



GSBGEN 343

Spring 2016

# The Power of Story Workbook

Jennifer Aaker  
General Atlantic Professor of Marketing



---

# Overview

**“Great stories happen to people who can tell them.” Ira Glass.**

Stories can be a powerful tool for persuasion, critical for understanding customers, working with team members and building brands. Stories help us in decision making by clarifying what is signal vs. noise. Stories are powerful tools for leaders, who often need to act as editors—shaping the stories told by employees and customers—to align everyone under a shared vision.

In this light, your personal stories—both those you share about yourself and those that others share about you—are tools of power, influence and impact. Throughout our lives, the stories we share and the contexts in which they are valuable change. This workbook aims to (a) help you identify your personal signature stories, and (b) provide a roadmap to iterate and improve those stories over the course of the class. Good luck

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1:</b> Six Word Stories (due in class on day 1) .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 2:</b> Three Personal Stories (due in class on day 2) .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 3:</b> Signature Story Draft (due in class on day 3) .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 4:</b> Signature Story Finale (due in class on day 4 for Story Off!) .....	<b>18</b>

---

# Ch 1: Six Word Stories

Many believe good stories are long, certainly longer than simply sharing data or facts. However, stories can be told in a short, six-word form (e.g., Ernest Hemingway: *For sale: baby shoes, never worn*).

Consider the following different types of six word stories (*and their humorous versions*):

## Simple description

The summer I learned work ethic.  
*Mind of its own. Damn lawnmower.*

## Evocative description

Active imagination as a small child.  
*Was beside myself; cloning machine worked.*

## Shows change

A first: finding and losing love.  
*Longed for him. Got him. Shit. (Margaret Atwood)*

## Sensational

Realizing I would die one day.  
*Tick tock tick tock tick tick. (Neal Stephenson)*

---

**Activity A:**  
**Write your own**  
**six word stories**

**Instructions.** List as many personal stories as you can (in six words or less). Go for variety. What are the stories that have defined and shaped you so far in your life—your epic fail story, the “you wouldn’t believe this” story, your hero story, etc.

*Your goal: Cultivate a personal story bank.*

**Activity B:**  
**Now with**  
**some humor**

**Instructions.** Any story can be told in another genre. For practice, rewrite each of your 6 word stories above, with a touch of humor. What is interesting or peculiar to your story? What evocative details can you highlight? How can you change the lens or dial up the drama.

*Your goal: View story through a different lens.*

---

# Ch 1: Story Banking

## Activity C: The stories others share of you

**Instructions.** Often when you ask others family/friends and colleagues to write 6 word stories about you as well, this will illuminate whether there is a gap in your perceptions and theirs.

*Your goal: Understand the stories others share about you.*

Signature stories your family/friends tell about you most often.

Signature stories your colleagues tell about you most often.

Is there a gap between the stories in your personal story bank and those that others share about you?

---

## Activity D: Future Stories

**Instructions.** Write down potential (not yet lived) stories. Where do you want to go? What do you want to achieve? Who do you want to be? Who is with you in those stories? After you write these imagined future stories, jot down any common themes or “throughlines” you found across all the stories ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Through\\_line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Through_line)), which shed insight on persistent values or traits that define you.

*Your goal: Design a story to aspire to.*

Future Stories (stories you would want to come true in the next 10-20 years)

Common themes: Are there any common themes in the stories you have written down so far?

Lastly, look over all your responses to activities A-D, and now write a 6 word story that you think might best represent you—your essence.

Now again rewrite it, with a touch of humor.

---

# Ch 2: Three Personal Stories

Now that you are warmed up, draft three possible stories (6 sentences or less) that are potential contenders for the 1 minute Commencement Speech story. They could be funny, inspirational or meaningful. View Steve Jobs Stanford Commencement Speech stories for inspiration.



Steve Jobs Commencement Speech

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLc>

Three tips when drafting your three possible stories.

First, go back to the stories you listed in Chapter 1, and the throughlines you identified as they might illuminate where you are going.

Second, consider imagining your “personal heroic journey.” How do you do that? Anticipate potential challenges in your future, as well as possible revelations and transformations. Then reverse-engineer a story that resonates with that future you imagined.

Third, share your three stories with a partner for rapid feedback based on these criterion:

- (1) Is your goal clear?
- (2) Is there a hook?
- (3) Is it authentic and compelling to the audience?
- (4) Does the audience know what to do, think or feel after the story?

After your partners feedback, you will pick one of the stories to be your Commencement Speech Story to further develop.

---

Story A Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Story B Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Story C Title: \_\_\_\_\_

---

# Ch 3: Signature Story Draft

## Activity A

**Instructions.** Now that you have picked your signature story—the one you will share for the Story Off!—here are some activities to help you write the first draft.

### Describe the Setting

Where does the story take place?

When does the story take place?

---

## Know Your Characters

Describe the protagonist (he/she is probably you!) in detail.

Describe the secondary character (if any) in detail.

---

# Ch 3: Build the Story Arc

## Activity B

**Instructions.** Now create a Story Spine (Kenn Adams), which is a tool to help create a well-constructed story with a beginning that establishes a routine, an event that breaks the routine, a middle that shows the consequences of having broken the routine, a climax that sets the resolution to the story in motion, and resolution. Specifically:

The Beginning that establishes the routine:

*Once upon a time...*

*Every day...*

The Event that breaks the routine:

*But, one day...*

The Middle that shows the consequences of having broken the routine:

*Because of that...*

*And because of that...*

The Climax that sets the resolution to the story in motion:

*Until, finally...*

The Resolution

*And, ever since then...*

---

Now with the framework provided on the left, build your story arc below:

---

# Ch 3: Storyboard

## Activity C: Storyboard

**Instructions.** Create four slides that represent key scenes of your story. If you don't like to draw, tell a visual story (e.g., take photos, paste images). Before finalizing your storyboard—remove anything that is not necessary.

1.



2.



**3.**

**4.**

---

# Ch 3: Write your Story Draft

## Activity D: Write

**Instructions.** Now write your story (est. 400 words). Although it is tempting to skip writing a title, opening, or conclusion at this state in the creative process, keep in mind that these elements anchor your story and should not be overlooked.



---

# Ch 3: Share and Listen

## Activity E: Share and Listen

**Instructions.** Listening to stories is as great as telling them. Ethnographers have a great skill for eliciting stories from people and drawing meaning from them. Practice this skill by listening to your partner's story, and then share your story with your partner. Use the below to provide feedback on the story.

Likes:

Wishes:

---

Rate the story using these scales:

	<b>Not at all</b>						<b>Very much</b>
Communicated a goal	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Grabbed their attention	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Made an emotional connection	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Inspired them to do something	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Write down:

What would you title the story?

What was the hook that drew you in?

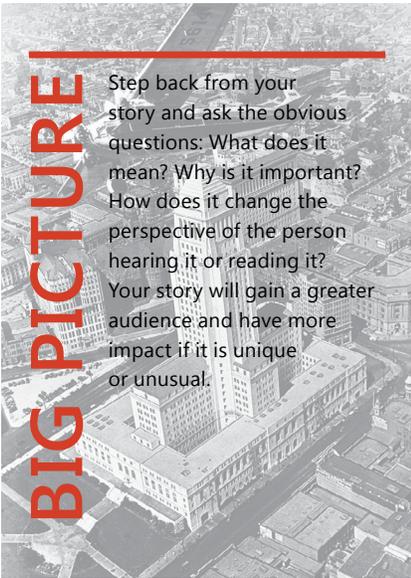
When were you most engaged?

What did they want to do (think or feel) after they heard the story?

---

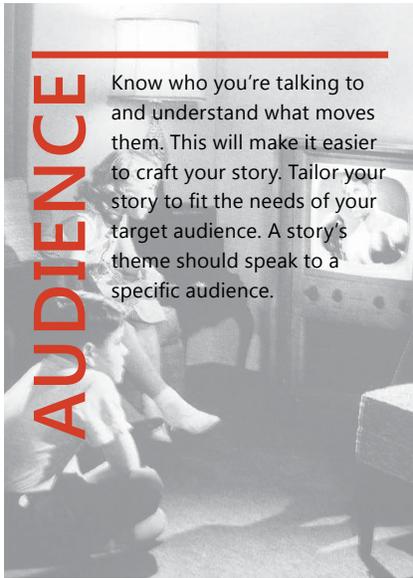
# Ch 4: Signature Story Finale for Story Off!

- (1) Tape your story, watch yourself in front a mirror or pitch to a friend or partner in class.
- (2) Add nuance, refine vocabulary, and ensure the right details are left in but the superfluous ones are eliminated. As a prompt, revisit the toolkit cards to the right.
- (3) Practice, integrate, iterate, practice more.
- (4) Submit the written version of your story (400 words) on the course website at noon day 4. During class, you will deliver your 1 minute speech (no visual aids), and vote on the most engaging, inspirational stories in groups. Big prizes for the winners of the Story Off so get ready!



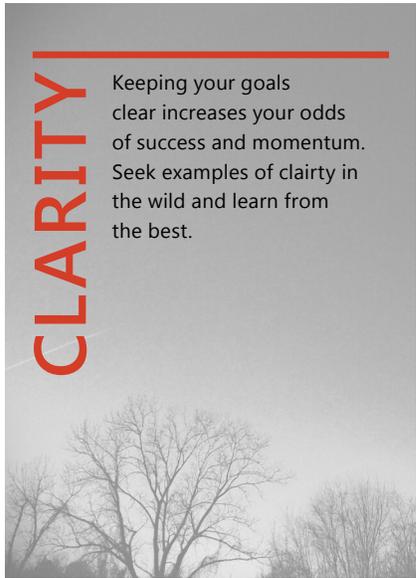
**BIG PICTURE**

Step back from your story and ask the obvious questions: What does it mean? Why is it important? How does it change the perspective of the person hearing it or reading it? Your story will gain a greater audience and have more impact if it is unique or unusual.



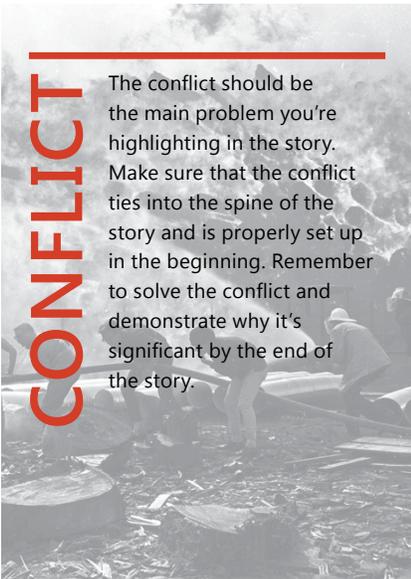
**AUDIENCE**

Know who you're talking to and understand what moves them. This will make it easier to craft your story. Tailor your story to fit the needs of your target audience. A story's theme should speak to a specific audience.



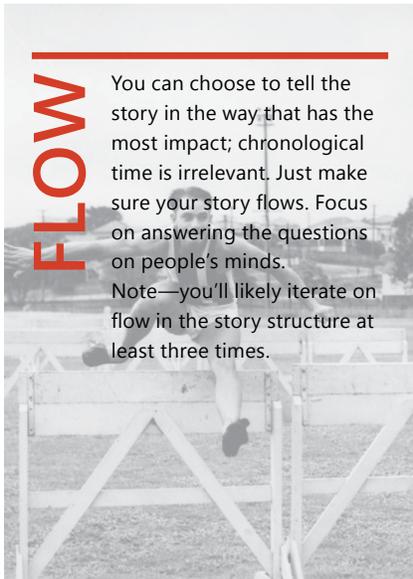
**CLARITY**

Keeping your goals clear increases your odds of success and momentum. Seek examples of clarity in the wild and learn from the best.



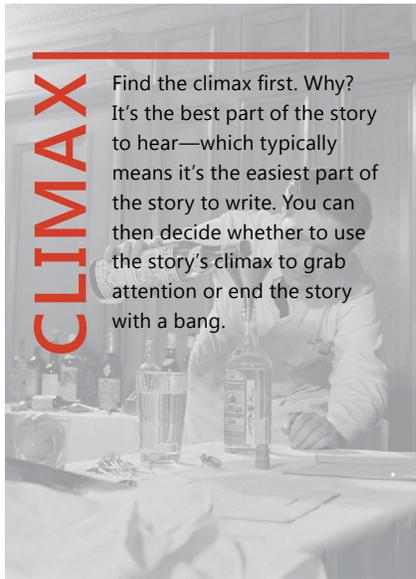
**CONFLICT**

The conflict should be the main problem you're highlighting in the story. Make sure that the conflict ties into the spine of the story and is properly set up in the beginning. Remember to solve the conflict and demonstrate why it's significant by the end of the story.



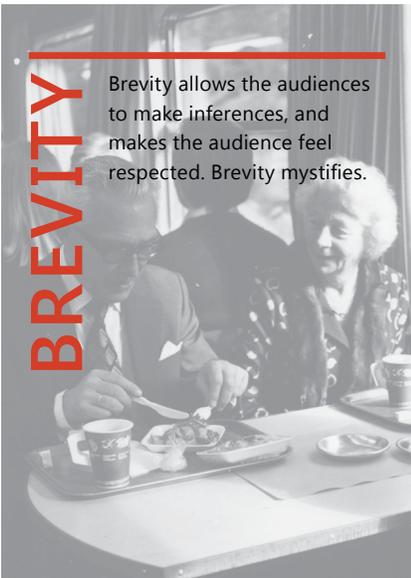
**FLOW**

You can choose to tell the story in the way that has the most impact; chronological time is irrelevant. Just make sure your story flows. Focus on answering the questions on people's minds. Note—you'll likely iterate on flow in the story structure at least three times.



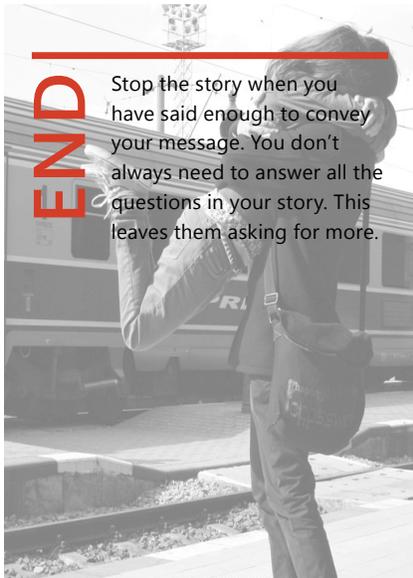
**CLIMAX**

Find the climax first. Why? It's the best part of the story to hear—which typically means it's the easiest part of the story to write. You can then decide whether to use the story's climax to grab attention or end the story with a bang.



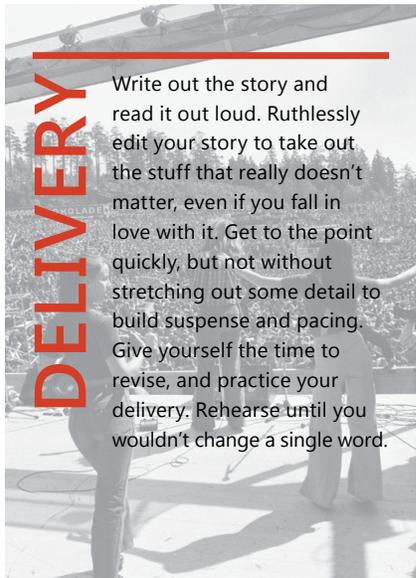
**BREVITY**

Brevity allows the audiences to make inferences, and makes the audience feel respected. Brevity mystifies.



**END**

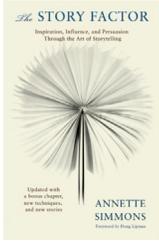
Stop the story when you have said enough to convey your message. You don't always need to answer all the questions in your story. This leaves them asking for more.



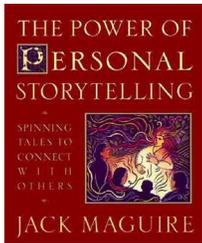
**DELIVERY**

Write out the story and read it out loud. Ruthlessly edit your story to take out the stuff that really doesn't matter, even if you fall in love with it. Get to the point quickly, but not without stretching out some detail to build suspense and pacing. Give yourself the time to revise, and practice your delivery. Rehearse until you wouldn't change a single word.

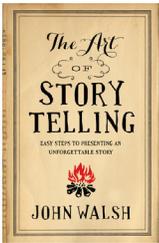
# Inspiration



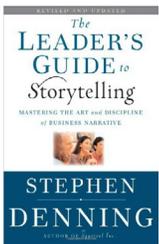
*The Story Factor*  
Annette Simmons



*The Power of Personal Storytelling*  
Jack Maguire



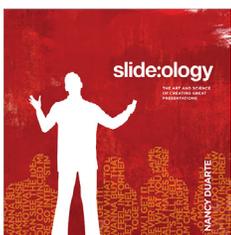
*The Art of Storytelling*  
John Walsh



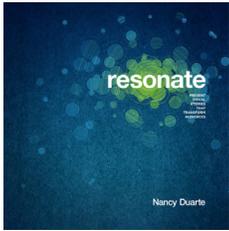
*The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*  
Stephen Denning



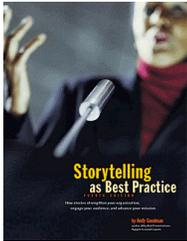
*The Dragonfly Effect*  
Jennifer Aaker & Andy Smith



*Slide:ology*  
Nancy Duarte



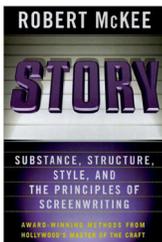
*Resonate*  
Nancy Duarte



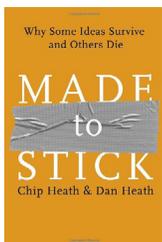
*Story Telling as Best Practice*  
Andy Goodman



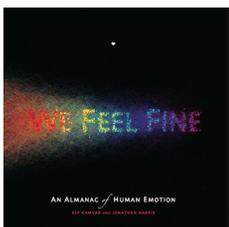
*Improving your Storytelling*  
Doug Lipman



*Story*  
Robert McKee



*Made to Stick*  
Chip & Dan Heath



*We Feel Fine*  
Jonathan Harris & Sep Kamvar

---

# Notes



