

Transcript - what makes a compelling story?

Hey there, I'm Lisa from Radio Adelaide and this video is here to help you understand what makes a compelling story. We all have stories within us that we love to tell, that we know off by heart and maybe we like to tell people around us; maybe we tell them at family parties and that kind of thing or maybe we have stories that we haven't told anyone before, that we haven't uttered in the presence of others. There are a few key elements to be able to communicate stories to a wider audience – to entertain, to inspire, to challenge – and these key elements are what we're going to be discussing in this video.

One of the key elements for a really great story is a story with a strong purpose. So, it asks important questions, maybe there are some important lessons to learn from hearing this story. You also want to think about how people feel when they're listening to this story. If you feel like your story doesn't have a great, strong sense of purpose, keep workshopping it, don't, don't give up, but perhaps if you're not feeling like it has a strong sense of purpose yet, put it on the backburner, keep working at it and maybe find another story to tell.

In all good stories there's some conflict and there's some interest so this conflict is what sparks interest in listeners, it's what makes us want to keep reading or keep listening to a story, and this conflict can perhaps be an internal struggle for a character or maybe the conflict is from external forces that are beyond one's control. Whatever the case, you really want these threads of conflict to be resolved by the end of the story, because otherwise, the story can be quite unsatisfying, you want to make sure listeners are coming away feeling like they have come along on a really great journey with you.

Every story needs a really strong start to hook its audience otherwise you'll be going along for the train journey and you'll find they're not with you, they're not listening, maybe they've tuned out. So, a really important element to consider is perhaps jumping straight into the action, into the drama, starting where the drama starts in your story. Thinking about how you can restructure it to make it really interesting and engaging. The start is also where some of the major questions are first laid out so an example might be: 'I sat in the dark room, with the glare of my computer. Beads of sweat trickled down my temple. And I knew the moment I was going to send that email, my life would change forever'. So, there are a few questions that come out of that, it's like, 'Why are you nervous?', 'Why are there beads of sweat?', but also, 'what's in that email?', 'What have you written?' and 'who are you sending that email to?'. You want there to be that sense of drama. And also, the question: 'why did your life change?', 'why was this such a pivotal moment in your life?'. And again, by telling the story, answering these questions throughout you'll have a really satisfying resolution for the listener.

And this is where a really strong ending is really important. Again, by the end of it, you want all of those important questions that you asked in the beginning and throughout the story to have been answered so make sure you think about the resolution and how to make it nice and strong.



We as humans love a long yarn and I think when we're telling our own stories it can be really tempting to include all of the details that we can to try and convey a message in the story. But for this kind of medium – for a live audience, for radio, for podcast – try to stick to the details that the story cannot exist without. That are meaningless without these details. And maybe think about those details that, hey, if we cut them, the story would still survive, we wouldn't miss them too much.

So, take the example of the fairy tale, Cinderella. Think about those story beats, those crucial moments in the story, that the story just can't survive without. So, the evil step sisters, the fairy godmother, the ball, the glass slippers, all of those elements are really crucial to the storytelling, and you can drop in as much detail or as little detail as you like. You can tell a two-minute version of that story and still have all of the twists and turns, or you can tell an hour and a half long story. Either way listeners are going to come away from hearing that story feeling really satisfied.

An unexpected change in direction or a surprise twist in the story is something that can take it from one level to the next and it's something that we as listeners, as readers, as media consumers we absolutely love. Perhaps think about those stories that you remember simply because those twists were so amazing and if your story has a major twist – amazing! If it doesn't, perhaps think about those details that usually in the telling of that story you may bury, that maybe they're a little bit more hidden and how can you play on that, how can you bring them to the fore, and perhaps make them even a little bit more remarkable than what you perhaps thought they were.

And finally if you need any further inspiration for your story, just think about the best yarns you've ever heard. What made them inspiring? Heartfelt? What was the conflict in them? What was the drama? You know, what were the opening questions in the beginning of the story and how were they resolved by the end. And maybe even think about, what were the details that were dropped along the way throughout, that only had meaning and clarity in the story's final chapter? Then go away, write them down, sequence them out and then think about your story – how can you use similar elements to elevate your story and take it to the next level?

Thanks for watching and if you need any further information, head to the Adelaide City Libraries website!

