ANIMAL PLACEMENT
MARKETING GUIDE

How to Create Compelling and Accurate Bios, Photos, and Videos for Dogs and Cats in Your Care

IN THIS GUIDE

Good marketing is one of your most important tools in placing animals! In this guide, we delve into a framework of best practices for bios, photos, and videos when creating profiles for: Potential Adopters, Foster Caregivers, and Placement Partners.

ADOPTERS

Primary Bio Format

A primary bio should consist of three components:
1. Introduction
2. Animal Needs & Characteristics
3. Direct Quotes *(optional)*

INTRODUCTION

Bios begin with a short introductory paragraph or a couple of sentences, written in third person, highlighting the animal's good attributes and what they would look like in the dream home that meets all their needs.

TIPS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE INTRO BLURBS	
Start with a fun, attention-grabber	• "Calling all suburban homebodies! Do you have some time to spend with Duffy?" • "BEEP BEEP! Buick's here!" • "Move over, Smokey Bear! Smokey the cat is here to steal the limelight."
Consider giving the animal a characteristic that helps an adopter picture him or her in their home	• A lazy cat could be a Netflix buddy. • An active dog could be a party animal.
Consider using tips and descriptors as featured in ASPCApro's "How to Write Compelling Bios"	• For example, instead of saying your animal is a senior, say they're "aged to perfection" or "a retiree"!

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ANIMAL NEEDS/CHARACTERISTICS

After the introductory section, use bullets to briefly highlight the animal's needs and the important characteristics that will help potential adopters determine if the animal is a good fit for them. Note that they frame the requirement or challenge in a positive light. Bio writers should feel free to customize the bullets below or create and add additional bullets based on an animal's specific needs.

SUGGESTED BULLETS FOR ADOPTION NEEDS	
Medical:	• "I take medication/eat a special food—our team would be happy to tell you more about it!" • "I have long-term medical needs that staff would be happy to tell you more about!" • "I have short-term medical needs that staff would be happy to tell you more about!" *Additional bullets can be added with more specific medical info that may hinder someone's ability to provide care, such as blindness or cerebellar hypoplasia*
Adopter Experience:	• "An adopter with [xyz experience] would be a big plus for me!" (Examples: "has experience with jumpy dogs," "can teach me to walk nicely on a leash," "has experience helping shy cats come out of their shell.") • "An adopter with [xyz experience] would help me thrive!" • "I'm smart and love food – which makes training me a breeze!"
Kids:	• "I need sturdy kids who will enjoy my zest for life/excitement/energy!" • "People say that teenagers can be hard to live with, but not for me! Bring 'em on!" • "No silly kids for me—I prefer adults." • "Adults, teens, kids—I love everyone! Bring 'em all on!"
Dogs/Cats:	• "I need a home without other dogs/cats—I prefer the attention all to myself!" • "I'm my best self with other dogs/cats and need a feline/canine roommate." • "My doggy/kitty social circle is pretty exclusive—I prefer xyz friends!" • "I'm still learning how to act around other cats/dogs and need xyz."
Bonded:	• "I can't imagine life without my BFF—we need to go home together."
Fear Outside:	• "A home with access to an enclosed area is a must for me!" • "I'm a city-slicker! Busses, cars—I pay no mind!" • "I'm a suburbanite at heart and need a home outside the hustle and bustle of the city." • "I'm a country boy/gal at heart and need a rural area to call home."
High Energy Level:	• "Strap on your sneakers—I have a lot of energy and need an active adopter! Let's run, run, run!" • "Chews, Kong-like feeders, puzzle toys—I'll need lots of things to keep me busy!"

Shy/fearful:	• "It will take me some time to settle into a new home, but just wait until I open up and you see my true colors" • "I'm a little shy—slow and steady wins the race with me." • "I'm a shy dog/cat and need someone ready to be patient with me." • "I'm not really a host/hostess, so I'd prefer you keep your parties elsewhere." • "I take time warming up to new friends, but once we're BFFs, we're BFFs for life." • "New people and things make me a little nervous. Let's take things slow!"
Destructive Behavior:	• "I love chewing on things so much, sometimes I'll chew on things I shouldn't. Can you keep an eye on me and teach me what to chew and what not to?"
Separation Anxiety/ Isolation Distress:	• "I'm learning how to enjoy alone time. A patient adopter with a flexible schedule would help my confidence/anxiety!"
Handling Sensitivities:	• "Let's wait to be touchy-feely until we get to know each other first." • "I need a hands-off approach until I get to know you." • "I can be a little sensitive in certain areas. Ask our staff for more info!"
Arousal:	• "The world is so exciting, and I'm still learning how to contain my excitement." • "I hope you're steady on your feet. I'm still learning to keep all four paws on the floor." • "I'm learning more appropriate ways to share my excitement than with my mouth." • "A lot of play/pets can be too much for me—let's keep it short and watch my body language!"
Leash Reactivity:	• "I can be very barky/pull a lot/stop and stare when I see other dogs on leash. Can you help me learn to keep my cool and find a walking route where I won't see many other pups?"
Over-stimulation:	• "A lot of play/pets can be too much for me—let's keep it short and watch my body language!"
Other:	For extensive behavioral/medical needs, consider linking certain bullets to public-facing post-adoption support resources (such as behavior handouts, for example), so that potential adopters can see what they will be getting into before submitting an application.

DIRECT QUOTES (OPTIONAL)

Direct quotes from staff, volunteers, and foster caregivers are a hit with potential adopters and can be crowdsourced.

Between the introductory blurb and the requirements bullets, you may also consider including an optional section that says, "Here's what staff/my foster caregivers say about me!" with bulleted quotes underneath. If the flow is natural, you can weave direct quotes into the introductory blurb instead.

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Backstories

Backstories should only be used when you expect or identify an animal with low adopter interest AND they have a compelling backstory that explains "the why."

When including backstories in bios, it helps to highlight how far the animal has come with their medical and behavioral rehabilitation and any other "pull on the heartstrings" type of messaging. This helps form an emotional connection with the potential adopter.

Stay away from any language that could be construed as shaming the previous owner.

Examples:
- "This could be x's first chance at a real, loving, safe home."
- "X is a dog/cat who came from a life of neglect and is looking for a loving person to continue helping him/her along their journey."
- "X is a dog/cat who, more than anything, deserves a second chance."
- "X needs a chance—they need you."

Other Bio Formats

Consider using other bio formats if the above isn't proving successful or if an animal needs to stand out even more, based on the animal's specific needs and characteristics. If an animal has been available for 2-3 weeks, consider refreshing their bio and/or utilizing one of the alternative bio formats:

1. First-Person From the Animal's Point of View (POV)
2. Funny/Dramatic

1. FIRST-PERSON FROM THE ANIMAL'S POINT-OF-VIEW (POV)

Example: Tessa is a party animal!
"Hi, I'm Tessa! You know what I missed most during the pandemic? Parties! There's nothing I enjoy more than putting on my best outfit, going out, saying hey to anyone and everyone and dancing all night long! Sleep? Who needs it?! I have the energy to go until 4:00 a.m. and not stop—take a look at my pedometer when I get home in the early hours—I'm always cranking in close to 20,000 steps. So, if you're looking for a party pal who's always raring to go—maybe sometimes a little too much—click the "Adopt Me" button to complete an application!"

Choose one characteristic for the animal and write directly from that POV.
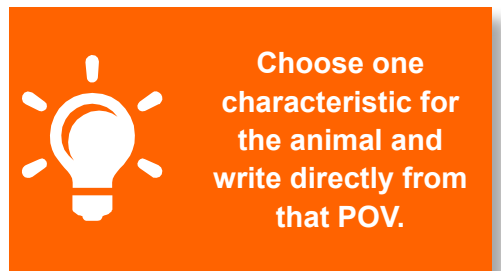
Note: Even with this format, a bulleted list of requirements should still be included.

2. FUNNY/DRAMATIC

A funny/dramatic bio plays on the animal's challenging qualities. This type of bio should not be used for any type of animal who already has a bad public reputation (i.e., blockheads), which could play into misconceptions or public fears.

Example: [Family's brutally honest adoption ad for 'demonic' dog makes pup an internet sensation](#)

Note: This format should be used very selectively so as not to cause fatigue. Careful language and consideration will also be needed.

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<tr><td colspan="2" style="background-color:#F26522;color:white">BREED AND SIZE CONSIDERATIONS FOR BIOS</td></tr>
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- All animals start with the same format regardless of breed or size. If there is too much or too little interest, alterations can be made on a case-by-case basis.
- Try to avoid gendered language related to size or other characteristics that can be phrased in another way or plays up stereotypes.

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Photos

Photos are the first thing that catch potential adopters' eyes, so you've got to make them count! Be thoughtful about what photos are chosen, especially the thumbnail or profile picture—you only get one chance at a first impression.

General Tips	
Dogs	- Weather permitting, prioritize outdoor photos for dogs who are comfortable walking outside. If the dog is indoor walks only or would look more comfortable indoors, opt for indoor photos. - For dogs who will tolerate it, use comfortable costumes and props (following ASPCA recommendations)—especially ones that correspond to a characteristic they have (ex: a dog who makes funny breathing sounds in a pig costume) or a holiday (ex: green outfit for St. Patrick's Day). - Be sure to include full-body photos where potential adopters can easily see the size of the dog.
Cats	- Ensure that toys are included in the shot. - Photograph the cat out of the kennel when medical and behavior status allows.
Both Dogs & Cats	- Consider utilizing tips from ASPCApro's "Hot Shots: Getting Great Photos of Your Animals" - Prioritize photos where the animal looks happiest, even if they are not high-quality photos. This is particularly important for cats who are fearful in the shelter and show much better in foster homes. - Include a variety of shots (standing, sitting, relaxing, playing, cuddling with people, etc.). - For cats and dogs who cannot wear costumes, consider photoshopping their profile thumbnail into something fun/funny (ex: a dog named Skipper as a captain, a cat named Jupiter in outer space) if they need to stand out from the pack. This tactic can also be used for animals you know are going to be a very hard placement who you want to go all in for ASAP upon being made available. - For animals who don't photograph well, or you can't post photos of for legal reasons, consider using a drawing or illustration as their thumbnail instead. - Potential extra consideration: have staff draw the animal, playing up their best/funniest characteristics that are known from caring for them daily.

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REFRESHING PHOTOS

When an animal has been available for 2-3 weeks, refresh their profile photos by conducting a new photo shoot or requesting new images from their foster.

BEFORE & AFTER PHOTOS

For animals who have gone through extensive medical or behavioral rehabilitation and have compelling before and after photos, before/after photos should be saved for non-profile promotion (i.e., social media, influencer engagement, etc.) and not used on their adoption profile unless there are special circumstances. Sensitive or graphic images can sometimes cause a potential adopter to get their heart set on adopting an animal before they've even had a chance to meet them and assess whether the dog or cat would be a good fit for them.

Videos

Utilize videos to show an animal's positive characteristics in a fun, exciting, upbeat way!

Include at least one video per animal, either fully produced or shot quickly on a cell phone by staff, fosters, or volunteers.

- For these videos, choose one to two that show off the animal's most pertinent or adorable quality. For example, for a high-energy dog, you may consider showing them running around the training room chasing toys. For a lap dog, you may consider showing them snuggled up with a staff person for a nap. For a fearful cat, you may show them sniffing your hand and then tolerating gentle pets.

For animals who have made a lot of behavioral progress, video can also be used to show their improvements in a "before/after" way. This way, the adopter knows how much potential they have to continue improving in the home! However, careful consideration should be made to ensure that we are not scaring off adopters with the "before" video, so decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis.

Consider incorporating tips from ASPCApro's "10 Tips for Shooting Great Video of Your Shelter Animals" and "Getting Your Available Animals Zoom Ready"

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FOSTER PLACEMENT

Bio

- There should be less fluff and sugar-coating in foster home pitches than there are in adoption bios since foster caregivers have had training to understand the types of animals we serve and what their job as a foster caregiver entails.

> **Consider linking certain bullets to public-facing ASPCA post-adoption support resources (such as behavior handouts, for example), so that foster caregivers have a sense of what their day-to-day with the animal may look like.**

- Foster bios should be laid out in a way that is easy for potential fosters to jump to particular sections and digest important caregiving information (i.e., Behavior, Medical, Reason for Foster, Length of Foster, Foster Home Recommendations, etc.).
- Foster bios should include as much information on an animal's previous home report as possible, if that information is available, including direct quotes. The previous owners know what an animal will look like in a home better than we do! If there is no previous home information, that should be specified.
- Backstories should only be used when we expect or identify an animal with low foster interest AND they have a compelling backstory that explains "the why".

Photos

- Generally, foster marketing photos should follow the same guidelines as adopter marketing photos. Often, the same photos can be repurposed for both audiences.
- In addition, foster profiles can and should include medical or behavioral before/after photos, if applicable and available—especially when an animal is continuing to undergo medical or behavioral treatment. This helps the foster understand the depth and importance of their continuation of the treatment, as well as pulls on their heartstrings.

Videos

- Generally, foster marketing videos should follow the same guidelines as adopter marketing photos. Often, the same videos can be repurposed for both audiences.
- For animals with particular medical or behavioral challenges that may make or break a foster placement, videos showing these challenges should be included.
- For example, if a dog has moderate leash reactivity, it is helpful for a potential foster to see what this looks like, specific to that dog, to decide if the dog could be a good fit. This could be included in a before/after video, as is described in the Adopter video section, if possible.

PLACING WITH PARTNERS

Bio

Bios should be sectioned into relevant categories, such as the below. See an example.
- General Info (signalments)
- Behavior and Personality
- Housetraining
- Dog-dog
- On-leash (for reactivity/strength)
- Arousal (form: leash/mouthing/dog)
- Fear, Anxiety, Stress (specify kennel stress, city stress, etc.)
- Medical
- Medications
- Diet

Note: This is a sample list. Changes may be made for specific animals and their needs.

- As with foster bios, placement bios should use straightforward, objective language, as we are talking to a professional audience. It is important to be as transparent as possible in placement bios, not hiding or sugarcoating medical or behavioral challenges. However, that doesn't mean that positive traits should be ignored! Any positive aspects of the animal should still be woven into the categories above, especially in the"General Info" section.
- Each placement candidate's bio may include their backstory, following the same approval process as is noted for adoption bio backstories. Discretion can and should be used by the placement team to determine if a "non-interesting" backstory would be worth including—however, those that are interesting and outside the norm can and should be included.
- Be sure to include medical and behavior recommendations if ongoing treatment is needed, taking care to be as specific and transparent as possible.

Photos

- Photos for placing with partners should follow the same recommendations as those for Fosters, including the use of before/after photos.

Videos

- Videos for placing with partners should follow the same recommendations as those for Fosters.
- Placement pitches should also always include videos of dog-dog interactions, dog-human interactions, leash-walking and kennel presence.
- For dogs and cats, placement pitches should always include video of concerning behaviors such as arousal during grooming or play (so long as taking the video does not cause undue fear, anxiety, and stress for the animal), and/or clips that can relay a progression or a behavior in various contexts. The key is to show and tell the behavior so that partners have a full grasp on the animal's needs.