

## Storytelling Introduction Video (Transcript)

Hey folks, my name is Duncan. Welcome to this little intro to storytelling for Public Engagement. Now if you've never thought about using storytelling for talking about your research before, particularly in a public engagement setting, listen in, because I'm going to tell you why it's really, really powerful and effective.

Storytelling is our oldest form of codifying information. Human beings have been telling stories for thousands of years, almost as long as there have been human beings. We used to draw stories on cave walls, and then we'd sit around campfires and tell each other stories. And for 1000s of years, the storytellers in society were really respected because they travelled from group to group from town to town, from society to society, sharing stories, sharing lessons, sharing, learning. Storytelling and listening to storytellers was how we understood the greater world around us. It's how we learned stuff, it's how we passed information back and forth. And then you have a bit of time and a bit of history, we start writing down stories in various forms on clay tablets, and then into books or on papyrus, and on walls. And then we get the printing press after a big chunk more time. I'm not a historian. We get the printing press, and we start sharing stories around all over the place.

Have a think now in 2021, in the 21st century, the information age, the tech age, where do we see storytelling now? Films, TV shows, theatre stuff that goes on in the arts. What about computer games, computer games have some of the best storytelling out there. Newspapers have stories and news organisations and news stories and documentaries. That's all-storytelling. Advertising the really good ones are very, very good storytellers. Books, they still exist, we still have books. So we still get stories through books. And what about when you're just chatting to people? If you're talking to your friends? How often have you said, "You'll never guess what happened to me the other day?" And then what do you do? You tell them a little story. Or if you've had a really bad day at work, you go home and you say to whoever is at home, you say "I have had such a day". And then you tell a little story. Even in academia, where maybe it can be a little bit weird to think about stories, you might be using them already. If you've ever had to show people, try and get people to understand how a theory applies to the real world. What do you do, you say, for example, and then you tell them a little story, you paint them a picture of how this piece of theory how this piece of information applies to the real world.

So this centuries old art form the thing that human beings have been doing for forever to communicate with each other, we still use it all the time. Even in a world that is information'y' and rational and techie, we still experience a lot of it

through stories. And because of that, we are hardwired to pay attention to them, to engage with them, to listen to them. And that is why they are powerful for your public engagement work. You want your audiences to have an easily accessible way to think about your work, you want something that is really going to hook them in and engage them and get them to pay attention to what you're talking about. Stories are the way forward. And in this little video, I'm going to give you a couple of quick tips for helping you use techniques that storytellers have been using for 1000s of years to make those activities to make those communications that little bit more engaging, but a little bit more effective.

So, storytelling tip that we can, nick from the world of storytelling, number one, it's a simple one, put people in. Now for some sorts of research, people are easy to find those people in the work, there's people doing it. For other sorts of research, people are maybe a little bit harder to find, perhaps the physical sciences, it's harder to think about people if what you're studying is small microbes. But people are one of the absolute keys to engagement. Human beings are fundamentally quite narcissistic, we want to hear about ourselves, but we don't often get to hear about ourselves. So we like stories about other people, particularly people we can relate to. So who are the people in your work? In your research, in the stuff you want to talk about.

One of the easiest to put in is yourself. Your audiences don't want to see somebody standing on a stage who's a research robot who just goes out and does the research. And then comes and tells them the research. That's not what they want to see what they want to see is a human being, talking about what they do. A human being who can get excited and interested and passionate about the subject and bring yourself to your communications. But more than that, find other people as well. When you're talking about your work, talk about how it is going to impact the lives of people, how is it going to change the world? How is it going to change the way we do things or the way we treat various medical conditions, connect your things, to the greater world, and particularly to people. And that is what's gonna make them interested and make them care about your work, people are really important.

And that relatable bit, you get that and by making them emotional, so if you're going to put people in, give them moments where they are frustrated, where they're happy, where they're passionate, where they're excited about stuff, where they're sad, when they're in love, because all of that stuff, is things that your audience can relate to, and find context in to help them paint this picture of your research. Maybe there are characters in the history of your subject that you could put in, maybe there are people who are going to be impacted by the work or people who are impacted because the work hasn't been done yet, by the problem you're trying to solve. Maybe you're working with interviewees and looking at people's stories and human beings coming in, put that stuff in your public

engagement comms, in your research comms, because it is going to make people pay attention and get them to care about the work that little bit.

Storytelling, tip number two, there's a phrase in the world of theatre that says 'conflict equals drama' And what they mean by that is human beings find things interesting when there is a little bit of tension when there's a little bit of conflict when there's a little bit of push and pull. Okay, so that concept of push and pull one idea going one way, one idea going another way, which one's gonna win, that's the thing that gets people interested human beings are suckers for curiosity, knowing which idea is going to come out on top, which theory is the one that gets taken up, what you're going to discover, is your equipment going to work properly for you this time, that little bit of tension is a really useful, really powerful thing when you're talking to other people about your work, because it kickstarts, a little bit of curiosity, a little bit of that. I don't know which way this is gonna go, who's gonna win? And that curiosity drives us to pay attention and to be interested. So look at your work, examine it, see if there are any spaces that you could add some tension, are there any points where one thing is pulling in one direction? And another thing is pulling another direction? Back tension will be interesting. Are there any overt competitiveness moments where one thing has to get on top of another? Okay, you can talk about that in terms of biology, or cells integrating, or things trying to do stuff or get involved with things.

Tension, right, something or somebody wants to get somewhere, and something is going to get in the way, that is the classic setup for storytelling, right? A hero has to do something a villain gets in the way. That tension is what makes stories interesting. So find moments of tension, moments of conflict, moments of, "we don't quite know which way this is going to go" and use them to create curiosity in your audience. Use them to create an audience who cares and wants to know what's going to happen next.

Storytelling tip number three, and it draws right on from the back of that tension thing. This one is something that academic comms and Academic Presentations forget a lot of the time and it's quite simple. Wherever you can find places to create curiosity. Curiosity is a huge driver of human engagement. We love wanting to know what happens next. Or if you can make us want to know what happens next, we're going to be with you, forever. People talk about the idea that attention spans are getting smaller, because we're just scrolling on our phones all the time. And yet, you will watch a three hours Marvel Avengers movie back to back with no stopping, right? That's three hours of focused engagement. Why? Because you're invested and you care. But more importantly, you are curious about what's going to happen.

That curiosity can be done in a few ways. Think about your openings. Have your talks and your events. How do you hook people in and get them curious? At the start of an event? How do you set things up? So people want to know which way things are going to go? One of the things academics do a lot is they give a big

introduction to their topic before they talk about it. Does that ruin curiosity? Maybe. Are you giving spoilers for what's going to happen next and taking away your audience's chance to be curious? So have a think about that? Where can you find moments to generate or create curiosity for your audience, they will love you for it, they will engage with you for it, they will pay attention to your work.

As you go about your daily life, look around you. See if you can spot when you're being told a story. See if you can spot the techniques that draw you in the things that make you want to pay attention and engage. Use these ideas of people and tension and curiosity to make your engagement techniques better make your presentations more interesting and more impactful, but also spot what other techniques are out there. Are there things that storytellers and filmmakers do and use that you can pinch, that you can use to make your own work that little bit better? Learning to use storytelling isn't a one stop shop. It's an ongoing journey of finding things that you like using and are gonna work for the way you deliver stuff. Keep a lookout. Keep focused on stuff and see if you can find things, but most of all enjoy. Thinking about this way of engaging audiences can be really refreshing and really interesting. So go enjoy it. I hope to see some amazing stories from you.

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