



UNIT 9

Story Marketing for Small Businesses

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Define story marketing
- ✓ Recognize and use the essential tools of story marketing
- ✓ Understand the basics of good storytelling
- ✓ Examine ways to connect with their customers
- ✓ Refine their company brand for story marketing
- ✓ Discover and build their own story
- ✓ Polish their story for maximum results

Unit 9

Story Marketing formal Businesses

Which Came First: The Chicken or the Egg?

This simple question from American folklore has sparked generations of debates, jokes and mental quests for the answer – or at least the winning argument. Did the first chicken simply appear (or was created) on our planet, or did the first chicken spring from the first egg? If the latter, from where did the egg appear? And around the argument goes.

The truth could be chicken. The truth could be egg. The truth is ... chicken or egg as an answer is not the point. Both are the same thing in different forms. One form needs the other to continue their legacy. Whether all chicken-and-egg creation sprung from First Chicken or First Egg, the healthy continuation of both requires a healthy supply of both. Your chicken dinner needs eggs as its source; your omelet needs chickens as its source. End of argument.

What does this have to do with story marketing?

Quite simply, successful story marketing is based on a sharp, effective company brand. A sharp, effective company brand has at its source a clear, focused message. If story marketing is your chicken dinner, your company brand is the chicken, your message is the egg.

An impulse is to see a great story, then leap to capture that same great story for your own company. If you are fine with take-out, mass-produced storylines that reflect just enough of your company to grab the edges of your target market, then you might be able to do that. It is like a chicken dinner: if you want fast food you can get it, quickly and easily, with no work, waiting or thought. But if you want a dinner that is unique, satisfying, exactly what you want and able to attract, retain, and remind guests of your party for years to come, then you must take your time, plan your menu, use the best ingredients and expertise, and deliver an experience that connects with your guests' tastes and desires.

This course is about creating an irresistible, satisfying, fulfilling, story marketing plan that authentically shares who you are as a company and connects with customers who want what you sell or serve. But first, we need to talk about the ingredients that will lead to this ultimate chicken dinner that is story marketing:

- Finely-tuned and well-assembled details that create a beautiful experience, whether those are the driving directions, coat check, cocktails, stunning main course, clever conversation and relaxing décor of a lovely dinner party, or the well-chosen words and well-crafted structure of a good story, as we will discuss in later in this unit.
- Invitations to your guests – in this case, your customers
- Foundations of the feast, the chicken and egg
- That brings us to building the menu – your story

Before we do all of that, we need to explore two things, which we will do in this unit:

- The spark, the seed of it all: your inspiration
- Your 'pantry': ensuring you have the tools you need to share your story

Your Inspiration

What is your story idea?

In this moment, you may have several ideas for stories that you have or wish to share. Are they worth pursuing? Let's consider some ingredients.

- Is it unique, something few or no other companies can claim?
- Is it easily explained: not too lengthy or technical?
- Is it sharing something about who you are as well as what you do?

If you have no ideas at the moment, and are challenged to come up with them, we will find them. Consider these sources:

- Day-to-day operations. Your production process, your creative process. These can be of interest to someone who wonders: *how do they do that?*
- Unveiling or launch: behind the scenes
- Your company history: names or dates that can be expanded into a story
- Your suppliers or colleagues: their day-to-day operations or history Let us see how these work for you.

Your Toolkit

When you think of a well-equipped pantry for your dinner party, what things would it include? Essentials would be spices and condiments, sharp knives, utensils, pans – items that are needed for nearly every cooking project. And, what brings all of this to success is the human element – a person or people who can plan, cook, serve, clean up, and shop to stock up for the next meal.

Your story toolkit is similar. There are ingredients and people that will help tell any company story.

Some ingredients are:

- Your history: the company, the founder
- Your location: its relationship to your company and your company's relationship to the community
- Your company values
- Your company's community or charitable causes

- Your product/service specifications
- Your track record
- Your motivation: what keeps you coming to work/inventing new things/doing what your company does best?

People in your organization who can help tell your story:

- Founder/owner
- Staff who can bring an ingredient to life
- Suppliers/colleagues
- Customer testimonials

Toolbox Inventory Activity

In the worksheet below, itemize where or if these items can be found in your organization.

Toolbox Item	Available in Your Organization?	Where Might These Things/People be Found?
Ingredients		
Your history: the company, the founder		
Your location: its relationship to your company and your company's relationship to the community		
Your company values		
Your company's community or charitable causes		
Your product/service specifications		
Your track record		

Your motivation: what keeps you coming to work/inventing new things/doing what your company does best?		
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Toolbox Item	Available in Your Organization?	Where Might These Things/People be Found?
People		
Founder/owner		
Staff who can bring an ingredient to life		
Suppliers/colleagues		
Customer testimonials		
Additional Ingredients/People You Can Use in Your Toolkit		

Story telling Essentials

What exactly is a Story?

Humans have evolved over thousands of years because we know how to survive.

The central processing unit of the human body is the brain, which through its various parts and millions of inputs and outputs sends and receives signals that result in mental, physical and emotional reactions. Feeding this vast machine that is the human brain cannot be done by mere numbers or simple facts alone. The brain craves context, meaning, and emotional energy, as well as data.

Enter the story.

Stories wrap data and details in a sensory package that provides energy and meaning. A well-told story delivers both information and sensation that moves the recipient to action. They may cry at the movie or at the end of the book. They may pick up the phone and call their city councillor. Or they may buy your product.

That is what story marketing does: it harnesses the power of storytelling, blending it with the expert messaging of your company and intent of your marketing plan, and delivering to the customer an experience that will attract their attention and encourage them to follow your call to action. It is the documentary that educates while entertaining, the song that lifts our mood while lyrics rewritten to match its tune help us memorize facts for a biology test. It is the story that speaks to your customer and encourages them to support your brand, campaign, or cause.

Ingredients of a Good Story

Early stories were essential to human survival by what they told us.

The story was simple. Fire hot, do not touch. Fire hot, good for warmth. We like warmth. We need warmth to survive cold night. Fire hot, good for cooking. Cooked food tastes good. Better than raw food. Big animal, danger. Hide. Little animal, food. Kill.

As our brains and societies evolved, stories became more complex and more versatile. Stories shared knowledge, increased wealth, secured political power and revolutionized economies. Stories entertained, changed attitudes, awakened passions, and recorded history. Stories took humans to the moon and to the depths of their souls. Stories continue to do all of these things, in an increasing variety of ways — through print, audio, video, social media, visual art, and music, to name a few — as we continue our evolution.

And every story then and now has the same basic three ingredients. Let us revisit the chicken dinner from above.

A chicken dinner, whether premade or gourmet, regardless of ethnic origin, contains the same basic ingredients:

1. Chicken
2. Starch: potatoes, rice, or noodles
3. Vegetables: a wide variety of colors, textures and tastes

These may be served separately on the plate or mixed together in a bowl or pie, plain or with sauce, sweet or spicy. The combinations, embellishments and additions are endless, but the three key ingredient groups remain the same.

This is true of stories as well. Whether the story is fact or fiction, novel or movie script, entertainment feature or corporate marketing tool, the same key ingredient groups remain the same. They are:

1. A hero
2. A challenge
3. A satisfying resolution

Stories can be as simple as words and pictures for beginning readers, or highly complex with multiple supporting characters and storylines, epic adventures and intricate detail. Man.

Cold. Fire. Harry Potter, with his innate talent and power of friendship, survives seven harrowing years of school with more characters, creatures and threats than we can count and saves the world from the greatest evil of its time. Yet at the core, these three simple ingredients remain.

1. **A hero** – the main character who drives the storyline and the audience response.
 - ✓ In the first story, Man. In the second, Harry Potter, boy wizard.
2. **A challenge** – something or someone the hero must defeat, defy or overcome.
 - ✓ In the first story, cold. In the second story – enemies, weapons, and fear itself.
3. **A satisfying resolution** – gaining their heart's desire, earning the prize they seek fulfilling their mission to rescue, save or create the world.
 - ✓ In the first story, discovery of fire as a source of warmth. In the second, defeat of the evil wizard.

Identifying a Hero, Challenge, and Resolution

Take the time now to revisit your story ideas from your Pre-Assignment. Select one of your ideas and identify the hero, the challenge and the resolution:

Story Idea:

Hero:

Challenge:

Resolution:

Story for your Brand

As discussed, all stories have the same three ingredients.

But to revisit the chicken dinner theme, Kung Pow Chicken and chicken shawarma, while offering the same basic food groups, have many variations between them and appeal to different tastes.

The same is true for stories.

The story you will create for your story marketing campaign needs to attract the attention of your audience, while engaging them in your message and call to action. The multi-billion dollar movie industry in North America, a powerful source of stories for more than a century, uses stunning vistas, actors with images larger than life, special effects, and millions of dollars in advance promotions and screenings to draw in audiences and impress them in their seats. However, rather than computer generated graphics or big-name celebrities to attract attention, you need to think in more simple terms.

The most successful story marketing campaigns are based upon stories that turn the complex into simple concepts and make clear the connections between a purchase and the good life.

Park Howell shared an example of a client who used a hockey stick to relate to his documentary on global warming.

Hockey stick. Global warming.

What were the steps in connecting these two items that have no apparent connection?

1. The audience knew or cared nothing about global warming but loved hockey.
2. The data graph showing the increase in environmental degradation caused by global warming looked like a hockey stick, fairly level at first, then rising at an alarming rate, like the blade of a hockey stick and the shaft, leading to the butt end.
3. The documentary was then introduced as a means to learn more about global warming and how to develop a plan to address it, forging a safety zone in an arena of rapid change.
4. The love of hockey leads to an immediate appreciation of the problem and then to a means of resolution.

Here we have a story within a story. In the first:

- **Hero:** Hockey lover
- **Challenge:** Lack of awareness and appreciation of global warming
- **Resolution:** Learns valuable information to choose positive actions

In the next:

- **Hero:** Documentary filmmaker
- **Challenge:** Gaining viewership from a person with no appreciation for the topic
- **Resolution:** Finding a way to bridge the gap and win support

As marketers, and as company stakeholders, you are always seeking to bridge the gap with clients and win their support. As story marketers, you will be crafting your company story in a way to bridge that gap to a specific destination. Brand awareness, sales, product download, charitable support – you choose the result, and craft a story to match.

Setting Goals

Take the time now to revisit your goals for story marketing.

Are there any other goals you can think of now?

Now look at the story idea you identified earlier. What could the goal be?

Does this change the identity of the hero, challenge and resolution?

The Truth Test

In this era of pressurized marketing and fake news, customers have little patience for companies or sources that play on their emotions with false information. Story marketing is powerful and effective with the ingredients described, but always when it is authentic. If your product or service is worth buying and your company is worth supporting, your story marketing can engage your audience without tricks, gimmicks, or untruths.

A good story can be selective in its facts, can include embellishments or enthusiastic descriptions, or position the positive spin ahead of the negative. These are effective and often necessary storytelling tools to allow the message of the story to shine through.

However, anything that a reader can determine to be a deception of the truth or an outright lie will destroy your credibility along with any goodwill that may have been held for your company or brand. Deception breaks the bond of trust between your client and your company. As in any relationship, trust can sometimes be rebuilt but often remains broken or forever tentative. It is a far better investment of time and resources to build upon the truth of your story rather than try to hide or avoid it.

Positive vs. Negative

What is an example you have seen of a “negative” story? This could be a story that criticizes the competition or uses fear tactics to scare a client into action.

How could this story be made positive without deception or lies?

Which story seems more effective to you? Why?

Connecting with Customers

The customer: It is about them.

For years, business owners have claimed to know this. Customers are the reason businesses exist, survive, grow, and thrive. Customers buy products, defend against competitors, boost profits and bring in new business through the powerful word-of-mouth endorsement. Yet for years, businesses that claimed to know ‘the customer is always right’ followed the exact opposite philosophy in their marketing. Messages were all about product or price point or company values. The customer was evident only in the implied message that they would be lucky to have this product/service/opportunity.

So much for it being about them.

In fact, story marketing is about all of you: your company and your customers. As in any story, the plot unfolds and interest builds through the existence and actions of characters. Good stories come from the talent and hard work of authors that take the time to get to know their characters and cleverly introduce them to their readers.

In the beginning of this unit, we planted the seeds for your company story. We spent time getting to know your company better and learning about the other characters in your story.

Now it is time to connect your story to the ‘reader’. It is time to learn more about your customers, because in your story, your customer, not your company or your message, is the focus.

The customer is the hero.

Story marketing engages your customers — not by luring them in and feeding them information — but by inviting them in to make the story theirs, so they can feed themselves. Since our brains are wired for survival and success, a story that feeds customers will be clear and quick to show how your offer will help them do either, or both. Our brains decide in seconds whether to stay or run; tune in or ignore; accept or reject. Your story has seconds to impart the desire to stay, tune in, and accept. Once those choices have been made, you have time to more fully engage your customer in the role

of hero. Why?

An empowered customer is an active customer, able and willing to respond to your call to action. And what hero will walk away from his or her own story?

A story that engages and empowers a customer needs to answer the standard hero questions we all ask when watching or reading a narrative:

- What does our hero want?
- What does our hero need to succeed?
- What obstacles or challenges must our hero overcome?
- Where and how does the hero get the help and tools needed?
- What will success look like?

Let's test this theory on the marketing of a precooked frozen chicken dinner.

What does our hero want?

Food is an obvious answer. But look deeper. How about quick, affordable, nutritious meal solutions for busy parents?

What does our hero need to succeed?

The ability to offer a hot, nourishing meal to the family after a long, busy day at the office.

What obstacles or challenges must our hero overcome?

Time away from home. Energy spent at work with little left over at the end of the day to cook a large meal. Expense of good quality options. Empty calories and chemicals of readily available takeaway food.

Where and how does the hero get the help and tools needed? The freezer aisle of any supermarket, in a package with your brand.

What will success look like?

To you, it looks like increased sales. To our hero, it looks like the family enjoying a tasty, satisfying meal at home, with time and money to spare.

So, your story?

Your hero is the mom who has earned a promotion at work, but who still has time to enjoy dinner with the family, thanks to your frozen dinners.

It could be the farmer who grows vegetables used in your dinners, and then enjoys one of the meals because after all, it takes a lot of time to help make dinner for a million people.

To tell this story well, and in a way that makes the rest of us interested, these heroes need to be believable. They need to appeal to our sympathy. We need to become their fans, to cheer on their success, to feel concern at their problems and joy at their triumphs. To create a story with these simple yet engaging details, you need to know your heroes inside and out.

You need to know your customers.

Understanding your Customers

Most companies do not have the option of meeting each individual customer personally. There are a number of ways, however, your company can get acquainted with your ideal customer, such as through engagement of customers with your company, customer support calls, web visits and social media. What are they sharing and liking, and who are they friending and following? Metrics from your own social media platforms can yield this data. Also, surfing through the abundance of public information can yield some clues. Consider these specifics:

- What information sources are they surfing or connecting with?
- What questions are they asking?
- What captures their attention: news clips, contests, random draws, or gifts? Then seek to answer:
- What makes them happy
- What they fear
- What solutions they need
- What could attract them to your product or service

Brainstorming

Brainstorm information on existing and prospective clients. Who are these customers, what do they need for information, and how do they want it?

Customer/Prospective Client	What do they need for information?	How do they want it?

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Refining your Brand

Get your story straight.

This is a life hack that speaks to the strength of your story marketing campaign. Remember the chicken and egg?

Story marketing begins with a clear message.

A clear message leads to a strong brand.

A strong brand leads to an authentic story.

An authentic story leads to an understanding of your company, its values, and its offerings.

Understanding leads to loyalty.

Loyalty leads to conversion and retention of customers.

Paying customers that keep coming back and share the news of their positive experience: there is your happy ending.

In this unit we will refine (or create) your company message, build your company brand, and ensure your foundation is secure for the story and campaign to follow.

Understanding your Company

We were introduced to your customers — the hero of your story.

Now, we cast your company, not in the role of hero — we already have one, and definitely not in the role of villain. Where do you fit?

You are the guide, the Yoda of your commercial sector, the kindly coach, the teacher who makes a difference, the wise and caring parent — you see these characters in every type of story. In story marketing, your company is the guide. As with creating a story around the hero, you need to know your capacity and intentions as guide to create a believable and effective story.

How well do you know your company? Consider:

- The product or service you currently offer
- How willing are you to adapt what you make or do to meet an emerging need?
- Targets for customers, sales, interactions
- System requirements

- Production capacity
- Skill sets – does your existing team have all the skills required, or do you need to hire/contract additional staff

Story marketing is inviting your customers into an intimate relationship that will ultimately blend their story with yours. As with any relationship, you need to be clear as a company about who you are and what you want in order to attract and retain sustainable customers.

Inventory of Key Company Facts

Consider the previous list and itemize details for your company. If you have any other details you can add to the list put them in the space provided. Are there any information gaps that you need to fill?

Item	Information Gaps You Need to Fill
The product or service you currently offer	
How willing are you to adapt what you make or do to meet an emerging need?	
Targets for customers, sales, interactions	
System requirements	
Production capacity	
Skill sets – does your existing team have all the skills required, or do you need to hire/contract additional staff	

Identifying your Message

We have discussed getting to know your customers – the hero of the story – by learning what they want and need. We have discussed your role as guide.

Your company message needs to connect what you offer with what they need —quickly and clearly — for two reasons:

- The human brain needs information that is easily digested.
- With so many choices on the information table, it is easy to skip over certain offerings. You do not want that skipped dish to be yours.

Your company message needs to address those hero essentials:

- What customers need and want
- What problems they have that you can solve
- What life will be like after they work with your company to solve their problem
- But it needs to do it even more simply, appealing to the primitive part of the brain that needs quick, simple messages. How does your offering help the hero survive, succeed, or gain a better life?

Marketing messages can be filled with product specs, scientific reports, and reasons to choose your product over the competition. But busy heroes have no time for dimensions, caloric content or nutritional value lists. They have a new baby, their older home is chilly, and they need a solution they can afford and use, now. Your infrared space heater becomes their choice, not because of its thermal output or kilowatt rating, but because your company message – From Our Home To Yours – with an image of your family cozy in your living room, causes them to pause on your website and browse your products. They read about how the winter drafts in your ancestral home triggered asthma attacks in your youngest child, causing your company to branch out from heating oil delivery to space

heater sales. They see not a picture of a heater, but of your youngest child today, cheeks glowing as he plays baseball in your yard. The heroes keep reading as they relate to the need to provide a safe and healthy home for their children. Then, they search space heater specifics: sizes, prices, features.

You need to answer their questions, not questions you think they should have. But the message also needs to be short and sweet, a catchy phrase or a sentence. Not sure where to start?

Think about this: What do you do better than anyone else? What makes your company unique?

Consider the example of a painting company, whose owner sought the help of story marketer Donald Miller to help create a single message for his diverse offerings. His company did everything from fine art projects to industrial spray painting. Miller's solution? An image of a painter at work with the message: *We paint all kinds of s---*. Get a quote.

Keywords

Revisit your customer activities from the start of this unit. List two or three keywords each for:

Their want or need:

Their challenge:

The tool that can help them survive, succeed, or get a better life:

Now, list two or three keywords each about:

What you offer:

How it will improve life:

Where and how to buy it:

Now, examine your list of keywords and brainstorm a new message for your company (or refine the message you are currently using).

Strengthening your Brand

Now you can use your refined message to build or refine your brand.

Consider your primary brand ingredients. These can include:

- Tagline
- Logo
- Color scheme
- Physical storefront
- Virtual storefront, including website and social media

These branding tools share your message in a variety of ways, through visuals, words, interactions and connected meanings.

Taking Stock

Complete an inventory of items used to share your company brand. Use the previous list and add to it as needed:

Using the new message created in the previous exercise, examine your list. What are some things you can do to strengthen the connection between your message and brand?

Building your Story

Show and Tell

“Don’t tell me it works, but talk to me.”

- Melanie Dezial, Mdezial Media

Show, do not tell, is a classic rule that elevates an interesting idea to an engaging story.

“He was really, really scared because the house was very dark.”

That **tells** us something.

“His hand trembled as he felt along the wall, fearing that the blackness that suddenly swallowed his world would consume him as well.”

That **shows** us someone scared and in the dark, but places us there as well.

The story you create for your story marketing campaign uses this same classic rule.

For example, in selling your chicken dinner, you can:

Tell us to buy it, with an advertisement giving price, size and where to get it.

Or

You can **show** us how good it is, by describing its tasty goodness, rich ingredients, and savory warmth.

Which do you think encourages customers to learn more? Which do you think motivates them to buy your dinner, especially if you reach them near mealtime?

Remembering that the hero of your story marketing narrative is the customer, **showing** rather than **telling** places the customer firmly in the role of making decisions and saving the day, or at least saving mealtime. Showing — rather than telling — gives our hero customer the tools and means needed to overcome their challenges and make life better.

And it all happens in the matter of minutes, even seconds, of a well-crafted story.

Remember:

“Companies sell solutions to external problems. Customers buy solutions to internal problems”

-Donald Miller

Parts of your Story

To recap, your story needs:

- Characters – a hero and a guide to help in the quest
- Challenge – an obstacle, problem or mystery
- Plan – to overcome the obstacle, solve the problem or mystery, and avoid defeat
- Success – to complete the mission, get the prize, advance in the quest for a better life

We have discussed the hero of your story – your customers – and their guide – your company.

What about the villain?

The villain is the challenge personified. Even if the challenge is a thing, turning it into a villain will make the story more engaging.

Every good story needs a villain, and the better the villain, the more invested the audience becomes in the outcome. A villain that is so effective that it is detested by everyone, moves the audience to watch to the very end, hoping for its demise. The villain makes the hero look good and makes the success that much sweeter.

The villain of your story could be:

A person:

- The teacher who told you in elementary school that you would never graduate
- The neighbor who lets his dog dig up your garden
- The driver who stole your parking spot
- You – the part of yourself that is afraid, angry, shy or confused and keeps you from doing or being what you want

A thing you can see:

- Stains on your favorite shirt:
- Pollution of your favorite beach:
- Busy family schedules
- Household dirt
- Baked-on food
- Unpaid bills
- Gridlock traffic
- Dry skin

A state of being:

- Personal debt
- Unfulfilling job
- Lost on vacation
- Unsafe neighborhood

Heroes and Villains

In the spaces provided below, list the hero, villain, and challenge for your own story marketing idea.

The Hero:

The Villain:

The Challenge:

Plan for Success

The villain is the challenge. The audience is rooting for the hero.

What is the plan to vanquish the villain?

For example:

A person:

- The teacher who told you in elementary school that you would never graduate:
 - your home self-tutoring program
- The neighbor who lets his dog dig up your garden:
 - your line of fencing
- The driver who stole your parking spot:
 - a shiny new car, faster than his
- You – the part of yourself that is afraid, angry, shy or confused and keeps you from doing or being what you want:
 - Gym membership, new clothes, tropical vacation, whatever connects the hero with the strength to overcome the villain

A Thing:

- Stains on your favorite shirt:
 - Your ultra gentle, tough-on-dirt detergent
- Pollution of your favorite beach:
 - Your biodegradable drinking straws
- Busy family schedules
 - Your app for coordinating family calendars

Which leads us to the final stage: **Success**.

To end our story with success, you need to know what success will look like for your hero.

In the case of the hero taking on herself, what would success look like for her: physical appearance, acquisition of goods, social status? Or the busy dad trying to remember his children's dance and soccer schedules: a smoothly coordinated day with the touch of a button? To know this is to know whether success will be a rippling new muscled body or children arriving on time to their lessons, which will make them stars in a few years.

So, consider the evolution of the story with this example:

Your product:

- SnapApp, a smart phone app that coordinates family calendars, sends push notifications of upcoming events, and gives stars for every event successfully completed.

Your message:

- Buy our app. It is good for you.

Your story:

Two parents and three children are racing around kitchen, filling lunch bags, waving permission forms, packing soccer cleats and ballet shoes. One parent hands the car keys to the other, and says: "You are driving today, I have a meeting after work."

Flash to the office, where the parent's phone dings, and a Smart App reminders appears. He grabs his keys, dodges traffic, picks up the kids, and delivers them to their activities.

Stars flash on the screen, morphing into stars in the parents' eyes, seeing children accept their Academy Awards.

SnapApp. Letting parents be the heroes in supporting their kids and their dreams. This simple formula can apply to any story with any theme. From here, it is up to you.

Your Story Board

Use this worksheet as a guide to outline your story.

Hero			
Who	Traits	Motivation	Desires
Guide			
Who	Product/Service	Advantages	Availability
Villain/Challenge			
Who/What	Traits	Problems	Powers
Plan			
Tools	Solutions	Benefits	Success

Writing your Story

Your outline is the first step.

Now, you craft your story.

Your story will need:

- A Beginning
- A Middle
- An End

The Beginning introduces the characters and the scene.

- Busy family in the kitchen.
- Child and her dog in the yard.
- Woman staring at a bicycle in the garage.

The Middle introduces the conflict and the guide.

- Too many calendars to coordinate, app for the phone
- Lonely, Girl Scouts (or other children's organization)
- Feels out of shape, gym for women

The End shows the resolution.

- Happy parent dreams of kids 'success
- Happy girl and dog participating in activities with other children
- Happy woman riding her bike with her family

The story is weaving details around those basic facts, making it interesting and clear for the rest of us.

Getting Started

Each individual has a unique creative process. What is yours?

There is no right or wrong way to create: there is the right way for **you** to create.

Options include:

- Key words. For example:
 - Beginning: Busy Family
 - Middle: Calendars
 - End: Stars and dreams
- Point form. This lists the key concepts as we have done.
- Writing a script. Imagine your story appearing on screen. Write down what you see.
- Running narrative. “This happened, then this happened, then this happened ...”

Once you have your key words, phrases or narrative, then work to piece ideas together, using words to illustrate the images and fill in gaps of understanding. Some gaps or questions that may arise:

- How does the app get on the phone?
- How does the woman learn about the gym?

A rough draft should give a clear sense of the story message, characters and their motivation.

Rough Draft

Using your chart from the previous activity and the guidelines outlined, craft a rough draft of your story in the space below.

- Pearl S. Buck, *Dragon Seed*

We are not, and may not even want to be, Pulitzer Prize winners such as American author Pearl S. Buck.

But we have much to learn from fiction and non-fiction writers when it comes to polishing a rough draft.

Some general rules:

- All drafts benefit from polishing
- All drafts need editing
- The process is never-ending; the finish line is set by deadline, desire, and purpose of the story

If the goal was indeed to win the Pulitzer Prize, one of the most prestigious prizes in American Literature, the editing process would be different and more extensive than the process applied to a draft being used in your story marketing campaign.

That said, giving time and energy to the polishing process will increase your return on investment and your chances of success with the harshest critic of all: your audience.

Color Commentary

There are two uses of color:

1. Literal, as in specific colors adding description and detail to people, scenery, or things.

As noted in the quote from Buck's novel, color elevates a plain summer day to one of blue, silver, and green.

Colors are powerful connector to memory and emotions. We have favorite colors, and those we dislike.

Your company logo has specific colors: you selected them to share your message and connect with your customers. Your story colors can do the same thing, whether it is the color of the kitchen walls or the color of the hero's sweater.

Some common color associations:

- Red can be active, fiery or angry
- Blue can be tranquil
- Grey can be calming and nondescript, allowing focus to shift or attention to drift

Consider what colors mean for you, and what they may mean for your audience. Incorporate your company color(s), if it can be done without being awkward or obvious.

2. Commentary, as in vivid descriptions that create images in the mind of the reader.

Color commentary is used by sportscasters, even those in video broadcast, because it adds a level of details not immediately seen through camera coverage of action on the field. Color commentary is especially important in audio broadcasts, as the only source of imaging available to the listener. In Buck's quote, the use of blue, silver and green are elevated by the detail linked to them: *hot and quiet day, piles of clouds, mountains*.

What makes a good color commentary?

The sentences flow, one to another. Each sentence adds an element to the image: a more detailed picture, a feeling, a sense of connection to the hero, the challenge or the guide. Allow your thoughts to connect to sentences and the sentences to connect to each other, in a path leading from your hero's problem to the resolution.

Adding Color

Take the time now to look at your rough draft and try adding some color words and commentary.

Notes/Ideas:

The Editing Process

Strengthening a relationship — personal or professional — with long-time clients or those new to your company, includes the following general steps:

- Building trust
- Determining needs
- Presenting
- Confirming

These general steps are also reflected in the editing process.

Editing is often considered a chore, and too often overlooked in the rush to print or send.

But a story full of misspelled words, confusing sentences, weak characters and an unresolved plot line does the opposite of the list above. A poorly edited or unedited story can weaken trust in your brand, leave your needs unfulfilled, or badly showcase your product, leaving potential customers unconvinced of anything other than it is time to scroll to another product placement.

Returning to the theme of our chicken dinner, poor editing leaves a bad taste in customers' mouths. So time spent in editing will ensure the investment you have made to date will, like your story, be strengthened and successful.

We can consider the editing in three courses:

Appetizer:

- Check spelling
- Check punctuation
- Check word usage: remove repeats, include strong verbs, add more color
- Check accuracy of any quotes or statistics

Main course:

- Strong introduction to engage your audience immediately in your scene, characters, and what will happen next
- Flow of your story: does it connect from one idea to the next, along the path from challenge to resolution
- Clear call to action at the end

Dessert:

- 'Tighten' sentences to read more clearly: remove unnecessary or weak words
- Reflow larger paragraphs into smaller paragraphs
- Consider if a series of single sentences should be grouped into paragraph
- Ensure a 'rhythm' to your story with sentences of varying length

Resources for Editing:

- [Oxforddictionaries.com](https://www.oxforddictionaries.com)
- [Grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com)
- [chicagomanualofstyle.org](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org)
- [editorsforum.org](https://www.editorsforum.org)

Editing Checks

Now, it is time to put your rough draft through the editing checklist. Apply each of the steps in the editing process to your story to see where you can strengthen it and make it more successful.

Peer Review

This is your test audience, your focus group.

This is the place to try out your new creation, see what works, learn what needs more work, and make the adaptations before 'going live.'

Observe your audience for:

- Emotional reactions
 - Do they listen attentively? Are they engaged in the story?
 - Do they laugh where you inserted humor? Or where you did not? Or, do they not laugh at all?
- Retention of information
 - Do they seem enthusiastic about your message at the end?
 - Do they seem confused?

Based on your observations, ask specific questions to determine the source of the problem and possible remedies:

- Who was their favorite character? Why?
- Why did they laugh in that spot?
- Where were they confused?
- Would they act on the call to action? Why or why not?
- Would you share this story? With whom?

Further Reading:

- ✓ Donald Miller, *Building a Story Brand*, HarperCollins Leadership, 2017.
- ✓ Robert McKee and Tom Gerace, *Storynomics*, Twelve, 2018.
- ✓ Jeff Rosenblum, *Friction: Passion Brands in the Age of Disruption*, PowerHouse, 2018. Ryan Levesque, *Ask*, Dunham, 2018.
- ✓ Gregory Diehl, *Brand Identity Breakthrough*, Audible Audiobook, 2020.