

How would the National
Enquirer write your letter?

I am not kidding!

- **Ask, "How would *The National Enquirer* write this?"** *The Enquirer* knows the value of the amazing, the lurid, the outrageous, the unexpected — and it milks it. Are you doing that, or are you imitating "respectable" journalism, purposely keeping it as colorless and purely factual as possible? Guess which approach gets more readership — and raises more funds.

Write the call to action before you do anything else

- It's very un-Zen to say it, but fundraising is more about the destination than the journey. You're going to arrive a lot more successfully when you know exactly where you're going.

What is your call to action?

- CMHF for 2 years was – We can't afford to wait.
- The sub-theme was You can't afford to wait.

Call to action and tag lines

- **Arts & Culture:** *Big Sky. Big Land. Big History.* — Montana Historical Society
The Montana Historical Society takes its state's most elemental and distinctive characteristics (Big Sky, Big Land) and deftly melds them with its mission in a way that generates excitement. The result is a tagline with punch and focus. And a big hit with voters.

- **Associations:** *Building community deep in the hearts of Texans* —TexasNonprofits
TexasNonprofits' tagline tweaks the title of an iconic American popular song from the 1940s and brilliantly connects it to the spirit, passion and mission of the state's citizenry. A great example of how word play works in a tagline.

- **Civic Benefit:** *Holding Power Accountable* — Common Cause
Common Cause's tagline leaves no doubt about the organization's mission, unique value and commitment. It's definitive, with a powerful economy of words. An excellent example of the tagline clarifying the nonprofit's focus, when the organization's name alone doesn't do so.

- **Education:** *A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste*® — UNCF -The United Negro College Fund

This 38-year-old tagline from UNCF still rings strong. It elegantly delivers its straight up, powerful message. When your tagline is the boiled-down essence of your argument for support, you've achieved tagline bliss. That's why this one is a classic.

- **Environment & Animals:** *Because the earth needs a good lawyer* — Earthjustice
Earthjustice capitalizes on what people do understand – that a lawyer protects rights – and uses that framework to dramatically position its role and impact in the environmental movement. And it does so with humor. If your tagline makes people smile or light up, without stepping on your message, then you’ve made an emotional connection...Bravo.

- **Grantmaking:** *If you want to be remembered, do something memorable.*

— The Cleveland Foundation

It's a rare tagline that manages to recruit people to its cause both unabashedly and effectively. That's exactly what The Cleveland Foundation pulls off here. Clear, concise, and...memorable! A model for any organization promoting philanthropy.

- **Health & Sciences:** *Finding a cure now...so our daughters won't have to.* © — PA Breast Cancer Coalition

The PA Breast Cancer Coalition's tagline is both emphatic and poignant. It strikes a deep emotional chord, and conveys the focus and impact of its work without being overly sentimental. "Finding a cure," a highly used phrase for health organizations, is bolstered here by the appeal to solve a problem now so future generations won't suffer from it.

- **Human Services:** *Filling pantries. Filling lives.* — Houston Food Bank

With simple but effective use of word repetition, the Houston Food Bank clarifies its work and impact. It delivers on two distinct levels—the literal act of putting food on people’s shelves and the emotional payoff to donors and volunteers. An excellent example of a mission-driven tagline.

- **International, Foreign Affairs & National Security:** *Send a Net. Save a Life.* —
Nothing But Nets
Short, punchy and laser-sharp, the Nothing But Nets tagline connects the action with the outcome. It's inspirational in the simplicity of its message and its reason for existing. The kind of tagline nonprofits should model.

- **Religion & Spiritual Development:** *Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.* — The people of The United Methodist Church
The work of religious organizations often operates on several planes at once — a challenge for any organization and its messaging. Here, The United Methodist Church delivers a tagline trinity that supports its applied faith mission and is warm, enthusiastic and embracing

- **Other:** *A head for business. A heart for the world.* — SIFE (Students In Free Enterprise)
If an organization's identity contains within it a distinct contrast between its key characteristics, that's often good tagline material. Here, SIFE surprises with its crystal-clear tagline that conveys not only what's unique about it but also capitalizes on the contrast between profit and compassion.

Think tag line but ask WHY!!!

- **Think of 25 reasons why a donor should give to you.** Then, get rid of all the reasons that are about you and not the donor.

You have a destination but you still need a letter ...

- The right offer should be so attractive that only a lunatic would say no.
- Make it easy to send back
- Inserting a deadline will create a sense of urgency. Choose your deadline carefully. A date too far in advance has no urgency. On the other hand, pick a date that's too close and if for some reason the mailing is delayed, your effort is chopped liver.

What drives success? The seven sisters ...

- The more of the key copy drivers—the emotional hot buttons that change behavior—that you can insert into your effort, the more powerful your argument. Those copy drivers are: fear – greed – guilt – anger – exclusivity – salvation – flattery.

What is the most used, and therefore, the best copy driver?

Flattery ...

- I know this stuff is old hat to *you*. After all, you're an astonishingly successful fundraiser already ... one of the best in the biz ... people have mentioned your name to me. So just pass this piece along to one of your junior colleagues and they'll be eternally grateful.

Making the seven sisters part of your team.

- **Overdo it.** Be too dramatic. Too emotional. Too strong. Eight times out of 10, you'll realize later that you didn't overdo it at all. The other two times — well, it's a lot easier to tone it down than it is to pump up weak and underdone copy.

Show, don't tell.

- You've heard this in every creative-writing class you've ever taken. It's good advice. It's easy to assert that something is sad, or great, or special, or cutting-edge. It's more persuasive to give the facts that add up to those things.

Flunk your English teachers.

- They meant well and taught you many useful things, but not everything they taught was useful. Paragraphs don't have to start with topic sentences. Passive voice is not all that bad. Neither are sentence fragments.

Repeat yourself.

- Whatever it is that you want people to do, tell them that thing again and again and again. Repeat yourself because you don't know if they understood or even noticed it the first and second times. Repeat yourself because hardly anyone starts at the beginning and reads straight through to the end.

Annoy yourself.

- You are not your donor. That's one of the most important truths you can know, and it has a dramatic side effect: Messages that motivate donors very often will turn you off. Learn to make your own distaste a good barometer for effective fundraising.

Use a cliché or two.

- There's a reason clichés catch on. They express things that people often want to express — in short (and sweet) ways that are easy (as pie) to remember.
Fundraising isn't creative-writing class; you aren't going to lose points for lack of originality. However, you will get extra credit for motivating more people to give.

Omit huge numbers.

- Donors don't want to solve a problem because it's big. They want to solve it because it's solvable. Yes, 24,000 children die from hunger-related causes every day. That's a mind-boggling fact. The fact that it's mind-boggling is exactly why it's a poor fundraising platform. Give donors the opportunity to save one life, and then another and another.

Use wrong grammar.

- I'm not suggesting you be churlish and deliberately make stupid mistakes. But sometimes getting it right makes you come across as a schoolmarm, which, unless you're an actual schoolmarm, is pretty unsympathetic. For instance, correct use of "whom" doesn't sound natural to most people (and it's probably dropping out of English). Any correct grammar that people don't commonly use in speech is a candidate for flouting. And if that's too painful, just revise so you avoid the issue.

Replace at least one paragraph that's about you.

- Instead, make it one that is about your reader.

Limit paragraphs to seven lines.

- Long paragraphs are forbidden territory. Anything more than seven lines is long. Most paragraphs should be one to four lines.

Break up long sentences.

- Long sentences are the main cause of thick, unreadable prose. Any sentence more than 20 words is probably too long. Keep sentences closer to 10 words. Or less. Really.

Read your copy out loud.

- This is one of the best ways to make sure your copy is clear, colloquial and easy to read. If you stumble while reading, sound pompous or arrogant, or just come across as an idiot, your copy needs more work.

Cut your first paragraph.

- I'm not kidding. It's like magic. Most likely, your first paragraph is a warm-up — and your real lead is your second or even third paragraph. Give it a try. It's one of the quickest and most surefire copy revisions I know.

Make the letter longer.

- I know you wouldn't read a long letter. Neither would I. For all we know, nobody reads long letters anymore. But we do know long letters work. Add another page, and you'll almost surely get more response.

Use photos sparingly — but use them.

- They say a picture is worth a thousand words (personally, I think it's more like 600). So use those pictures carefully. Too often we use photos that might as well be saying "lobster" a thousand times. Make sure the photos you use tell the same story as the words you write.

Underline stuff.

- And use bold. And italics. Emphasis and variation are great for readability. Just don't overdo it, because too much emphasis turns out to be no emphasis at all.

Use black serif type over a white background.

- Any variation from this — sans-serif type, white type over color, even black type over a tint, colored type — will degrade the reading comprehension of your donors. This advice will make some designers very unhappy, but it's a simple reality.

Use 13-point type for body copy.

- Hey, your donors wear bifocals. Almost every one of them. Would you rather be part of their daily struggle to read small type or a strain-free oasis in their day? Which choice do you think will make them more likely to respond?

Bypass most of your reviewers.

- Committees kill fundraising, systematically draining life and power from anything they touch, while bulking up the message with irrelevancies and worse. That's just the way committees are. Work without committees, and you'll see improvements — to your copy and your revenue

Time to write ...

Please use the following words in your attempt:

You (and a little I)

Please

Thank you

Free (or FREE)

Renew

Member

Exclusive

Other good words ...

- In relation to a donor's support – valued, loyal, kind (add in your favourite.)
- In relation to a donor's second gift – ongoing, enhanced, increased – or how about “the largest gift you can send.”
- About making the gift now – right now, your immediate gift

More good words ...

- In relation to your work – vital, important, key, life saving, life changing, extensive, trail blazing
- In relation to why you are asking this donor – need broad base support or grass roots support.

Future resources

- The agitator
- Tom Ahern