

Storytelling Elements

The following is a list of things you might consider to make your stories more engaging. None of these are prescriptive!

- Set a clear context by starting with where and when it happened (“Three years ago I was in Milan for the weekend...”)
- Use an engaging opening statement (e.g., “This is the story of how I started to believe in god...”)
- Add specific, sensory details that add depth and colour – things to see, hear, touch, smell and taste, so your story appeals to all senses
- Choose between introducing the theme or meaning first, or going straight into the story (aiming for the head or heart)
- Decide what’s the MIT – the Most Important Thing about the story – and tell it accordingly
- Relate your story to the audience. Clarify the terms of reference if the audience isn’t familiar with them
- Introduce the villain (a person, a problem, a difficult situation e.g., the financial crisis, the loss of consumer confidence, etc.)
- Introduce the hero (a person, a solution, a product etc.)
- Make characters specific by giving them names and describing how they look
- Describe the hero’s vulnerability
- Raise the stakes for the protagonist / introduce risk
- Introduce conflict and problems / obstacles
- Include surprises
- Raise questions that make the audience wonder what will happen next. Create mystery
- Use open questions or rhetorical questions
- Use humour
- Act out the story with gestures, voices of different characters, etc.
- Imagine the story as you tell it, see it in your mind’s eye

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- Use pauses for dramatic impact
- Introduce contrast – between characters, locations, expectation vs. outcome, etc.
- Use analogies and metaphors
- Use repetition for dramatic effect
- Step in and out of the story
- Coming full circle at the end
- Reincorporate elements later in the story that have been introduced before
- Use sets of 3s:
 - Beginning – middle – end
 - Set-up – build – pay-off
- Create empathy through recognition
- Allow yourself to jump in time, for dramatic effect or to make links between things
- Express your emotional connection with the material / describe the impact of the story on yourself
- Create transformation or change between the beginning and the end
- Have a clear conclusion – the reason why you are telling the story. Or invite your audience to draw conclusions. Link it back to the business
- End with the moral of the story
- End with a question?
- Make a summary statement that encapsulates the whole story in a nut shell