

Storytelling

What is it?¹

One of the most powerful ways to make your point memorable or to persuade people is by telling a compelling story that unites an idea with emotions. Essentially, storytelling expresses how and why life changes. It begins with a situation in which life is relatively in balance. But then there's an event—"inciting incident"—that throws life out of balance. The story goes on to describe how, in an effort to restore balance, the main character's expectations crash into a cruel reality. This creates a struggle between what was expected and reality in all its nastiness. A good storyteller describes what it's like to deal with these opposing forces, calling on the character to dig deeper, work with scarce resources, make difficult decisions, take action despite risks, and ultimately discover the truth.



Image source <http://cdn.business2community.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/storytelling11.jpg>

How do I start?²

All great stories have three essential elements: context, action, and result. These three elements make up Paul Smith's **CAR** framework for storytelling.

Step 1

Create Context

The context provides the background information that listeners need to make sense of your story. It should also spark their interest and make a connection, so that they care about what you have to say. Context needs to address four key questions.

1. Where and when does this story take place? Establish the "when" and "where" of your story.
2. Who is the main character? This needs to be someone who your audience can connect with. In most cases, you are the main character.
3. What does he or she want? Explain what your main character wants to accomplish.
4. Who, or what, is in the way? Every story needs an obstacle or villain. This can be a person, object, event, or challenge.

Step 2

Describe Action

Every great story has action: ups and downs, setbacks, conflicts, failures, and battles. The action is where we experience defeats and learn lessons. In your story, your main character must "do" something. Ideally, he or she will experience a setback, failure, or problem along the way. Obstacles create tension and forge an important connection with your audience, because everyone experiences them daily.

Step 3

End with Result

At the end of your story, you reveal your main character's fate. You also need to explain, subtly, what the audience should have learned from this result. What is the moral? Why did you tell this story?

¹ McKee, Robert and Fryer, Bronwyn. Storytelling That Moves People. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2003/06/storytelling-that-moves-people/ar>

² MindTools. Business Storytelling.

<http://www.mindtools.com/community/pages/article/BusinessStoryTelling.php?route=pages/article/BusinessStoryTelling.php>

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Important Tips

- **Create an experience** – When you tell a story, you create an experience for your listeners by stimulating multiple senses and exciting emotions.³
- **Illustrate dramatic struggles** - When you tell the story of your struggles against real antagonists, your audience sees you as an exciting, dynamic person.⁴
- **Admit flaws** - Most stories are boring because we want to hide our dirt by sweeping it under the carpet. We want to present a rosy picture to the world. Rosy stories with positive pictures don't work because these stories don't ring true. By admitting your flaws you develop trust with your listeners.⁵

“A great lasting story is about everyone or it will not last. The strange and foreign is not interesting – only deeply personal and familiar.”

John Steinbeck

Image created by Christopher Scott

How can I learn more?

- **APPEL Storytelling:** <http://appel.nasa.gov/knowledge-sharing/masters-forums/>
- **Video - Jay O'Callahan - The Power of Storytelling** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jehYhIY3Lw>
- **Article - Harvard Business Review - Storytelling That Moves People** <https://hbr.org/2003/06/storytelling-that-moves-people/ar>
- **Video – Storytelling with Infographics** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQbFX2QzbOI>

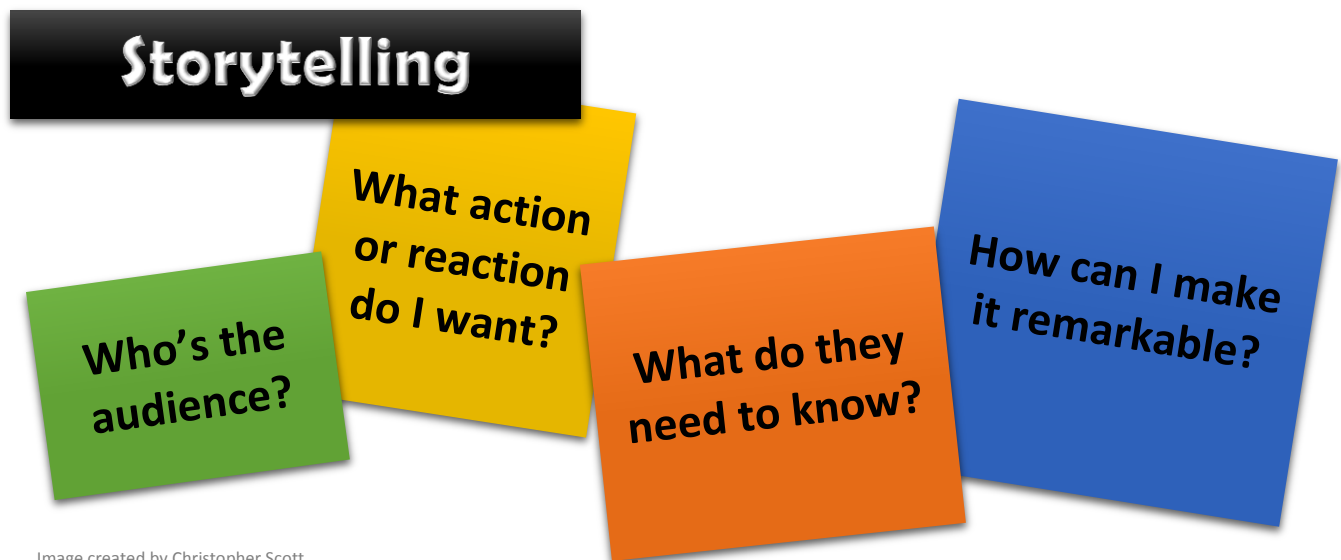


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³ MindTools. Business Storytelling.

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⁴ McKee, Robert and Fryer, Bronwyn. Storytelling That Moves People. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2003/06/storytelling-that-moves-people/ar>

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