

CREATING KILLER FACTS AND GRAPHICS

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

'Killer facts' are those punchy, memorable, headline-grabbing statistics that make reports special. They cut through the technicalities to fire people up about changing the world. They are picked up and repeated endlessly by the media and politicians. They are known as 'killer' facts because if they are really effective, they 'kill off' the opposition's arguments. The right killer fact can have more impact than the whole of a well-researched report.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO DO IT

There are various kinds of killer facts. Most involve some kind of comparison:

Type	Example (Not necessarily real or up to date!)
Big number: The single statistic showing the size of the problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Armed conflict costs Africa \$18bn a year; A Eurozone breakup could cost the poorest countries \$30bn in lost trade and foreign investment; 21,000 children die every day from preventable causes; Remittances from overseas workers to developing countries are worth \$372bn a year, three times the global aid budget.
Juxtaposition to highlight injustice and double standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It would cost \$66bn to get everyone on the planet out of extreme poverty – 4 per cent of global military spending (<i>From Poverty to Power</i>); A woman's risk of dying from pregnancy-related causes ranges from 1 in 18 in Nigeria to 1 in 8,700 in Canada (<i>From Poverty to Power</i>).
And absurdity can make a juxtaposition much more memorable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is easier to trade in guns than bananas... bananas are subject to more regulations under EC rules than sales of AK47s; Every EU cow receives over \$2 per day in support and subsidies, more than the income of half the world's people.
Surprising stats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More people die from road traffic accidents in developing countries than die of malaria, HIV and TB; Mexico is the second most obese country after the US.
Humanizing abstract issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 million more children will go hungry by 2050 because of climate change.
Human scale: Statistics can be incomprehensibly big. Re-scale them to a size we can relate to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A child dies every four seconds from preventable causes; UK aid spending per person per day is less than the price of a cup of tea; There are nearly two bullets for every person on the planet.

KILLER GRAPHICS

Graphs can speak louder than words, as can [infographics](#). They can illustrate the contrasts of killer facts but in addition:

- Show sudden changes in long term trends, e.g. [food prices](#) (as in the [FAO Food Price Index](#));
- Show [projections into the future](#) (as in Oxfam's [The Right to Survive](#) report).

DOs AND DON'Ts

Do

- Be totally certain of the data you use to create your killer fact. The sources must be reliable, respected, up to date and referenced in your report.
- Check before recycling old killer facts, as the data may well have changed (here's [an example from this guide](#)).
- Check your argument for fallacies with someone with statistical training.
- Be ready to provide sources to media or politicians – if the killer fact succeeds, they will be on the phone very quickly and you need your sources ready.
- Make sure that the fact can't be misinterpreted, i.e. that the language is not too convoluted. Otherwise journalists rewriting it in plain terms may accidentally twist your meaning.
- Try and avoid using 'weasel words' like 'could' or 'up to' (damages credibility), for instance 'up to 50 per cent off the world's poor will die of preventable diseases' could mean any percentage between 0 and 50, but invites the reader to assume the larger number
- Make sure the best killer facts are included in the executive summary and the press release – ask someone other than the author, e.g. a media officer, to read through the paper and pick out the best ones.
- Plan ahead: early on when working on your report, decide on the kind of killer facts you would really like to have. Does the data already exist to fill it out? If not, is it possible to generate that data?
- Working out killer facts can take a long time – it often involves adding statistics up in a way that they are not usually added up. So make the time, or get a research assistant to help you with the calculations.

Don't

- Don't cut corners on killer facts. They are crucial to a report's impact. If you are exhausted and have run out of inspiration (a common problem late on in the writing process), ask a media officer or campaigner to help with ideas.
- Don't use too many killer facts in one paper: focus on the most powerful. Otherwise they overwhelm the reader.
- Avoid using killer facts that are [not credibly sourced](#), even if they fit your message. It is not worth damaging your credibility for a quick hit.

And remember: if in doubt, leave it out!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For a concise account of how one of Oxfam's most successful killer facts came into being, see Leila Smith's [Researching the Killer Fact That Highlighted Global Economic Inequality](#).

Researchers may also want to consult other [Oxfam Research Guidelines](#), including [Integrating Gender in Research Planning](#), [Reviewing the Existing Literature](#), [Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews](#), [Researching Human Interest Stories](#), [Planning Survey Research](#), and [Writing for Impact – Lessons from Journalism](#).

LINKS

All links last accessed April 2019.

Africa's Missing Billions: International arms flows and the cost of conflict: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/africas-missing-billions-international-arms-flows-and-the-cost-of-conflict-123908>

Eurozone breakup would cost poorest countries \$30 billion: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2012-06-15/eurozone-breakup-would-cost-poorest-countries-30-billion>

Today, around 21,000 children died around the world: <http://www.globalissues.org/article/715/today-21000-children-died-around-the-world>

Remittances: bigger than ever: <https://www.ft.com/content/4cf69352-3bb4-3cd7-bd95-7980617674bf>

From Poverty to Power: How active citizens and effective states can change the world: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/from-poverty-to-power-how-active-citizens-and-effective-states-can-change-the-w-115393>

Stay on Target: Will the UK fight the battle for tough arms controls?: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/stay-on-target-will-the-uk-fight-the-battle-for-tough-arms-controls-220271>

Cows are better off than half the world: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2002/aug/22/worldsummit2002.earth4>

Death on the road: Traffic accidents kill more than malaria, HIV and TB: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/12/07/death-road-traffic-accidents-kill-malaria-hiv-tb/>

What's New in Development? (re obesity in Mexico): <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/whats-new-in-development/>

The Killer Facts behind the GROW campaign (climate change and child hunger): <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/the-killer-facts-behind-the-grow-campaign/>

UK spending on foreign aid: <https://fullfact.org/economy/uk-spending-foreign-aid/>

Stop a Bullet, Stop a War: <https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/stop-bullet-stop-war-arms-trade-treaty-310512-en.pdf>

How to make infographics: a beginner's guide to data visualisation:
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2014/aug/28/interactive-infographics-development-data>

FAO Food Price Index: <http://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>

The Right to Survive: The humanitarian challenge for the twenty-first century:
<https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/right-to-survive-report.pdf>

How to write Killer Facts and Graphics – what are your best examples?:
<https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/how-to-write-killer-facts-and-graphics-what-are-your-best-examples/#comment-175713>

Are women really 70% of the world's poor? How do we know?: <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/are-women-really-70-of-the-worlds-poor-how-do-we-know/>

Researching the Killer Fact That Highlighted Global Economic Inequality: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/researching-the-killer-fact-that-highlighted-global-economic-inequality-620162>

Oxfam Research Guidelines: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-approach/research/research-guidelines>

Integrating Gender in Research Planning: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/integrating-gender-in-research-planning-620621>

Reviewing the Existing Literature: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/reviewing-the-existing-literature-252995>

Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/conducting-semi-structured-interviews-252993>

Researching Human Interest Stories: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/researching-human-interest-stories-253014>

Planning Survey Research: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/planning-survey-research-578973>

Writing for Impact – Lessons from Journalism: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/writing-for-impact-lessons-from-journalism-253033>

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