

Storytelling Guide

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Form the idea

Storytelling begins with an idea:

- The best time to question the idea is at its conception.
 - Will the viewer care about it?
 - Will it bring understanding?
 - How will this affect the viewer?
 - Will it involve the viewer?
 - What emotional response do I want to convey?
 - Will the viewer be angry? Sad? Happy? Curious?
 - Will it make viewers ask themselves questions?

A good story idea will answer "yes" to at least one of the above. Stories are for the audience.

Your motivation should be to come up with story ideas that:

- Are relevant to the viewer.
- Are likely to involve the viewer.
- Could move the viewer from apathy, through sympathy to empathy.
- Will bring an understanding to the viewer.

Viewers are people, and the best way to bring relevance, involvement, empathy and understanding to them is naturally through stories about people. Or ones that closely involve them.

When a story idea first comes up, look for people genuinely involved in the subject matter, the participants.

People are interested in people.

Viewers are more interested in themselves, their families, friends and other people than in institutions or inaccessible subjects like the environment or economy. For example, an idea about the environment would have the most impact when told through the people who are engaged in the issue.

Storytelling is to convey what is happening with the people involved, how they feel about it and what they do about it.

Research

Accurate and thorough research forms the foundation of all great storytelling. Your credibility as a storyteller relies on your dedication and proficiency in conducting sound and comprehensive research.

Research uncovers:

Truth	What is happening (not what they or you want to believe is happening) and what it means.
Facts	The who, what, when, where and why of the story.
Context	Also known as the "back story". The crucial happenings which led up to today.
Focus	Good research can come up with several suggested focuses from the same story idea. This is considered the central theme or message of the narrative.
Visuals	Strong visuals help convey all elements of the story.

Your research should result in finding:

- Interesting people.
- Interesting questions to ask the interesting people.
- Interesting locations to ask the interesting questions of the interesting people.

Continue asking as you go:

WHO is the story about?

- Did this change when you learned new details?

WHAT is the story about?

- Has the research changed the initial direction of the idea?

WHEN is our story?

- Does It involve the past, present or future - or maybe all?

WHERE is It?

- What is the best setting for telling the story? Rural or urban. Interior or exterior.

WHY are you telling this story?

- Has your purpose evolved through your researched information?

HOW will you be able to tell this story?

- What visuals are absolutely needed for this story?
- Are the visuals abstract or deliberate?

After addressing the previous questions, it is beneficial to ask climatic research questions that delve deeper into the motivations and actions of the people in your story.

- Why are the people in your story engaging in their current actions?
- How are they accomplishing their goals or tasks?
- What do these motivations and actions reveal about the individuals involved?
- Furthermore, what are the potential consequences or outcomes for them if they persist in their current course?

These climatic research questions allow for a more thorough exploration of the characters' motivations, methods, and the implications of their actions within the story. As you grapple with answering these questions you will find the heart and soul of your story. You will find your **story focus**.

Focus the narrative

Focus is the theme or controlling idea of your story. Focus is a single, simple, vivid declarative sentence expressing the soul, the essence, of the story.

- A story is focused before you go out to shoot.
- The focus...
 - is based on research.
 - contains both cause and effect.
 - defines the order of events of the story.
 - defines the emotional as well as the factual meaning of the story.
- The focus must be brutally specific in that it defines what you go out to shoot, write, edit, and report.
- The focus can't be a question - it is the answer to your climactic research questions.

The focus answers the questions:

- WHO is the story about?
- WHAT are they doing?
- WHY are they doing it?

Then you put information into a sentence with a "because" (or similar word) as the fulcrum.

- The focus is a roadmap that tells you where the story is going and how to get there.
- It identifies three vital areas of the story:
 - the beginning,
 - the middle or transition (cause to effect or effect to cause)
 - and the closing
- It identifies and describes the roles of the principal character.
- It dictates the chronology of the story.
- It defines the emotional effect.
- It ensures that you use only essential information.
- It ensures clarity and order in your story.

Focus Examples:

A lowly can of pop can be transformed into art because Pierre Labelle uses his imagination to recycle.

The once frantic life of Annie Brooks is back in balance because she's rediscovered her connection with nature.

Structure

Classic storytelling looks like this:

Context	Just enough information at the beginning of the story to make it understandable, and accessible as it unfolds. The necessary information to intrigue the viewer to follow the story.
Foreshadowing	A hint or a clue, that there's to be an unexpected, even dramatic outcome to the story. Not just random facts or pictures.

Dramatic Unfolding	Usually involving someone taking some sort of journey and having to overcome obstacles to reach a desired goal. Telling the story as it happens.
Climax	The culmination of the story, such as the winning or losing of the journey.
Denouement	Wrapping up the details of the journey. This could be a concluding thought or image that sums up the focus.

Good storytellers take the viewer on a journey of discovery. This is the whole point of storytelling.

The better the story is told:

- The more the viewer takes part.
- The more the viewer is invested in knowing how it turns out.
- The more information is retained by the viewer.

If the structure is garbled, if the climax and the main points of the story are known at the beginning, there can be no discovery, no dramatic unfolding.

Good storytellers tell stories with **context, foreshadowing, dramatic unfolding, climax and (sometimes) denouement.** In that order.