

Finding the Experience

Story Styles

Narrative Theory: Finding Your Story

The Restorying Process

Story Styles

The KQED/DSI suggests several types of story styles you can use to create your digital story. Your instructor will show examples of each style to familiarize you with its format and be there to provide insight when you begin to conceptualize your project.

A STORY NARRATED WITH YOUR VOICE

Stories created in a narrative style are the most personal in topic and tone. Written in first person, narrative stories are narrated with your own voice. Narrative digital stories are often the source of personal discovery and introspection, where we generally find out something personal about the author. The story “drives”—or takes precedence over—the images; the meaning is expressed through the narrative and supported visually by the images. We will examine some useful methods to identify and focus a narrative story later in this chapter.

A STORY WITH MUSIC

Most commonly recognized as music videos, this type of production is a story without words, although captions, titles and the blending of lyrics and visual imagery can personalize the piece.

A STORY WITH INTERVIEWS

Different people (including yourself) tell a story with interviews and the author provides supplemental images to support what is being spoken about. A common technique is to weave an entire story through the voice and reflections of others; this method is enhanced through multimedia technology, which allows voices to be heard while different images are seen. A story using interviews can also be mixed with a story including narrative. We will explore tips for effective interviewing later in this manual.

Narrative Theory: Finding Your Story

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A well-crafted digital story is a seamless blend of multimedia technology and the inherent ability to find meaning in our experiences and tell that story. While technical skills are easily taught and usually just as easily learned, identifying a compelling personal story and translating it into narrative can be a difficult and overwhelming experience. Some people who are completely capable of sharing a story in casual conversation become apprehensive at having to prepare a story in script form for their digital story. Perhaps there is an element of fear in the notion of creating something tangible or permanent and “getting the story right.” It is helpful to remember that these are *your* stories. How they are told and supported through visuals is a unique and individual process; there is no one correct approach. However, to help identify your story and tell it effectively, the KQED/DSI recommends these key processes in eliciting stories that have proved successful with a broad range of students.

ABOUT STORIES

Our identities are filled with stories, which provide insight into who we are. Stories mined from our lives are a direct connection to what our experience on the human journey is. Stories can explain and illuminate:

- Who we are
- Where we came from
- Where we are going
- What we care about
- What is important to us

A good story has a beginning, middle and end. Make the beginning captivate your viewer. Perhaps frame it with a question, dilemma or controversy. It should compel us to continue to watch; we want to see how the problem is resolved. The middle describes the course of events: What happened? The end of a story reveals a conclusion: How did the situation turn out? The story’s end is also a good place to present your meaning or point. The experience of watching and hearing the story should leave us changed or wanting to learn more.

STORY IDEAS AND THEMES

Ideas and inspiration for personal stories can come from many sources. Your KQED/DSI workshop instructor will show examples of digital stories created by former students, then lead a discussion of classic story themes. She will also assist with memory trigger and brainstorming exercises to help you identify a story you feel is meaningful to tell. Here is a small selection of common story themes. Yours need not fit into one or any of these categories. Once you begin to think about stories using common themes or memory triggers, you will find the possibility for a story worth digitizing is endless!

Some common personal story themes include:

REMEMBRANCE OR MEMORIAL STORIES

Stories that acknowledge, honor or reflect on the life of one who has died.

RELATIONSHIP STORIES

Stories of significant relationships in your life. Common subjects are immediate relations, including parents, grandparents, siblings, spouse or partner. Other meaningful relationships may include a business or creative partner, a teacher or mentor, childhood or lifelong friends, even pets. Who are these subjects and what impact have they made on your life? Consider including stories of love, admiration, longing or loss, disappointment or a poignant reflection of a person.

THE GENESIS STORY

Almost all people, groups or businesses can point to a significant moment or event in the past that was a determining factor in how things are today, e.g., “If my mother had not taken a ceramics class, she would not have met my father...” The genesis story is an essential part of almost all family histories, examining the question, “Where do we come from?”

STORIES OF CHALLENGE

Stories in which you have experienced challenge and how (or whether) you overcame it. They can be physical as well as mental challenges, i.e., the challenge of climbing a 15,000-foot mountain, conquering the fear of changing careers or returning to school after an extended absence.

OBJECTS AND ARTIFACTS

All of us have owned or known of a possession that held tremendous value in our lives and the compelling stories that accompany them. Objects or artifacts can be as varied as a lucky charm, a rock found on a memorable hike or a precious family heirloom handed down through many generations. What are these objects, how do they exist in your life and what value do you place on them?

HURT AND HEALING

Sadly, it is guaranteed that human beings will experience at least some element of emotional suffering. Stories about pain and the healing process are ultimately about resurrection and finding a way to continue. These types of stories can be about hurt and how that changed you.

STORIES ABOUT A PLACE

Stories about locations, specific or vast, capture memories. Geographical places hold intense memories and emotional significance in our lives. Whether you have a fond memory of spending childhood summers on a grandparent’s farm or the painful recollection of a war combat zone in a distant country, reconciling stories and emotions of these places is a useful exercise in understanding ourselves—we might refer to it as narrative archaeology: What’s buried in this place?

ADVENTURE, JOURNEY OR TRAVEL

This theme is an abundant source of stories, for we have all had some sort of journey or travel experience that can be told as an adventure.

THE SHOE BOX OF STORIES

Countless stories can be found in the well-worn shoe box or photo album filled with our treasured photographs. Each photo preserves a moment in time and each moment has a corresponding story: “Where was I when this photo was taken? Who took it? Who is in the photo with me? What was I thinking when this was taken?”

Conceptualize Your Story: Narrow the Focus

Once you have decided on a particular theme or topic for your story, you begin the process of planning how the story will be told. At this point, it is often necessary to narrow your focus. Telling the entire history of a beloved grandfather in a single short story could be an overly ambitious task. It is often hard to know where to start a story with a broad topic, and usually harder to know when to end it. By thinking about a particular aspect of the relationship that was important to you or a specific event you shared—perhaps relating a bit of wisdom or transformation that occurred—you conceptualize a core story. Questions to consider in this order narrow the focus of your story:

- What is the main question or problem this story will explore?
- What events or experiences occurred that will help to tell this story?
- How did it end?
- How did I feel (in the beginning and at the end)?
- How was my perspective or viewpoint changed?

Conceptualize Your Story: A Point of View

Having and expressing a point of view is critical to any good story. All stories are told to make a point from a particular perspective. Without a point of view, a story is reduced to a mere recitation of facts. If the point is to tell something about yourself, it will be helpful to incorporate something emotionally engaging, something you care deeply about. A point of view allows others to understand how you feel about your story and what compelled you to tell it in the first place. Emotional points of view can be derived from:

- A dream
- A wish
- A disappointment
- A fear
- A belief
- A loss
- A discovery
- A success
- Something exciting

Conceptualize Your Story: Voice

The sound of your voice is unique and special. In digital storytelling, we talk of the voice, both as what it means in audible terms as well as in its narrative and storytelling terms. For digital stories that are created in a narrative style, we recommend using your own voice for several reasons. First, if the story is a personal one, who better to narrate it than you? Your voice, your manner of speaking, your inflections and tone all identify you, which will add authenticity and a sense of identity to your story. When writing your script, we recommend you include elements of your unique phrasing style and sentence structure. Narrative writing has a different cadence and rhythm than business or other formal forms of writing. More organic, it resembles the manner in which you naturally speak. By embracing your voice both in writing the script and for the narration, the ownership and authorship of your story become wholly yours.

Conceptualize Your Story: Audience

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In any created piece, you must take the audience into account. In broad strokes, the audience for every piece is a general audience, but on closer inspection, we often have a specific person or group of people in mind. Answering these two questions will help to define your audience:

What do I really want to say?
To whom do I want to say it?

The first question will lead you to better communicate the meaning behind your story; the second will aid you in discovering the embedded audience. To discover your real audience, ask yourself who really needs to hear it.

Understanding who your audience is will lend insight into appropriate tone and diction. You could relate the same experience to three different people and, depending on who they are, the story will be different even though the experience is the same. The way you tell a story to your mother is very different from how you tell it to your best friend. Knowing your audience will help determine how to best to tell this story.

The Restorying Process

Telling stories is one of the most powerful methods humans have for sharing meaning and understanding with one another. Human stories are unique in that each individual's account will be different than another person's, even if the exact same experience happened to both people at the same time. People have different perspectives and thus story their lives unique to their interpretation and identity. The process of examining a story, reconstructing it through narrative and ultimately releasing it in a tangible form alters the experience from one person's internal account into one available for internalization and interpretation by others. By this act of conscious release, a story is transformed.

The restorying process can be used as an agent for personal change and the transformation of a negative experience into a positive one. As a therapeutic application, storytelling is a technique that encourages people to analyze events and relationships clearly and put them into perspective. This process grants permission for a negative or stressful situation to be developed into a positive or resurrective narrative. The concept is simple: you can't change what happened, but you can change where you stand in relation to that story. That is, you don't need to stand in the victim's place. If you retell the story, you become the author. Through that reauthoring process, the story gets rewritten according to your version of it.