



Mini-guide to writing bios

Do you need to write a bio for one of your nonprofit's leaders, board members, volunteers or staff? A bio should be more than just a presentation of credentials; it should inspire readers and add a human element. Use this guide to give your bio writing a little boost.

Step 1: Gather the facts



Gather all of the pertinent facts about your subject. Collect anything that supports a well-rounded description of the person in question. Look for:

- A Curriculum Vitae
- A list of personal accomplishments
- A summary of degrees, courses and workshops
- Volunteer activities
- Influences/mentors
- Professional certifications
- Media mentions
- Publications
- Professional associations, clubs, other groups
- Old bios!

Step 2: Send an email to pick up a personal perspective



Send a quick note to the person whose bio you are writing to glean some personal insights and perspective. Ask a couple of questions such as:

- What attracted you to our cause? Our organization?
- What keeps you here?
- What inspires you?

Tip: If there are important elements that you weren't able to round up in Step 1, take this opportunity to ask for the missing details.

Step 3: Determine the right style



Assuming that you'll be publishing this bio on your nonprofit organization's website, your copy should be brief, readable and conversational. Your writing should also match your organization's voice and tone, so refer to your messaging guidelines if you have them.

Now, consider the right *style* for this bio, complementing the individual's role and how they would like to be perceived. For example:

- An executive or board member bio will probably be somewhat **formal**, but perhaps also **dynamic** in tone.
- A bio about a service or care provider should convey their **expertise** and **approachability**.
- A bio about a volunteer ambassador should convey their **passion** and **motivations**.

To help you plan, here are some other styles to consider:

- Compassionate
- Innovative
- Fun
- Strategic
- Academic
- Influential

Step 4: Create a theme and story



It's time to take all of the information you've gathered and look for an interesting theme or story to tell – preferably, both. Review your background materials and notes, with highlighter and pen in hand.

- **Look for a theme:** Look for key words or phrases that add colour or interest. Sometimes an obvious theme will emerge from the facts, the individual's language or the analogies they use.
- **Look for a story:** Find a way to connect events and shape the chronology into a mini story. Brainstorming or mind mapping can be a big help with this.
 - Try to communicate the path that led them to their current role.
 - Make the story about what they 'bring to' rather than what they 'do at' the organization.

Step 5: Start writing!



You've done the research and planning you need to write an interesting bio, so start writing! Keep these points in mind:

- Include relevant credentials and accomplishments without overloading the reader.
- Weave in your theme by including key words and analogies.
- Make it personal – include a quote (or a short excerpt from a quote) from your subject that supports the story or theme that you've developed.
- Keep it brief and within a consistent word count. I recommend 150–200 words, but this will depend on whether you are featuring each bio on a separate page, or keeping them all together on one.