

Science Through Story™: Inclusive Science Storytelling

Consider Your Audience

1. *Who is your target audience for your story? What are some things that they probably care about?*
 - Can you think of one or more reference audiences who represent the most disparate person(s) you are trying to reach in your target audience?

2. *What are your communication goals for this audience? Which one is your priority?*
 - What do you want the audience to take away from your story? New knowledge? A call to action? A particular perspective or emotion?
 - Decide on a primary goal to focus on. You might end up accomplishing others as well.

3. *Are there any particular challenges that you need to consider in pursuit of your primary communication goal with this target audience?*
 - Might your audience have trouble relating to your topic? Why?
 - Is it possible that your audience has a suspicion of or aversion to your topic?

4. *How can you address those challenges?*
 - Is there a historical factor, familiar scenario, or common concern that you can address?
 - Is there anything that you might want to avoid because it would immediately make your audience averse to your story?

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Distill Your Story

Create a 2-3 sentence *And – But – Therefore* (“ABT”) summary of your topic for your target audience to clearly communicate your main point.

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Structure Your Story

These questions will help you identify and develop the essential elements of your story. The bullet points under each question can help guide your thinking, but you don't have to address each one.

1. *Who is the protagonist (main character) in your story?*

- Your character can be anyone or anything, human or nonhuman (e.g., a molecule, an organism, a system). It might be easiest to try this exercise with a human protagonist first.

2. *What is the protagonist's main goal?*

- What motivates them on a daily basis?

3. *What is the main antagonistic force working against the protagonist's main goal?*

- What usually thwarts the protagonist from pursuing that goal?

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4. *What is at stake?*

- What do the protagonist or others stand to gain or lose from the outcome of the protagonist's pursuit?
- Stakes can be external (e.g., life/death), internal (e.g., overcoming/succumbing to a personal weakness), or philosophical (e.g., can we have confidence in our data?).

5. *What is the outcome for the protagonist? Has anything changed by the end?*

- Do they end up in a better or worse situation than they were in at the start of the story?
- Does the protagonist learn something about themselves or the world around them? Has the protagonist changed the world in some way?
- If your story is about a nonhuman character, has the character impacted its community or environment in some way?

6. *How does your story end? What is the climactic event that occurs just before the ending?*

- These two elements need to make the outcome for the protagonist clear to the audience.
- Is the protagonist *surprised* by the climax or outcome?

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7. *What is the inciting incident that sets the story into motion?*

- This should be an event that presents a new opportunity or a new threat to the protagonist and their main goal.

8. *What is the chain of events that occurs between the inciting incident and the climax?*

- Each event should cause what happens after it.
- Only include what you need for the story to make sense.

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Essential Story Elements

Now summarize the essential elements that you have identified for your story, in the order in which you would present them to your audience.

Note: If you want some practice, you can also use this page to analyze the essential elements of another story!

SET UP

Target Audience:

Communication Goal:

Protagonist:

Main Goal:

Antagonistic Force:

Stakes:

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EVENTS

Exposition (add in whatever you need to “set the scene” for your audience; this would be the Introduction of a paper or presentation):

Inciting Incident (in a paper, this might be a new hypothesis, method, or study system to test; this would go toward the end of the Introduction):

Chain of Events (Methods would go here):

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Climax (Results would go here):

Falling Action (Optional; Discussion would go here):

Ending (Conclusions):

Outcome for Protagonist:

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Pitch Your Story!

Review your story treatment:

- Is it cohesive?
- Does it follow the same protagonist throughout?
- Does the story support your communication goal for your target audience?

Now, try pitching your story to someone else and ask for feedback! Tell them who your target audience is for your story, and your communication goal for that audience.

Here are a few questions that you might want to ask your test audience:

1. *What did you find most interesting in this story? What do you think the target audience would find most interesting?*

- This stuff is working well in your story!

2. *Was the story hard to follow at any point?*

- Revisit this part of your story – is it too complex? Does it digress or shift focus?

3. *Were there any terms in the story that were unfamiliar or confusing to you, or that might be confusing for the target audience?*

- Consider how you could replace, rephrase, or better explain these terms.

Now go back and strengthen your story! Don't be afraid to go through this process several times – iteration is part of storytelling!

Have fun! :)

For more information, check out this open access paper:

EIShafie, S.J. 2018. [Making Science Meaningful for Broad Audiences through Stories](#). *Integrative and Comparative Biology* 58(6):1213-1223.