



Effective Story Telling

How to Engage and Inspire!

“What you’re trying to do, when you tell a story, is to write about an event in your life that made you feel some particular way. And what you’re trying to do, when you tell a story, is to get the audience to have that same feeling.” Pete Docter

1. Great stories are universal

Great storytelling is about taking a piece of the human condition (so things like birth, growth, emotionality, aspiration, conflict) and conveying it in a unique situation.

One way you can do this is to pull apart the stories you like.

Break down every little element about what you love about them. Those are real feelings you’re having, and you have to recognize them in detail in order to tell a great story yourself.

In other words, self-knowledge and awareness are at the root of all great storytelling. You are part of the human condition and people will relate to that.

2. Great stories have a clear structure and purpose

Structure

One of my favorite ways to develop a compelling story is to use “The Story Spine” formula created by professional playwright and improviser Kenn Adams. Pixar has used this story structure to create so many films we know and love today.

It goes:

Once upon a time there was [blank]. Every day, [blank]. One day [blank]. Because of that, [blank]. Until finally [bank].

Purpose

Why must you tell THIS story?

What’s the belief burning within you that your story feeds off of?

What greater purpose does this serve? What does it teach?

That’s the heart of really great storytelling.

By crafting a story that you are passionate to tell because it serves a real purpose, your stories will have bigger impact on the world.

I think that gets lost a lot of the time.

3. Great stories appeal to our deepest emotions

Psychologists generally agree that there are six basic emotions: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise.

Why are you feeling a certain way? How might you be able to take the “why” behind your emotions and tell a story?

Continuously question yourself in order to understand your own emotional reactions to stories so that you can learn to tell more authentic stories that reach and move people where it counts.

4. Great stories are surprising and unexpected

We’ve all seen the classic “fairytale” storyline: a helpless princess in need and a charming prince swooping in to save the day.

Boring (and totally outdated).

What makes modern stories compelling are when our perceptions of reality are challenged or changed in some way.

Many times, those topics or themes are surprising and unexpected, leaving the audience thinking about the story well after it is over.

Challenge yourself to dig deep.

5. Great stories are simple and focused

We as audiences know a good story when we see or hear one.

Have you ever watched a movie or read a book where you had to keep asking yourself (or someone else) what was happening in the plot?

Not a great experience.

As creators, we naturally want to include as much information as possible in our stories. We want to pack the story full of characters and plot twists and dialogue.

And often times we might not even realize that we’re adding layers that don’t need to be there.

Advice: Combine characters and hop over detours.



While you as the creator may feel like you're losing lots of valuable stuff, it'll set you free in the end and will allow your audience to get lost in the narrative.

One way to find out if your story is easy to follow is to tell it to a friend or family member who has never heard it before. Watch their face as you tell the story and try to see where they pause and what questions they might have.

The Structure of a good story has a three-unit format:

- The Opening
- The Body
- The Close

The Opening:

The opening may be the most important part of your story. The opening is where a speaker establishes rapport. The opening establishes the critical first impression.

The Body:

The Main Body of the story is the outline structure made up of Headings or Main Points that you want to discuss.

There are Four Common Forms of Support in the Body of a Story:

- Examples and Illustrations.
- Statistics
- Testimony & Personal Story – the "AHA!" Moment
- Quotes & "Leave Behinds"

The Close:

A good Close is essential in pulling a story together, restating and emphasizing your main points, and leaving a favorable impression.

- A story to inform often ends up with a recap of the main ideas.
- An effective Close can be made with a strong or startling statement.
- An emotional lift at the end of a story is an effective Close.
- The use of a Quotation is an often an effective Close.