



Distilling Your Message
Project Funded by NSF EPS 1101317

Storytelling

“Storytelling is joke telling. It’s knowing your punch line...your ending...knowing that everything your saying from the first sentence to the last is leading to a singular goal, and ideally confirming some truth, that deepens our understandings of who we are as human beings”.

We all love stories. We’re born for them. Stories affirm who we are. We all want affirmations that our lives have meaning. And nothing does a great affirmation than when we connect through stories. It can cross the barriers of time, past present and future. And allow us to experience the similarities between ourselves and through others, real and imagined.

- Andrew Stanton

“People will forget what you say, they’ll forget what you do, but they won’t forget how you made them feel” - Maya Angelou

Understand the purpose of your talk

- What do you want your audience to do?
- What do you want them to feel (so they are motivated to do what you want the to do)?

Define Your Audience

Whenever possible, define the composition of your audience in advance. By knowing the needs and expectations of the audience, you can determine the key messages ahead of time. You need to answer the questions:

- What does your audience know about your topic already?
- What questions might they ask?
- What might they be interested in related to my topic?

To figure out the answers:

- Consider the Venue: Are you speaking at a middle school, science café, or community group? Reach out to the point of contact or organizer for information to ask questions about the attendees. When you schedule an interview with a reporter, ask him/her about the story and what kind of information they are looking for.
- Conduct an Internet Search: What type of events has the organization held in the past? Read or watch some stories the journalist wrote or produced to determine their expertise on the topic.
- Once There, Look Around... and Have Options
- Do a quick survey of your audience — look around or even ask for a show of hands of people already familiar with the topic. Be prepared to adapt delivery of your message to best target your audience. This is true for both speaking engagements and unexpected questions that come your way.

Structure of a Presentation

Structure - PART 1

- Why You (establish your relevance and credibility)
- What will you cover (3 main points)
- Why now (why is this topic timely?)

Structure - PART 2

- 3 Main Points
- Summarize your presentation (“Tell them what you’re going to tell them, Tell them, Tell them what you just told them” - PT Barnum)
- Create a call to action

Pay attention to how you look and sound

- Power and range of your voice (changing tones creates compelling story)
- Hand gestures:
 - When gesturing, above the waist, reach out towards the audience, elbow away from the body, engage them, not too long – 3 seconds, not tight or rapid
 - When not gesturing, hands at your side, or lightly together at navel

Distilling Your Message (notes from Alan Alda Workshop, Feb. 3rd, 2015)

Basic Tools for distilling your message

- Give us the big picture
- Tell us why it matters - SO WHAT?!
- Use everyday language
- Be visual / personal
- Evoke emotion
- Tell stories / use examples

Make us Care

- Practical reasons
- Transcendent reasons
- Because we care about you

Finding Your Story (know your personal story – what in your life happened to bring you to this point?)

- Who or what inspired you?
- What was the most thrilling moment in your life?
- What has been your biggest frustration?

Characteristics of a good story

- Personal
- Evolves (start/finish)
- Someone wants something and tries to get it
- Something hangs in the balance
- A turning point occurs
- Something has changed