



# Storytelling

*Updated as of June 1, 2023*

*'Storytelling ... knowing your punchline, your ending, knowing that everything you're saying, from the first sentence to the last, is leading to a singular goal, and ideally confirming some truth that deepens our understanding of who we are as human beings.'* - Andrew Stanton, Pixar

## Why Use Storytelling?

*'Storytelling is a great way to enhance the experience and create vivid images for remembrance. [Our expert] was both very informed and very talented at storytelling.'* - Autumn 2018 client feedback

*"We both appreciated his knowledge and his weaving the story of the French Revolution around not only the past but present day events in French social and political culture & manners. The tour was intellectually stimulating as well as fun!"* - Spring 2019

Stories can frame knowledge and ideas so that we offer more than just a series of facts or a list of events. They put facts and events within an **engaging** and **memorable** structure.

- Stories have a great impact on us. When we hear stories, the chemistry in our brains changes as we react to excitement and emotions.
- Retention rate increases hugely when facts are shared within a story rather than on their own. They make facts more digestible. One study has suggested that stories are remembered 22 x more than statistics, facts and figures alone (*Jen Aaker, Professor of Marketing at Stanford Graduate School of Business*).
- Stories transport us into another time, place and world. This is called 'narrative transportation'. Our brain activity is not of a listener, but a participant.
- Effective stories capture attention and maintain audience interest. They slow people down, encourage listening as well as thinking, and facilitate memorable and extraordinary experiences.



## When and How to Use Stories

Through our tours, we share the stories of our cities. Shared well, these stories bring history, art, architecture to life and are uniquely informative, engaging and thought provoking. Through storytelling, you can share your passion for your subject and pique curiosity in an approachable and audience friendly way.

### **We can use storytelling in two ways:**

- Creating an overarching narrative for your tour (we often talk about these separately but narratives are just stories by another name)
- Telling stories at stops throughout the tour.

Remember that you can tell many stories from the same set of facts. And that you may choose to tell different stories depending on the group in front of you.

## How to Find the Story

As subject specialists and experts trained in a wide variety of fields, you will each approach a tour differently. For example, you may focus more on architectural styles, international influences, trends, social history or art history etc. You may focus on the royal family, the artists vs art dealers, the activists or architects.

Think about your research and what you find most compelling. Always tell the stories you find interesting. If you don't find it engaging or relevant, it will show.

To gather stories to use at stops throughout the tour, think about creating a 'story vault'. Maybe you've read or heard something new. Bank these stories so that you can weave them into your tours. This means you have many to choose from on the day of the tour, and it keeps things fresh and interesting for you as a guide.

A note on fact vs fiction: You don't need to make things up or rely on too much unreliable information to make things interesting or entertaining. There are times when you might tell clients a myth, a legend or an uncheckable story which may not be true, but let the clients know this. When drawing on people's stories, be mindful of 'gossipy' information; this is especially true with historical figures and artists. If it is relevant, integrate it responsibly.

*'The truth is stranger than fiction' - Mark Twain*



## Crafting a Story

First, ask yourself: “*Who is my audience and what is my goal in engaging them?*” (Jennifer Aaker, Professor of Marketing at Stanford Graduate School of Business). Are you telling this story to share an insight, to surprise your clients, to get them to think about something you are going to show them next? If you are telling someone a story and they don’t understand why it is relevant or why they should care, then they won’t listen. **What do you want clients to remember?**

To craft a simple story, it can helpful to think about the 5 Ws: **Who, When, Where, What, Why** as your basic building blocks

### 1: Who?

*‘Her cafe tour was not simply a food tour, though it included an introduction to Prague’s cafe specialties. More important to us was the cultural history she provided, sharing anecdotes about and excerpts from the authors and poets who frequented the cafes we visited.’ - Client Feedback September 2018*

People are drawn to people. Drawing on real life experiences helps to bring a story to life, encourages clients to make a real connection and frames a deeper understanding. People are the life of the cities we work in, and have shaped how it stands today, whether it’s the artists who struggled or thrived, the royalty who commissioned the buildings, or the food vendors whose stalls fill the market streets.

Telling the story of one person is generally more powerful than that of a group. For example, singling out the story of one campaigner, artist, or royal family member has more impact than telling a general story of a mass collective. One strong character always connects through a relatable quality of humanness, no matter how different they and their lives are to us.

To identify the people in your stories:

- Look out for ‘the who’ when doing your research, make a note and investigate them further
- Think about who epitomizes the message you are trying to communicate
- Research who started memorable events and why

*‘Every character should want something’ - Vonnegut, 1999*

Once you have identified these people, ask yourself: **what are/were their motivations, experiences and actions? What do/did they want to achieve, to have, to do?** Look for universals such as emotions of love, fear and guilt as they help people empathize. **Do/did they succeed in the end? What do/did they have to overcome to get this?** Being able to answer these questions gives the character and story more depth and complexity, and helps drive a story forward.



## . 2 & 3: When and Where?

Think about your story's world - the place and time your story is set.

Of course, you may be in the very place that is the setting for your story. But you don't have to be - the place you are can relate to the main theater of an event. The "when" will be in the past so try and bring the period you are referring to to life.

## 4 & 5: What and Why?

*What is the plot? What are key events and their driving forces?*

What are the events in the story? What happens to the character(s)? Why do these things happen?

The plot is all of the events that make up your story. You can play with the order of these events. This is your story structure.

# How to Structure a Story

When you've decided what you want the key messages to be, think about how you will get to that point. Think about what you want clients to know and when - at which stop, at which point in the tour.

A typical story structure involves developing a beginning, a middle and an end.

- **Beginning:** Hook the audience in and set the scene. It should surprise, challenge, and intrigue clients. If relevant, think about what is at stake in the story.
  - Offer a hook by starting with an unusual situation or at a pivotal moment; use a quote; use a rhetorical question; or pique interest with something shocking.
- **Middle:** Continue to take clients on a journey involving action, tension, and conflict.
  - This is where you can build tension, add turning points and add layers to your story. What is blocking your character getting what they want? What steps did the character take? How did they struggle? What challenges are overcome? What's the main event? How does it end? What is the ultimate answer to the questions your story has posed to the audience?
- **Ending:** Wrap things up, provide a resolution and reveal the aftermath. It should touch on how things have changed and what lessons have been learned. You should also link back to the purpose (or 'so what?' question) of the story. Don't forget to tie up loose ends.

