

WRITING HUMAN INTEREST STORIES FOR UNICEF

A GUIDE FOR FIELD STAFF

unite for
children

unicef 

HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

WHAT ARE THEY?

- Emotive, Personal, Engaging
- Give a 'human face' to bigger concepts/programmes
- Show our work makes a real difference to real people

HOW ARE THEY USED?

Newsletter, Website (local & global) Donor reports, Annual reports, Media, Case studies, etc.

WHY DO THEY MATTER?

- Generate funds/publicity
- Reporting mechanism
- Raise UNICEF's profile

THE PROCESS

1) IDENTIFY

2) RESEARCH (INTERVIEW)

3) WRITE

4) FIRST EDIT

(By programme staff)

5) SECOND EDIT

(By C&I Chief)

6) PUBLISHED

IDENTIFYING A GOOD HUMAN INTEREST STORY

THINK SMALL

Get up close and personal. One or two children, one family, one UNICEF worker...

A POINT OF DIFFERENCE

Is it something your mother, or your aunt, or a friend overseas would be interested in hearing about?

CLEAR PROBLEM, CLEAR OUTCOME

By the end of your story, the reader should feel satisfied that the support they give UNICEF is resulting in real changes and making people's lives better.

EXERCISE

WHAT WOULD MAKE THE BEST STORY?

- 1) UNICEF funds have helped a Sidr-affected family in a small rural village to re-build their damaged home
- 2) Children in the district of Jessore are participating in Global Handwashing Day
- 3) A UNICEF worker in Dhaka has written a report on the geographic targeting of UNICEF services
- 4) A mother in the CHT has attended a UNICEF community meeting on arsenic mitigation

EXERCISE

In district groups, spend 10 minutes trying to identify a real case study from your area that might make a good human interest story.

Report back to the larger group and explain why you have chosen that particular case study.

RESEARCHING YOUR STORY

BACKGROUND

Get background on the project from UNICEF programme staff, publications, website (factsheets), etc.

INTERVIEW

Ask open-ended questions. Encourage your subject to speak with emotion and give specific details.

OBSERVATION

You're writing for an international audience, so many of the sights, sounds, smells of Bangladesh will be unfamiliar and interesting to them. Help your reader imagine what it's like to be there on the ground.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

OPEN-ENDED

Yes/No answers don't make good quotes. Instead, ask questions like 'Can you tell me about...' or 'How do you feel about...' or 'Describe what you did when...'

SPECIFIC

Little details make quotes interesting and personal. Encourage your subject to give more specific answers.

EMOTIVE

Be sensitive, but try to get your subject to speak about how they feel. Quotes like this allow the reader to connect with the story's subject on a human level.

EXERCISE

WHAT ARE THE BEST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS?

- 1) Do you have access to clean water now?
- 2) What are some problems for people in your village?
- 3) How do you feel to see your daughter swimming?
- 4) Are you happy that your son is going to school?
- 5) Can you tell me about yourself and your family?
- 6) How is life better now than it was 5 years ago?

EXERCISE

Form pairs. For 5 minutes, one person will interview the other person about the work that they do for UNICEF.

The interviewer should try to ask questions that will get good quotes in response.

After 5 minutes, swap roles.

Each person will report back to the larger group with their best quote.

WRITING YOUR STORY

WRITE IT LIKE YOU WOULD SAY IT

You're writing for regular people, not donors, partners or UNICEF staff. Use simple, everyday language. Explain any unfamiliar terms. Avoid acronyms where possible.

BE ACCURATE

Especially with names, ages, titles, organisations.

RELAX AND WRITE FROM THE HEART

Don't worry about the technical stuff (English skills, grammar, etc.) That's what I'm here for! Your job is to tell the story of a human being in an interesting way that will make your reader feel something.

THE FORMULA

- 1) **INTRODUCTION** (Approximately 100 words)
- 2) **ISSUE** (Approximately 200 words)
- 3) **ACTION** (Approximately 200 words)
- 4) **IMPACT** (Approximately 200 words)
- 5) **CONCLUSION** (Approximately 100 words)

INTRODUCTION

- Get your reader 'hooked' in the story
- Set the scene – describe the sights, sounds, smells
- You may wish to start with a short anecdote that illustrates the 'main point' of your story
- Or, start with a good quote that draws your reader in and allows them to 'get to know' your subject
- The last sentence of your introduction should move from micro to macro – what is the bigger issue at play? What is your story going to be 'about'?

ISSUE

- What is/was the situation before UNICEF intervened?
- Try to paint much of the picture using your subject's own words – both direct and indirect quotes
- Back up your subject's own personal experience with statistics or other examples.
- It's best to 'unpack' the meaning of statistics if you can. Describe trends and theories (things that can be easily pictured/imagined). Use only the most essential figures in the body of your story

ACTION

- What is UNICEF doing or what have they done?
- You may like to answer this question using a quote from a UNICEF staff member, a field worker, or the Country Representative or Deputy Representative.
- In a couple of sentences, describe the project itself: How does it work? Who is funding/implementing it? Who are the key players? What does it aim to achieve? Who is benefiting and how?
- But, be careful – remember that your story is not about UNICEF, it's about the person, family, or worker.

IMPACT

- What has changed for your subject as a result of UNICEF's work?
- This should be a 'good news' paragraph! Try to capture that emotion. Your reader should be able to feel your subject's happiness/satisfaction/relief
- Again, use your subject's own words as much as possible – both direct and indirect quotes
- Ensure that UNICEF's role in the story is clear. The 'Impact' should be a direct result of the 'Action' described in the previous section.

CONCLUSION

- There are many ways to finish a story, but make sure you finish on a ‘strong note’.
- You may like to use the ‘bookends’ technique and return to your opening anecdote or quote – how has the situation turned out? What has changed?
- Alternatively, you might like to take a ‘big picture’ approach and end with an overarching statement about the stand that UNICEF is taking on this issue.
- As with the introduction, a powerful, inspiring quote is always a good way to end.

EXERCISE

Form 6 groups. In your group, study a human interest story from the most recent UNICEF Bangladesh newsletter and try to identify the:

- **Introduction**
- **Issue**
- **Action**
- **Impact**
- **Conclusion**

As a group, discuss what elements of the story work well, and what elements are not so successful.

QUESTIONS

???

THANK YOU

For examples of recent UNICEF Bangladesh human interest stories, please visit:

www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media_5339.htm