**Writing Fantastic Pet Bios**

**Make a Connection**

Great advice from Heartspeak.org: “While potential adopters appreciate knowing (and should be informed of) the facts on both ends of a pets’ adoptability spectrum, they’re ultimately looking for a reason to love a pet.”

It can be easy to focus on the pet’s needs and forget about the adopter entirely, but they’re the “audience” we need to engage by **highlighting why this pet will make a great addition to their life**. An easy way to make readers feel connected: picture the ideal owner for a pet and write about them! “*Would be a great companion for someone who \_\_\_\_\_\_\_*” (*Loves to stay active, enjoys a cozy night with a good book, likes to stick to a routine*). Or, “*if you enjoy \_\_\_\_\_\_, you’ll love Charlie!*”

**Highlight the Positive**

An animal’s health or behavioral issues should never be the main focus of their bio. It can be tempting to weed out less committed adopters by focusing on a pet’s limitations and negative behaviors up front, but this can make their issues seem far worse than they really are. **Our goal is not to warn away the “wrong” adopters with a long list of an animal’s shortcomings, but to draw in the right adopters by describing their best qualities**, what kind of home they will thrive in, and what kind of adopters will connect best with them. A frank and detailed conversation about their needs and limits will take place with staff during the adoption process: our job is to get them in the door! A good rule of thumb: **every bio should list twice as many positives as negatives.**

**Pay Attention to Tone & Language**

The tone we use in a bio can make or break the interest an animal receives. Focusing on an animal’s positive traits doesn’t mean skipping over their issues entirely, but it does mean choosing your words very carefully when addressing them. When writing about a restriction or requirement, try to sound warm, playful, and encouraging toward the reader – people should smile when they read it! – otherwise, while trying to ward off unqualified applicants, you might scare away a qualified one by sounding unfriendly or unnecessarily intimidating.

**Remember: there’s no such thing as too many positive adjectives!**

Wonderful • Adorable • Sweet • Intelligent • Smart • Dignified • Laid Back • Easygoing • Good Natured • Confident • Outgoing • Social • Curious • Loving • Friendly • Affectionate • Snuggly • Cuddly • Gentle • Sensitive • Happy • Silly • Chatty • Bouncy • Goofy • Playful • Exuberant • Mischievous • Adventurous • Athletic • Peppy • Fun-Loving • Spunky • Sassy • Handsome • Stunning • Gorgeous • Beautiful • Volunteer Favorite • Good Listener • Social Butterfly

**Negative words to avoid whenever possible:**

Hates • Dislikes • Won’t • Can’t • Doesn’t • Shouldn’t • Fearful • Defensive • Scared • Standoffish • Pushy

**Instead, convey the same message using positive words:**

“*Won’t be a good fit with other animals*” 🡪 “***will thrive in a home where*** *he can shine as an only pet*”

“*Shouldn’t/can’t live with small kids”* 🡪 “***can join a home with*** *adults or older teens*”

“*Doesn’t like to be left alone*” 🡪 “***is happiest when*** *he’s with his people*”

\*Be careful with “needs” and “should”: these words may not be negative, but repeatedly saying what an adopter “should do” or what an animal “needs to have”, can come off as bossy and make an animal sound high maintenance.

# Avoid Gimmicks: the animals are cute, so we don’t have to be!

# We can be positive, playful, and warm without veering too far into overly cutesy language (ex. “cross your paws that this furbaby finds the purrfect furever home!” is a little too saccharine) which can be distracting for the reader. Song lyrics and TV or literary references can also be confusing for those who aren’t clued in, and don’t necessarily tell potential adopters about an animal. We also recommend against speaking in the first person from the animal’s point of view (ex. “*My name is Walso and I love laps…*” which can also become a distraction). A good alternative is to use the second person to encourage a connection with the reader: “*You’ll love Tasha’s smile!*” “*Henry will gaze lovingly into your eyes while you pet him*.”What to include in a bio:

**1. A positive and engaging introductory statement about the animal to draw people in, even if it’s a generic one. Think of it as their “headline” (“*This social boy is fabulous*,” “Gorgeous Lily would love to be your new friend!”).**

**2. At least two more positive descriptions to draw adopters in, help them feel a connection to the cat, and learn about their personality: are they playful or a couch potato? Do they have a favorite toy or an endearing habit? Imagine the ideal adopter or home for an animal and describe it.**

* Some basic questions to answer: How does this pet show affection and connect with people? What seems to make them happy/excited? What’s something cute or endearing about them that makes you smile? What would their ideal day consist of? Have they started clicker training or harness training?
* You don’t necessarily need to mention medications, FIV-positive, or other health or behavior issues (with the exception of FeLV or other hospice-type illnesses) – adoption counselors or staff will discuss it when adopters call or visit).
	+ For FeLV, please include this text word-for-word:
		- “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is positive for FeLV, a virus that can impact a cat’s overall health. S/he will need to be the only cat in your home or live with other FeLV-positive cats. Please read our quick guide for more information: https://catadoptionteam.org/?jet\_download=3615”.

**3. A brief description of special behavior or training needs that adopters should be aware of. Are they still learning important training basics or working on socialization? Will they need a lot of play or exercise? Do they need a more experienced owner? Encouraging, casual language is critical for this section!**

* This is where we “translate” their behavior notes (“*swatty – experienced owners only*”) into positive, non-intimidating descriptions (“*this spicy guy will flourish with an experienced owner who understands his signals*”).
* Keep descriptions concise – we don’t want this to feel like an intimidating list of problems! – and mix in as many positive adjectives as possible (“*this friendly boy is working on his manners*,” “this wonderful girl will be happiest as the only pet!”)
* Use plain language rather than shelter jargon, which can sound more serious than it is. Encourage adopters to see medical and behavior issues for what they are: manageable conditions.
* If a cat is hyper or untrained, talk about their training as something ongoing (“*he’d love to continue working on his training with you!*”), rather than something the adopter will need to figure out for themselves (“*he needs an adopter who will work on behavior training*”).
* If we know that they’re treat- or toy-motivated, be sure to mention that: when you let adopters know what motivates a pet, you “build a bridge” between them and a potential adopter.

**5. Whether they get along with/can live with kids and other animals. Remember to talk about the kind of home they can join, rather than the type of home they can’t join!**

* “No kids” makes a cat sound like it eats kids for breakfast: even people who don’t have kids of their own won’t want a pet that sounds like it will hurt a child. Mention why this restriction exists without making it sound like one: “*he’ll be happiest in a home with adults who can be sensitive to his age*” or “*he can join a home with kids over 12 who have experience with respecting cats’ space*”
* If they get along great with every animal and human they meet, remember to talk that up!
* For animals with a lot of restrictions (no other animals, no kids), try to work as many of them as possible into one sentence to keep it from feeling like a list of issues. Instead of “*He is not a good candidate for a home with children. He is dominant with other dogs and chases cats, so he needs to be the only pet*,” try, “*He’ll do best in an adult home where he can shine as the only pet*.”

**6. End with a positive closing statement with a call to action. As with our opening statement, this can be generic:**

* Examples of endings: “*He can’t wait to meet you, so visit him today!”* “*Come and meet this wonderful girl: we know you’ll fall in love!*”
* End the bio portion with your initials and date in parenthesis:
 Ex. *Bobbie can’t wait to meet you, so visit him today! (JR, 1/21)*
* The last line of the bio should include the adoption fee:
 **Single cat/kitten:** “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s adoption fee is $\_\_\_.”
 **Bonded pair:** “*The adoption fee for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_ is $\_\_\_\_ for the pair*.”

**\*Optional: How the animal came to CAT (stray, owner surrender, etc). We don’t speculate or go into great detail about how hard an animal’s life was before being rescued. Negative details fuel the misconception that all shelter animals are broken or have a dark past, and feeling sorry for an animal or angry at past owners won’t get them adopted - a positive connection will! It’s also not necessary to say how far they’ve travelled or which specific shelter they came from. The exception to this is if we participated in a special rescue effort – for instance, taking in cats from an area due to a natural disaster.**

* If the pet was surrendered, we rarely share that info in the bio. If we do, we should do so without saying or implying anything negative about the surrendering owner. Part of CAT’s mission is to support and assist struggling pet owners, so that means that we take a nonjudgmental approach. When in doubt, just avoid it.
* Exception: If we know that an animal was with the same person for many years, but that person has recently passed, that can be good info to share: it lets adopters know that the animal has lots of experience living in a home and is in the shelter through no fault of their own. Use sparingly and only if it is certain!
* Most of our cats and kittens come from other shelters, including animal control agencies where their lives are in danger when too many animals come in and space runs out. These groups are our partners and they work very hard to save as many animals as they can, so we do not say or imply negative things about them. We would never say that an animal came from a “kill shelter”!

**CAT BIO EXAMPLE:**

\*Confident - Active - Affectionate\*\*

Young, busy, and saucy Tortellini looooves to play. He'll also curl up in your lap for a few cuddles and purrs too. If you want to toss him some cat treats, he wouldn't be mad about it! In fact, he's so treat-motivated that he'd be an excellent candidate for training to do some tricks or walk on a harness. He's got a cute little meow and likes to chat. Tortellini seeks a loving home where grown-up or teenage humans can keep him entertained and continue his training on good manners. This good-lookin' dude is the epitome of feline awesome, so hurry out to meet him! (hjs 12/5)

Tortellini's adoption is $100.

**Examples of language to use:**

#### Positive opening statements

-“Get ready to fall in love!”
-“The more we get to know \_\_\_\_\_, the more we fall in love”
-“An outgoing girl who gets along with every person she meets”
-“An energetic dog ready to be your buddy!”
-“An affectionate lady looking for love”
-“A beautiful brunette ready to be your companion”
-“A spunky boy with lots of love to give”
-“A lovable boy who will make a great pet.”
-“Please come and meet her: we know you’ll fall in love.”
-“Wants what every dog wants: a safe and comfortable home where he can be loved.”
-“Appreciates the finer things in life, like a comfy bed and a delicious meal.”
-“A wonderful family dog who’s just missing a family!”
-“He loves you already… and he hasn’t even met you yet!”
-“Will always make you laugh”
-“Whenever you’re having a bad day, he will put a smile on your face”
-“A happy-go-lucky dog who needs a home to call his very own.”

#### When you don't know an animal very well but need more positive language

#### Try to start with at least one positive thing the adopter can’t see from looking at the picture—even if it’s general. Then, it’s OK to talk up their appearance just to fill out the bio a bit. You might comment on super-soft fur, stunning green eyes, sleek jet-black coat, cute button nose, a gorgeous petite lady, a handsome tuxedo with a cute smudge on his nose, etc.

**Generic positive statements examples:**-“A lovable boy who will make a great companion.”
-“Still a young guy at just X years old”
-“Wants what every cat wants: a safe, comfortable home where he can be loved.”
-“Appreciates the finer things in life, like a comfy bed and a delicious meal.”
-“A great family pet who’s just missing a family!”

**For cats who are fearful/nervous/shy in shelter or new situations**

– Once he knows you and can tell you want to be his friend, he will crawl right in your lap and be your best pal!
– He brightens up when…[describe what makes him happy or at ease]
– Once he’s in a home, his personality will blossom and he’ll show you what a loving companion he can be.
-Although he’s still unsure of himself at the shelter, this sensitive guy opens right up with a gentle touch and some one-on-one time.
– A sensitive girl who needs a moment to learn that you’re a friend
– Is used to the comforts of home, and can’t wait until he can leave the shelter and go back to being loved and pampered.
– Once he’s feeling safe and secure in a loving home setting, his adorable personality will shine
– Would much rather be in a loving home than in the shelter! Once he’s settled at your place, he will be his bouncy, lovable self and will show endless affection to his human family.
– May need some time to warm up to unfamiliar faces, but once she does she is eager to call you a new friend.
– This laid back, quiet girl is looking for a patient, loving adopter who will give her time to open up and adjust in her new home.
– Would appreciate a calm household where she can come out of her shell
– Can be shy at first and likes to greet new guests at her own pace
– Can be shy around unfamiliar people, but once she gets to know you better, she’s eager to call you one of her best friends.
– This sensitive guy is looking for a patient adopter who will give him some times to settle into his new home
– Appreciates time to adapt to new places and would feel most comfortable in a quiet home
– Will be a great companion for someone who likes to enjoy life’s quiet moments

#### For cats who are short-tempered, standoffish, or withdrawn

-“An independent lady”
-“Sassy”
-“An opinionated boy who will always tell you what’s on his mind!”
-“A low-maintenance cat who will give you plenty of space”
-“Happy just to hang out around the house without needing constant attention.”
-“An independent cat who doesn’t mind if you’re busy: if you have a long day at work or a full social calendar, she’ll be happy to entertain herself while you’re out of the house.”
-“Won’t ask too much of you”
-“This confident cat knows what she wants and prefers attention on her own terms.”
-“This sensitive kitty likes attention on her own terms, especially when she’s offered a tasty snack.”
-“She loves to be around her favorite people and keep a watchful eye over her loved ones.”

**Behavior training**

“Is working on his basic manners and would love to continue learning in his new home!”
-“Likes to learn—especially when he’s rewarded with a tasty treat.”
-“This smart guy has already mastered “high five,” and is eager to learn a few more tricks”
-“Is young, so he still has a lot to learn. He would benefit from an adopter who can help him learn his basic manners.”
-“Is eager to learn more of her basic manners, and will work hard when rewarded with a tasty treat!”
-“Is a fast learner”
-“Will respond well to clicker training”
-“Is learning how to walk on a harness and leash while he’s at CAT”
-“Still learning his manners and would like a home where he can continue to build his skills”
-“Sometimes, when she’s meeting new friends, she gets a little overexcited and gets a little sassy with strangers, but she quickly recovers when she feels safe.”

**Some restrictions with children**

-Can join a home with kids as young as \_\_\_\_\_\_
-Can join a home with kids \_\_\_ and up
-Can join an adults-only home
-Will be most comfortable in a home with older kids/kids over \_\_\_\_
-Will be most comfortable in an adult-only home
-Bonus: add positive adjectives (“this friendly boy can join a home with…”)
- Great with kids who are old enough to understand how to interact respectfully
-Would do especially well with adults and teens

-Is friendly with people of all ages and would specifically do best with school-age kids, teens, and adults.
-Is a sensitive boy who would be happiest with older kids, teens, and adults.
-Can join a home with older kids and adults who will be sensitive to his age.
-Can join a home with older, dog experienced kids who will be comfortable with his exuberant play style.
-She appreciates time to adapt to new places and would feel most comfortable in a quiet home with kids 10-and-up.
-She would appreciate a calm household with cat-loving humans who are 12 years and older.

**No kids at all**

-“Is most comfortable around adults and would do best in an adult-only home.”
-“Likes her peace and quiet and would be happiest in an adult-only home.”
-“She appreciates time to adapt to new places and would feel most comfortable in a quiet, adult-only home”

#### Some restrictions/selectivity with other animals-She may be fine with a calm cat or dog who won’t mind that she’s more interested in people than in them.-Have a cat at home? He’s made cat friends before and could do well with a feline friend given the right introduction.-Has gotten along with dogs/cats before, and may do well with another pet-Would do well as an only pet but may be able to live with another dog/cat if they’re a good match-Can live with another dog/cat who has a similar personality (mellow, playful, etc)-Would prefer being your only pet, but could live with another mellow dog/cat who will be respectful of his space.

#### Needs to be the only cat/pet-“Prefers a home without other pets.”-“He’ll do best as your one and only.”-“She loves people and only people, so she’ll be happiest as the only pet.”-“Will flourish in a home where she can shine as the only pet”-“Would love to be your only pet so he can have all your attention to himself!”-“Will be happiest as your only pet”-“Can join a home where he’ll be the only pet”-“Would prefer to be your only pet”

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#### Multiple restrictions (ex. Needs to be an only pet, not good with kids, needs experienced adopter)

#### -“A home with a big bay window would be a dream come true for this curious boy. He is looking for an experienced adopter and a home with teens-and-up.”-“Can join an adults-only home with an experienced adopter.”-“This friendly guy is looking for an experienced adopter and a home with kids 8-and-up.”-“He can join a family with an experienced adopter and kids 10-and-up.”-“Would love to be the only pet in his new home. He can join a family with an experienced adopter and kids 12-and-up.”-“An experienced adopter and a family with teens-and-up would be a great match for this sweet dog.”“Can join a family with teens-and-up and an experienced adopter who can continue to train him.”