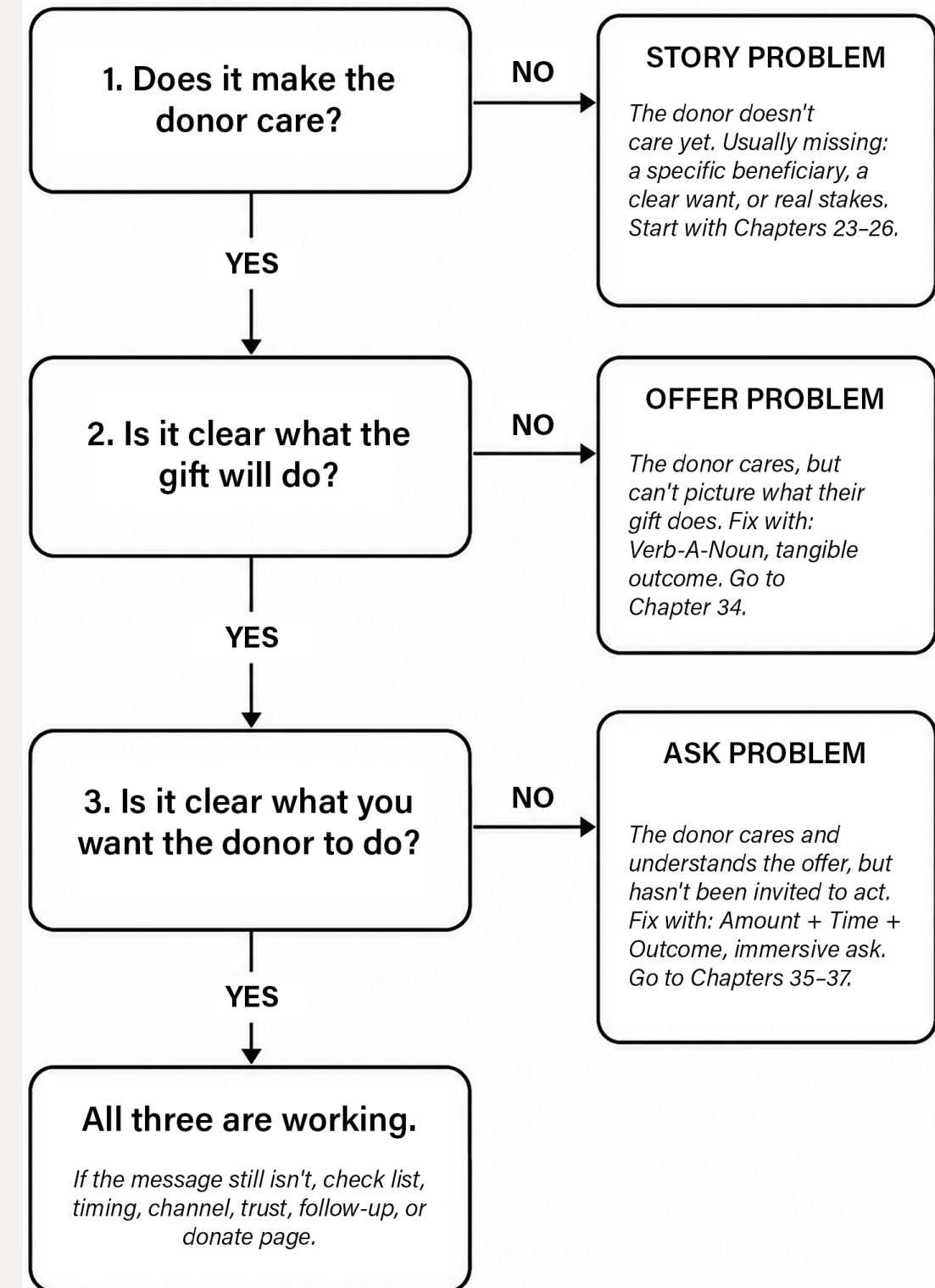
# The whole thing on one page.

Yes moves you down. No sends you to the problem on the right. More than one can break at once.

PRE-LAUNCH EDITION - PAGE 262

## Story Offer Ask Diagnostic

*If a fundraising message isn't working, one of these three is broken. Run all three checks. More than one can break at once.*



CHECK 1 OF 3

1

# Does it make the donor care?

## THE TEST

Hand the draft to someone outside your org. Ask them, in their own words: who is the gift for?

**A specific person, animal, or place? You have a story.**

“People in need,” “the community”? The beneficiary isn’t on the page.

## IF NO → STORY PROBLEM

Check for three things: a beneficiary the reader can picture, a want they’re chasing, something in the way.

CHECK 2 OF 3

2

## Is it clear what the gift will do?

### THE TEST

Find the sentence that says what the money does.  
Missing? Offer problem. There? Read it out loud —  
could the donor repeat it to a friend?

“Changes lives” — no.

“\$50 puts a week of meals on a family’s table” — yes.

**IF NO → OFFER PROBLEM**

They have nothing concrete to say  
yes to. Fix with Verb-A-Noun.

CHECK 3 OF 3

## 3 Is it clear what you want them to do?

### THE TEST

Read only the last paragraph. Is there a real ask — a specific action attached to a specific amount? Or “thank you for your continued partnership”?

**The ask should be findable in five seconds by someone skimming.**

### IF NO → ASK PROBLEM

The donor reaches the end and doesn't know what's expected of them.

DIAGNOSTIC

How did your message do?

**What areas could be stronger?**

Drop your results into the chat.

# Start where your message breaks

## STORY PROBLEM

### Chapters 23–26

Creating the caring: find the want, name the villain, choose the frame, build the emotion. Then 27–30 to write the moment.

## OFFER PROBLEM

### Chapter 34

The Offer. Start with Verb-A-Noun.

## ASK PROBLEM

### Chapters 35–37

The Ask, the Immersive Ask, and putting all three together.

All three working and still flat? The problem isn't in the message — it's around it: the list, timing, channel, trust, follow-up, or the giving page.

HARD TIME FINDING STORIES? START HERE · THE “FINDING A STORY” CHAPTERS

# The stories are already around you. These chapters teach you to catch them.

**Ch. 15**

## **Build a Stand-In First**

Make up the moment you need, then go find the real version. You can't find what you can't picture.

**Ch. 17**

## **Get the Pieces**

The five things to walk away with: beneficiary, situation, stakes, moment, shift.

**Ch. 19**

## **The Interview**

How to sit down with a beneficiary — who to talk to, how to set it up, how to follow the energy.

**Ch. 22**

## **When the Beneficiary Isn't a Person**

A river, a building, a cause — how to make someone care about it anyway.

READ THESE “CREATING THE CARING” CHAPTERS

# Facts and data are the easy part. Caring is what you build.

**Ch. 23**

## **Find the Want**

What is the beneficiary fighting for? Give the donor something to root for.

**Ch. 24**

## **Name the Villain**

What would keep winning if your organization didn't exist?

**Ch. 25**

## **Choose the Frame**

Every story holds more than one emotional truth. Lead with one on purpose.

**Ch. 26**

## **Build the Emotion**

Want + Doubt + Recognition — emotion built on purpose, no puppy required.

**Want help?**

IF YOU WANT HELP

# Start here.

## Free diagnostic

Run your next message through it before you send.

## Nonprofit Storytelling Pro

Expert eyes on your fundraising before it goes out.

## Campaign Accelerators

A short, structured push on one real campaign.

## Farmhouse Intensives

A few organizations, a farmhouse table, real work.

## The Conference

Hundreds of fundraisers practicing this craft together.

## The Club · Free

New storytelling and fundraising tools as we make them.

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Questions?