



GUIDE TO WEB STORIES



Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Types of Stories**
 - Feature stories about UNEP's work and its impact
 - Stories about publications
 - Stories that use a news hook
 - Stories related to UNEP participation in events
 - Stories about major UNEP initiatives, such as Champions of the Earth
- **How to Get a Story on the UNEP Website**
- **Essential Tips on Writing Good Stories**
- **Rules for Style and Spelling**
- **How to Prepare Your Story for the Web**
- **How to Make Your Story Pop in Search**
- **Where to Find Photos**
- **How to Clear and Publish a Story**



Introduction

Stories on our website are an effective way of communicating with our core stakeholders, including Member States, donors, partner organizations, the science community, civil society and private sector entities. While web stories can help inform the general public about UNEP's work, and should always be written in a way that is clear, concise and can be understood by a wide audience, please note that web stories may not be our primary tool to communicate with the broader public. For that, other means, like social media, may be more effective.

This document is intended as a guide for any UNEP personnel writing a story intended for posting on UNEP's website. As you think about pitching a story to the Communication Division, please consider the following:

- All stories need to serve a clear corporate and/or programmatic purpose and align with organizational priorities, as articulated in the Medium-Term Strategy and Programme of Work.
- Stories need to be substantive, informative and well written. The intended audience for web stories is an informed one. A typical reader is likely to care already for the environment and will probably have some knowledge about UNEP.
- All stories need to take forward the global conversation on a particular topic. We should not repeat what is already in the public domain.
- We do not publish stories focused on the work of other organizations unless they are UNEP partners and the bulk of the story highlights UNEP's normative and/or project work.
- As UNEP is a science-based organization, all stories must be substantiated by evidence and data, and not be based on the personal views of the writer or UNEP staff. Relevant key messaging documents that are approved at a corporate level should be used to shape the focus of stories. Here is a regularly updated list of [UNEP key messages](#).
- Data in stories should preferably be sourced from UN reports and hyperlinked. If data is cited from elsewhere, clearance should be attained from a relevant branch or division head.



Types of Stories

Most web stories will fall into one of the following categories:

Feature stories about UNEP's work and its impact

Feature stories may focus on a specific project or intervention but should take a programmatic perspective. This means that they shouldn't only be about one project, or the work of one unit, branch or division, but should connect the dots to UNEP's broader work and strategy. This is the case even if a writer is engaged by a particular unit, branch or division. When writing about one project, think about whether you can draw in relevant examples from elsewhere, and how this connects to UNEP's overall programmatic goals. The story pitch form will help you think this through. All claims of impact by a UNEP project or other activity need to be substantiated with evidence.



How to write a good feature story

Feature stories are written in a narrative style, often told through characters, field reporting, and/or use of anecdotes to illustrate issues. Features should begin with a three- or four-sentence opening anecdote followed by a nut graph – a sentence or two that explains to the reader what the story is about and why it is important. UNEP's role/contribution must be made clear in the first few paragraphs of the story. In cases where you aren't able to report from the field in-person, you can add a colour lede that frames the issue in a creative way.

Stories on UNEP's work can be written up as **listicles**. Short on text and heavy on pictures, they're a list of facts, tips or quotes organized around a common theme. Beware not to trivialize the listicle – they should still be rooted in data/science.

An alternative format to features and news stories is the **Q&A**, which allows us to showcase the expertise of UNEP staff on emerging environmental issues. Open them with a few sentences about the interviewee and tease the issues to be discussed. Since UNEP does not have a blogging platform, the Q&A is one way to give "voice" to experts but they must be vetted/cleared by the technical leads.

Examples:



COVID-19 vaccine could revolutionize cold storage around the world [CLICK HERE](#)



In Latin America and the Caribbean, the closure of ageing dumps is clearing the air [CLICK HERE](#)



In campaign against plastic pollution, world is making tentative progress [CLICK HERE](#)



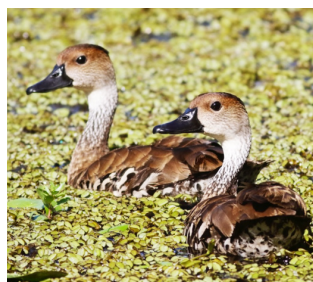
How video games are joining the fight to save the planet [CLICK HERE](#)



10 things you should know about industrial farming [Listicle] [CLICK HERE](#)



Sponge city: San Salvador uses nature to fight floods [This story uses a country anecdote to illustrate how the CityAdapt program works globally, and to make the case for Ecosystem-based adaptation] [CLICK HERE](#)



Duck conservation takes flight in Jamaica [How to use a country project to bring in a larger issue. Grafts 4 and 5 of the story broaden into UNEP's messaging on biodiversity] [CLICK HERE](#)

Stories about publications

These stories should be distinct from a press release for that same publication. They can explore an interesting angle from the publication, put the publication in context of a broader global issue, or be written up as a Q&A with the authors of the publication. When budget and relevant data/trends are available, these stories can be developed as an interactive feature. (Please liaise closely with web team to propose an interactive.)

Examples:



Used vehicles get a second life in Africa – but at what cost? [CLICK HERE](#)



Sustainable infrastructure can drive development and COVID-19 recovery [CLICK HERE](#)



Time is running out for coral reefs: new report [CLICK HERE](#)



Emissions Gap Report 2020 interactive [CLICK HERE](#)



As daily COVID-19 cases reach a new high, new report examines how to prevent future pandemics [CLICK HERE](#)



Humanity's penchant for wasting food is trashing the planet [Q&A format] [CLICK HERE](#)



Green shoots: are COVID-19 recovery funds helping the environment? [This story links the report to UNEP's MTS in the last graf] [CLICK HERE](#)

Stories that use a news hook

These stories are based on what is in the news – for example, natural disasters, climate-change-related developments, or an international day – to showcase UNEP’s work in an area of focus. Please ensure that you weave in UNEP projects, data/reports/science on the subject. As such stories are time sensitive, a quick way to produce them may be a Q&A with a relevant UNEP staff member.



How to write a good news story

Place the essential elements of a story at the beginning and follow up with supporting information. This structure, typically found in newspapers and on news websites, lets readers stop reading at any point and still come away with the essence of the story. At UNEP, we use this template, known as the inverted pyramid, when writing about major reports or reporting on current environmental topics/events where UNEP can add science, data and value.

Examples:



Glacier collapse in India worrying sign of what’s to come [CLICK HERE](#)



Flipflop embarks on its second voyage in Africa [CLICK HERE](#)



Meet seven women saving the planet [CLICK HERE](#)



Nobels shed light on hunger crisis [CLICK HERE](#)

Stories related to UNEP participation in events

These stories can help amplify UNEP’s key messages from an event. We are unable to carry stories on all events, only those that were led by UNEP or where UNEP had a significant, high-level intervention. Whenever possible, embed a video from the event and/or hyperlink to a transcript of remarks. Stories should focus on UNEP’s leadership at an event but may include comments and quotes from other speakers to provide context and perspective.

Examples:



Can big data help protect the planet? [CLICK HERE](#)



UNEA-5 ends with clear message: act now to tackle planetary crises [CLICK HERE](#)



With new pact, tech companies take on climate change [This story focuses on a landmark agreement signed during Digital Day 2021, rather than provide a read-out of the event] [CLICK HERE](#)

Stories about major UNEP initiatives, such as Champions of the Earth

While the focus of such stories could be on individuals not related to UNEP, the writer should do their best to weave information about relevant UNEP work into the articles.

Examples:



Profiles of:

[Robert Bullard](#)

[Nemonte Nenquimo](#)

[Mindy Lubber](#)



Turning air into water in rural Peru [CLICK HERE](#)



Plastic clean-up brings crocodiles back to Indian river [CLICK HERE](#)



Farm Fresh: change is in the air [CLICK HERE](#)



How to Get a Story on the UNEP Website

Most writers will be assigned stories by the Chief of Content or the Head Writer/Editor. These are chosen carefully to align with UNEP's strategic goals. We do, however, encourage staff from across divisions to pitch good story ideas to us. Please use the [Web Story Pitch Form](#) to do so. The form will help you think through the story idea and how it connects to UNEP's broader strategy. Once you have completed the form, please send it to Neha Sud (neha.sud@un.org).

If you are submitting a technical piece, you may wish to write it up as a 'topic' page. These pages speak about environmental issues that UNEP is addressing. They are not about specific projects, but provide a global overview of UNEP's science, data and approaches. See examples on the [Energy Finance](#) and [E-mobility](#) pages.



Essential Tips on Writing Good Stories

Have a clear message

Whether you're writing a 300-word listicle or in-depth feature, you should be able to summarize the main takeaway of your story in one or two sentences. If you can't do that, you probably don't have a compelling story to tell.

Have a UNEP angle and align with the Medium-Term Strategy

All stories should reflect UNEP's key messages and contain an overview, including links to relevant reports, of UNEP's work in the area of focus.

Include a news hook

Except in very rare instances, stories should be timely. Writers must answer the question: why is this article important now? Both events (like the release of a new report) or trends (like accelerating biodiversity loss) can serve as news hooks. If you don't have a news hook, the editorial team will work with you to find one.

Add voices

Stories should include quotes from people you have interviewed. These voices add an important human element to articles, making them more real and more engaging. When planning interviews, strive for gender parity and diversity.

Demonstrate scale

Wherever possible, rather than doing a story about an isolated country project (unless it has wide-reaching impact), focus on scale. How has UNEP replicated this approach elsewhere or how does this initiative demonstrate solutions or policy recommendations on a global level?

Avoid editorializing

Writers should not insert their own opinions into stories – known as editorializing. Any statements that reflect an opinion must be attributed to a source. Please be specific in your language and avoid superlatives, focusing instead on facts. For example, do not write: "Unless we change our ways, the planet is doomed." Say instead: "Unless humanity drastically reduces carbon emissions, thousands of species will become extinct in the next decade, according to a new UNEP report."

Be brief

The stories that perform best online are usually short and to the point. Your article should be under 700 words unless it is a multi-source feature or covers a significant, newsworthy event, like the release of a major UNEP report.

Use plain language

Use clear, concise and plain language. Avoid jargon and when a technical term is introduced, it should be explained in simple words.

Include data and science

It is important that we back up our stories with hard facts. Please draw on UNEP's extensive data resources when writing.

Never plagiarize

Stories should be in a writer's own words. Do not copy even a single sentence verbatim without attributing it to the original source. Plagiarism is a serious reputational risk for UNEP.



Rules for Style and Spelling

Spelling

UNEP follows the [United Nations Editorial Manual Online](#). Words that do not appear in the United Nations style guide should follow the spelling used by the Oxford English Dictionary. The UN spelling guide is a mix of British and US English. Canadian English is quite similar, so setting the language option to Canadian English in Microsoft Word can be helpful. Here are a few notable style and spelling points.

Currencies

United States dollars should be written with the prefix US\$ (example: US\$2,000). All other currencies should have their names spelled out after the figure, and their equivalent in US\$ should also be given (e.g., “300 euros, or US\$350”).

Numbers

Numbers should be spelled out when they are less than 10, simple fractions or appear at the beginning of a sentence. Use numerals for percentages, ages, temperature, sums of money, measures, weight, ratios, map scales and compound fractions. Write out millions, billions, trillions; e.g., 2 million not 2,000,000 but 2,577,457. Decimals should be rounded to one number after the period. Percentages should have the % symbol spelled out as per cent.

Measurements and abbreviations

UNEP uses the metric system. If your source uses a different unit, such as pounds, you should convert it to a metric equivalent (e.g., 2 lbs should be 0.9 kg). To disambiguate the meaning of ton, the spelling tonne should be used.

Names of countries

Country full and short names can be found in [Working Paper no.54](#) of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names. Only the short forms listed in the above document can be used. No other abbreviations are allowed. Please note that this version was updated in 2017 and does not note the name change from Swaziland to Eswatini. Given the disputed nature of many international boundaries, only use [UN-approved maps](#).

Acronyms

On first reference, you should spell out the names of all organizations, including UNEP and other United Nations bodies. On second reference, you can use acronyms. But be judicious in your use of acronyms—too many will make a story confusing and possibly unreadable for a general audience.

Names and Titles of Persons

Use full names on first reference; thereafter use surnames only. The preferred style for the UNEP website is to avoid the use of prefixed titles and honourifics, like Mr., Mrs., Dr. and His/Her Excellency. However, in rare cases where protocol makes their use necessary, titles are acceptable.

Capitalization and Italics

Titles are capitalized using sentence case. Project titles, organization names and working groups are considered proper nouns and are capitalized in title case. (Capitalize the first letter of every word, except short words, like prepositions.) Official titles are also capitalized but job roles are not (e.g., Adam Andrews, Chief Executive Officer; Adam Andrews, an environmental specialist). Italicize the names of reports and books.



How to Prepare Your Story for the Web

To maximize the reach of your story and facilitate the posting process, please use the following [Web Story Template](#) when submitting a story.

Writer:

Editor:

Reviewer:

Topics: Please make sure to provide relevant topics that correspond to “What We Do” on the top navigation of [unep.org](#). The content architecture of our site is based on our programme of work, which is represented via the topics. For a list of topics, [click here](#)

Tags: Tags are used to properly position the story within the website. Each web page is programmed to display all the content that contains a certain tag, such as a topic or region. If these are missing, your story will not appear in the right places. For a list of tags, [click here](#).

Region:

Meta description: This is a short description (160 characters or less) of your story. In a Google search, it will appear below the headline. Please provide a custom meta description that effectively explains your story and entices readers to click through. **Example:** Headline: Used vehicles get a second life in Africa – but at what cost? **Meta description:** A report from UNEP finds that used vehicles exported to Africa and Asia cause air pollution, road accidents and are hindering the fight against climate change.

Photos:

Banner Image:

- File name: the name of the photo, ending in either .jpg or .png
- Photographer, organization: the name of the photographer and organization they work for.

For stock images, use the name of the website (le: Unsplash)

- Image description: a brief description of the image; this will be read aloud by software for the visually impaired and is an important component of making the UNEP site accessible.
- Link: a direct link to the photo if it is on a publicly accessible website

Body Image(s):

- File name:
- Photographer, organization:
- Image description:
- Caption: A short rundown of what is happening in the photo. Unlike the image description, which is read aloud, this will appear below the photo.
- Link:

[Body Copy]

Boilerplate (if any): Sometimes, authors may want to add generic information about a specific programme or campaign. This information may be added at the very end, in italics. UNEP has boilerplates for some topics.

Contact Information: Whenever possible, contact information for the designated expert should appear at the end of the story. Example: “To learn more, please contact John Smith, UNEP’s Head of Desert Ecosystems,; john.smith@un.org If you do not have a designated spokesperson, try to link to UNEP-related material. Example: “Learn more about UNEP’s work on disasters and conflicts.”

Further resources: It is important to connect your story to UNEP’s broader programme of work, including related stories, studies, speeches and press releases. These should be in list form.



How to Make Your Story Pop in Search

There are several ways to make your story more engaging and rank higher in search.

Headlines and subheads

For maximum search visibility, articulate what the person is likely to find in the story. Headlines should be short: between 20 and 70 characters. Add subtitles to break up body copy. Google also uses subtitles to optimize for search.

Pullquotes

These will appear in larger font and can help break up long text blocks. Please flag your strongest quotes for this.

Quizzes and polls

These are good tactics to boost engagement in your stories. If you would like to include a quiz or a poll, reach out to the web publishing team.

Links

Stories should not be a dead end. Hyperlinks give readers the choice to further investigate a topic. Links should be carefully picked and point to an authoritative source. Journalistic content is not considered an authoritative source. Acceptable links include peer-reviewed journal articles, United Nations websites and documents, UNEP partners' websites and past UNEP content. Add links to the "Further Resources" and into the flow of your copy.



Where to Find Photos

All stories should be accompanied by high-resolution pictures. Writers must provide credits for all photos. We will not run a picture without the photographer's name and the source of the photo (ie. John Smith, via Unsplash.com). Carefully review the photos being borrowed to determine the conditions of use. Please note that many photos with Creative Commons licenses still have restrictions on their use. For a summary of those conditions, [click here](#). The burden is on the author to ensure there is no copyright violation. Photos should have detailed captions that include the names of any people in the picture. Captions must follow the same style as outlined above. The cover photo does not require a caption.

Please try to find photos from UNEP and other UN organizations before reverting to stock photo websites.

The following websites contain images that are generally free to use.



UNEP Digital Library
[CLICK HERE](#)



UN Photo
[CLICK HERE](#)



Grid-Arendal
[CLICK HERE](#)



Unsplash
[CLICK HERE](#)



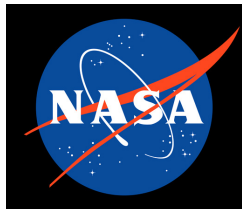
Pixabay
[CLICK HERE](#)



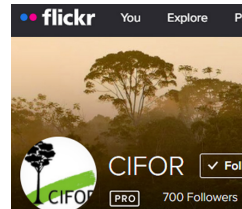
Pexels
[CLICK HERE](#)



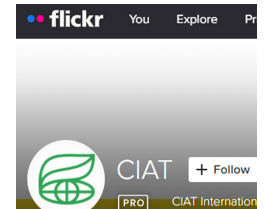
UNEP Flickr
[CLICK HERE](#)



NASA
[CLICK HERE](#)



Centre for International Forestry Research
[CLICK HERE](#)



International Center for Tropical Agriculture
[CLICK HERE](#)



How to Clear a Story for Publication

Clearances

All stories should be cleared in writing by the relevant branch, division or regional heads before being submitted for editing.

Technical clearance must be obtained from the technical officer in charge of the topic. For regionally-focused stories, please alert the regional office from whence the story came (if you don't know, our editorial team will advise).

All quotes must also be cleared by the sources.

Once the content has been reviewed for accuracy, authors are requested to send it to the Communication Division for editing.

All the content published on the UNEP website is edited by professional editors to ensure that the guidelines outlined above have been followed and that the final text is easy to read and contains all the necessary elements for web publishing, such as links, photos and tags.

Scheduling and publishing

Stories are typically scheduled several days in advance. The calendar fills up quickly—if you would like to publish a story on a specific date, please pitch to the Communication Division as soon as possible. Publishing dates are tentative. We do our best to respond to world events as they unfold, and we may produce last-minute stories that need to be placed on the calendar, pushing down stories that are not as time sensitive.



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