

# How to Add an Emotional Hook to Your Fundraising Letters: What to Do and What Not to Do

Never, ever, forget to grab people's hearts in your appeal letter!

By Gail Perry

**W**e all talk about the need for a visual and emotional “hook” in our fundraising letters. But it's not easy to pull off.

What you want to do is create a visual metaphor or story that portrays your message. You must step back and get into the mind of the donor. Ask yourself: Which aspects of the work you're doing will appeal to the donor's fundamental values and beliefs? What benefits will they gain from your work?

This is very different from starting out an appeal letter: “This sad little boy can break a donor's heart” or “For 20 years our organization has lovingly served our community.” (Yawn.)

Instead start your letter with a story. Just the way lots of newspaper articles begin. Perhaps it goes like this:

*“Johnny Smith woke up Monday morning, hungry again.”*

Wow, doesn't that strike you in a completely different way? It creates a visual narrative that draws the reader in. You want to keep reading, don't you?

You could go on to say that Johnny lives right here in our community, and his single mother couldn't find work. You could talk about how many nights a week he goes to bed hungry. Or describe how he stuffs his empty backpack with cafeteria food at school because there's no food at home.

If you're the reader, the story generates an emotional feeling in your heart. As you read the letter, you form pictures in your mind. Pretty soon, you start to care about little Johnny. You imagine what it must be like to have to sneak food out of the cafeteria so you can have something to eat over the weekend. And you might feel angry that this is happening right here in your community. Once you have feelings about Johnny and his situation, you're far more prone to take action and make a gift.

“Logic leads to conclusions.  
Emotion leads to action.”



Remember this important axiom: Logic leads to conclusions. Emotion leads to action.

Think about all the rabble-rouser politicians out there – people who can stir up a crowd and incite action. They don't do it with logic. They do it with emotion. Blatant emotion. *That's* the way to appeal to your donors' hearts. You'll be amazed at the result. 

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*Gail Perry inspires nonprofits around the world with cutting-edge fundraising strategies and new tools to make fundraising more successful and more fun. Find smart strategies to help you raise tons of money at [Fired-UpFundraising.com](http://Fired-UpFundraising.com).*

## Make Your Appeal Letter Irresistible

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**How to Write a Fundraising Letter** (Vol. 29, No. 5)

**55 Direct Mail Secrets** (Vol. 25, No. 1)

**Think Out of the Box for Fundraising Gains** (Vol. 29, No. 5)

**Choosing the Right Typeface Means Cash for Your Cause** (Vol. 15, No. 6)

**Top Five Tips to Improve Direct-Mail Fundraising and Cement Your Future** (Vol. 29, No. 2)

**Making the Mail Work (Better) for You** (Vol. 21, No. 2)

**What Are the Three Most Boring Words in Fundraising Appeals?** (Vol. 36, No. 2)

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