

## A RESOURCE FOR WRITING HUMAN INTEREST STORIES FOR IAFN NEWSLETTERS

Stories help us remember. Stories influence how we decide. Stories are linked with our sense of generosity. Human interest stories fascinate because they are of people we don't have easy access to. They're about relationships and the enhancement of a person's well being. But they can be tricky to write, especially when turning an oral story into a written one.

What follows are some tips about human interest stories, and 4 different approaches to writing them. We at the International Anglican Family Network are always collecting stories of how local churches around the Communion are supporting families under pressure. **We invite you to submit stories that you are happy to share via our newsletter and social media to our Coordinator at [iafn@anglicancommunion.org](mailto:iafn@anglicancommunion.org).**



Human interest story writing uses real people and real life incidents, appealing to the emotions of the readers to inspire them and to garner sympathy and support. The story writing flow is eloquent and often includes quotes and photos.

A traditional news report focuses on hard facts and data; a human interest story focuses on individual people and the emotion tied to their circumstances.

Your human interest story can be the door which opens the minds of the readers to something new; it can change their way of looking at a particular concept, person or situation. It can bring attention to an important topic that many readers aren't yet aware of.

Tips to help you write a good human interest story:

- Pick a topic you like - it must appeal to you
- Focus on getting the emotion right - what is that you want your readers to feel at the end?
- Describe people, places, attire and time so that readers can picture the story in their minds

Gathering material for your story:

- Background information. Ask: Who? How? Why it matters?
- Interview your sources. Ask: What? Why? When? Where? Each question is intended to help you gain important pieces of information while treating the person with respect and maintaining integrity.
- Get their permission to quote
- Take photographs if appropriate
- Authenticity of data and integrity of interviews is vital



Important things to remember about Structure:

- The **introduction** needs to be relevant and concise. It should explain what the story is about and provide a base on which the body can continue.
- The **body** is the most important part and is where the real story-telling takes place. It should have essential information, quotes, incident and opinions in a logical manner
- The **conclusion** should efficiently summarise what you have presented, ensuring there's a link between all the elements.
- Avoid language that creates a bias and use jargon only where relevant. Use clear, straightforward language. If you are writing something technical, find a way to transcribe it into more accessible language. How could you explain it to someone who is not an expert?
- Tell your story from beginning to end. Be concise: including a few well-placed and powerful anecdotes or quotes is much more effective than filling your article with details.

## A Suggested Outline:

### Paragraphs 1 + 2:

Write an engaging **lead**: This is where you get your reader hooked in to the article.

- A lead provides a preview of what is to come and establishes why your story is important. Summarise your story briefly, giving the reader an idea of what to expect through the rest of the piece. Create a mood: your story is meant to convey feeling as well as information.
- Consider starting with a short anecdote that identifies the point of your article: a brief story about someone you helped, an amazing volunteer or employee, involvement in a newsy event or the 'aha' moment that led to the birth of the organisation.
- Your lead should be no longer than 2 paragraphs

### Paragraph 3:

Write the **hub** of your article: This is where you put the news about your organisation.

- Why are you telling this story, why now, what is the content?
- What are the key statistics and oomph and/or urgency of your story?
- Choose words carefully. If you must use technical or workplace-specific words or phrases, ensure you explain them clearly the first time you use them.
- Use descriptive language. Try not to recount facts in a dry manner.
- Tell your readers why they should care: To effectively resonate, a reader has to become emotionally invested in a story and its subjects. How does what you are writing about affect them and the world around them

### Paragraph 4:

Write a **descriptor**: This is where you identify your organisation.

- What are you? Clearly identify what is unique about your organisation and what you are doing.
- You might want to include the age of group/organisation/church.
- Is your program/what you are doing a model for programs in other parts of the country/province/community?
- Put what you are doing in to perspective. Do you fit any trend?
- Be clear and specific about your goal. Be sure the reader knows why there is a need for what you do.

### Paragraph 5:

Write the **endpiece**: This is where you offer your readers something to think about.

- Leave your reader on a strong note
- One option: Return to the anecdote in the lead – how did it turn out?
- Another option: End with an over-arching statement about how you are having an impact
- Wrap up with a powerful quote if possible



Check these important things:

- Are the facts correct?
- Does your article answer the questions that it raises?
- Is information missing?
- Does it flow and make engaging reading?

### 3 Other Outlines you might want to try:

#### Facing a Challenge:

- introduce the character and his situation and goals (the main character is a client or person helped, not the organisation)
- write about the obstacles that the character faces; tension mounts
- the action peaks and the character triumphs with the help of your organisation

#### A Creative Response:

(Useful when there is a well-understood problem for which a standard response doesn't work)

- Structure based on an 'aha' moment followed by a response
- Introduce the people around you
- Explain the problem and inadequate solution
- Talk about your new approach, the test runs and theories
- Close with vision of a new reality

#### Connectivity Stories:

(These are 'bridging the gap' stories, where 'big meaning' is found in small events. These can be quite hard to write in ways that are interesting to read!)

- Start with small specific situation or event
- Look for the larger connection to the greater human experience
- Make connections between people in the stories and between the storyteller and the reader.



These notes are provided as a resource for contributors writing their stories for the IAFN newsletter. They are in no way intended to be a definitive guide to journalistic writing nor a teaching aide. IAFN 2017.

