

Speaking about your research in the form of a story can be a helpful way of connecting your message to a range of listeners and readers. This template can help you in that process.

Begin with audience

Your story is only effective if it is relevant to the people that will read or hear it. While you might not know your audience exactly, you can consider the demographics of the people that might engage with this publication or attend this type of presentation or lecture. **If you can be specific, do.** If you can't, think broadly and let those answers help you shape your story.

WHO IS MY AUDIENCE?

WHY DO THEY CARE ABOUT THIS TOPIC?

In the most evocative single sentence, what is this story about? **Example:** This is a story about cancer treatment that is as unique as the patient.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

This is a story about ...

It is possible that in defining what the story is about, you have also defined your research question or the climax of the story. In our example, you can imagine that the arc of the story begins with cancer treatment that at one time wasn't individualized, a research question that asks – can we make treatment better? – a number of twists and turns in that adventure – and a climax in which a study of patients in a clinical trial have had significantly different results in their treatment. The world is potentially “happily ever after” as a result of this process. Again – look at the arc. **What did it used to be? What changed?** Above all – don't forget the importance of people and emotion. Emotion in story is not about “dumbing it down” or watering down the science. It is about helping your audience grapple with the importance and remember your message. Getting to this climax involved sleepless nights and one or two celebrations. **Don't leave yourself or your team out of this story. Let's begin.**

THE BEGINNING defines what used to be – the status quo that your research question disrupts. Set the stage for your audience. Begin with a prompt like: “At one time...” or “Currently...”

RESEARCH QUESTION: In story, this is the inciting incident, or the event that lifts us away from the status quo. Remember – this is where you begin to include **WHY** you or your team care. Consider beginning with the prompt: We wondered if/we hoped that/we were curious about...

TWISTS/TURNS/UNEXPECTED FINDINGS. Nothing about your work was easy. Consider **WHY** your audience cares about this issue. Let their interests help you determine what to include and exclude. Not everything is interesting – find the most surprising element that led you forward or backward in this work. Consider using any of these prompts: We were surprised to find that/we didn't expect/we were frustrated when...

CLIMAX. All of the twists, turns and unexpected findings led you to one significant moment. You either succeeded or failed in answering your research question. Don't be afraid to describe that moment in vivid detail. You can edit later – but for now, describe the moment of success or failure evocatively. Consider using the prompt: After all of this, we suddenly realized...

ENDING. Remember the beginning and the climax. The world changed as a result of this journey. The change meant something to you and your team. You either found what you were looking for – or you didn't and are now challenged to find a new research question. The ending matters. Make it clear, interesting and evocative. Consider using these prompts: What we hope/Now we believe/We have an opportunity now to...

Depending on the length of your story, you might need to add space to some of these fields. Use these prompts as a guide and once finished, share your story with someone outside of your field. Listen to their reactions and edit based on their curiosity. Enjoy!