BCST 1121 – Discovering Your Inner Storyteller

**Module 1** – **Introduction to Storytelling**

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New page: M1-1 Name: Introduction

(h1) Introduction to Storytelling

Storytelling has become the buzzword of the Internet age. It seems that everyone is calling themselves a storyteller, from those working in radio, television, and advertising all the way to those in corporate boardrooms. But what exactly is storytelling? And how can it be used more effectively in your life and career?

In this course, we’ll identify how to use a story not only to entertain, but also to sell and change opinions. Storytelling is a powerful tool that is built into our DNA as a way to communicate with the world around us.

In our first week, we’ll kick things off by examining what *you* think effective storytelling means.

Insert activity icon

1. Twitter has created its own brand of storytelling by only allowing 140 characters per “tweet,” so brevity is key. (But, as we’ll learn in this class, it always is!) Chances are you already have a Twitter account, but if you don’t, go ahead and create one at www.twitter.com.

Insert twitterlogo.png to the right of bullet 2.

1. Tweet your ideas about storytelling: When is it most effective? What makes a good story? How has good storytelling affected you? Tweet as many times as you like. You can even include an Internet link to an example of effective storytelling (anything from a news report, a TV commercial, or even a YouTube video featuring a man talking about his cat). And don’t forget to include a “hashtag”(#) with your tweet (such as #storytelling). This is how we all keep up with topics that interest us.

For example:

To tweet your definition of storytelling, tweet your message, including the hashtag, as follows:

**“**I think storytelling is . . . - #BCITstorytelling**”**

Insert hashtag.png

End activity

Insert callout

***#Some Tips for Using Twitter***

* *Twitter is about random bursts of thought. Think of a tweet as a pebble being thrown into a vast ocean. Some pebbles will make a bigger splash than others, but in the end, all tweets will fall to the bottom of the sea. But don’t be nasty or offensive. Tweets have a way of rising back to the surface.*

End callout

After you’ve posted your tweet, search Twitter for **#BCIT-storytelling** to make sure your message can be found. You’ll also be able to read other messages by me and your fellow students. As an optional activity, try searching Twitter for **#BCIT**. And if you would like to get an idea how vast the Twitter universe is, search for **#justinbieber**. (You’ll see that every few seconds, someone from around the globe shares some kind of story about Justin Bieber.)

Throughout this course, if you have any thoughts to quickly share with me or your fellow students, post them to Twitter. Just make sure you include **#BCITstorytelling** in your tweet.

Insert example icon

Here’s a great example of effective storytelling in advertising. It’s funny, absurd, and makes me want to eat a chocolate bar—mission accomplished!

Link underlined text to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH69vCP6OvQ

End example

New page: M1-2 Name: Learning Objectives

(h1) Module 1: Learning Objectives

Insert learning objectives icon

Upon completion of Module 1, you’ll be able to:

* 1. identify effective use of storytelling in popular media
  2. use techniques to aid in the creative process of storytelling and writing

End learning objectives

New page: M1-3 Name: Learning Activities at a Glance

(h1) Learning Activities

To complete Module 1, you’ll have to do a few learning activities. Have a look at the list below in order to plan your study time in advance.

Insert activity icon

Insert twitterlogo.png

Tweet your thoughts about what you think effective storytelling is. Using Twitter, send a tweet of your definition. If you don’t have a Twitter account, go to [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) to create one.

End activity

Insert web resources icon

* Storytelling in advertising (video)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LH69vCP6OvQ>

* The three little pigs (story)

Link underlined text to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three\_Little\_Pigs

* Improvised story told by children (video)

Link underlined text to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=wsRk0TXYXuA>

* The story of Lothar Meggendorfer (video)

Link underlined text to: <http://www.ted.com/talks/joe_sabia_the_technology_of_storytelling.html>

End web resources

Insert discussion

Post your story to the My Backyard Story discussion and engage with your peers.

End discussion

New Page: M1-4 Name: The Narrative Impulse

(h1) The Narrative Impulse in Humans

Insert MartinMod1-1.jpg to the right of the paragraph below (text wrap)

Caption: *CC by SA*

This is a photograph of a painting on a wall in the El Castillo cave in Cantabria, Spain. The painting is estimated to be about 40 thousand years old, and is one of hundreds just like it in caves throughout France and Spain. Some theories hold that these images serve a religious or ceremonial purpose, while others claim that they were simply a way for one human to communicate with another, a way to tell a story. Perhaps this image was created by a hunter recounting a kill, or by someone attempting to depict a mythical beast that he or she was once told about.

Humans crave stories. From ancient cave-dwellers huddled around a fire to a crowd of people wearing 3D glasses in a packed movie theatre, people eagerly experience life through the eyes of others. Stories both entertain and teach us.

Along with movies and theatre, organized “storytelling nights” are more popular than ever. Perhaps the most well-known is *The Moth* storytelling series, which holds live events around the U.S. *The Moth* also puts out an incredibly entertaining podcast, which we will listen to later in this course.

Insert activity

\*Perhaps you have an idea about why it’s called *The Moth*. Tweet your idea and we’ll talk about it. Use #**BCITstorytelling**.

End activity

Insert example icon

In Vancouver, people from all walks of life get together every month for *The Flame*, a live storytelling event. I recently got up on stage at *The Flame* and told a story. Give it a listen here. It’s ten minutes long (“But I thought you said ‘brevity’ was key!” Fair enough. I plead guilty on that one).

Link underlined text to <soundfilename>

End example

(h2) Storytelling and Children

The narrative impulse in humans is never more apparent than in children. Much of a child’s early development is based on storytelling, from the bedtime story to the myths of the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus (one story in which you actually get to meet the main character every year in person at the mall).

Insert example icon

Children also love to *tell* a good story and are often freer than adults to let their imaginations run wild. Here’s a great example of that with a bit of a twist. It’s an improvised story told by children and acted out by adults.

Link underlined text to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\_embedded&v=wsRk0TXYXuA

End example

This clip displays some interesting storytelling techniques. For example, when one of the children mentions that the neighbour might be a bank robber, the other child quickly adds to the dramatic tension by mentioning that he indeed saw a “one-dollar bill” on the floor. He then quickly changes it to “a ten-dollar bill” before finally settling on a “thousand-dollar bill!” They’ve got our attention now.

Also impressive is the way they wrap up the improvised scene. With the alleged bank robber not home, the story seems to have crested. After a pause, one of the children asks, ”So, do you want the penguin?” The other calmly says, “Yup,” and the scene is neatly and effectively wrapped up.

Insert activity

Feel free to share your thoughts about the story on Twitter (don’t forget to tag it **#BCIT-storytelling.)**

End activity

New Page: M1-5 Name: Effective Storytelling

(h1) Elements of Effective Storytelling

So, now that we’ve begun to think about what effective story telling is, let’s deconstruct what exactly is a story. Depending on the story, any of these following 5 elements may play a more prominent role, but *all* must exist in the story somewhere.

Simply put, any story must have:

Multimedia object from Ali

* + 1. Characters – Who is being affected by the events in the story? Who is the protagonist and who is the antagonist?
    2. Setting – Where does the story happen? What is the mood or atmosphere of this place?
    3. Plot – This is a sequence of events which helps the reader understand the choices the characters makes and gives the story its shape.
    4. Conflict – Central to the plot, conflict provides the desired instability that helps hold the interest to your audience. What do the characters want? Why can’t they get it?
    5. Theme – Not always presented directly, the theme is the truth of the story and is the connection between the writer and the reader.

End multimedia

The theme of a story is often open to interpretation. Let’s look at the theme of the classic children’s story “The Three Little Pigs.”

Link underlined text to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three\_Little\_Pigs

I would say one of the main themes is: “good planning can save your life,” or, to put it another way, “if your contractor is recommending that you construct that new addition to your house out of straw, you might want to find a new contractor.”

Insert callout

Some popular themes in literature include: “man against nature,” “crime doesn’t pay,” and “love conquers all.”

(h2) The Changing Technology of Storytelling

While cave-painting may have been the popular storytelling technology of its day some 40 thousand years ago, today’s technology is a lot more sophisticated. One of the innovators in this department is the young digital storyteller Joe Sabia.

Insert example icon

In this 6 minute clip, Sabia uses his iPod to illustrate the story of Lothar Meggendorfer, a 19th-century inventor who created his own breakthrough in the technology of storytelling.

Link underlined text to: <http://www.ted.com/talks/joe_sabia_the_technology_of_storytelling.html>

End example

Insert activity icon

Now that we’re feeling inspired, it’s time for a memory exercise. Grab a piece of regular-sized paper (8½ by 11 inches). Now, spend the next 15 minutes drawing a diagram of the backyard that you spent the most time in as a child. Be specific. Try to draw every tree, every garden stone, just as you remember it. Take your time and be as thorough as you can. Have a look at the one I did:

Insert scanned image provided

Now that you’ve spent some time working on your backyard diagram, write a quick story relating to a memory conjured up by this exercise. Remember that this is just an exercise, meant to provide some inspiration that will hopefully come in handy later on in the course. Stories are everywhere. Just look in your own backyard.

**Note:** Because this course is about all forms of media, your story doesn’t have to be in a written form. You can also videotape yourself telling the story or tell your story as a podcast. Keep it short, though—no longer than three minutes.

End activity

Insert discussion icon

Once you are happy with your story, in whichever format, post it to the My Story discussion forum.

Link underlined text to the discussion

Create discussion topic

Post your backyard stories here and feel free to provide each other with any comments or feedback.

End Discussion

New Page: M1-6 Name: Summary

(h1) Summary

Stories are all around us. Storytelling and comprehending the stories of others is a natural impulse in humans – even young children display inherent narrative skills.

While story structure can vary, all stories must display these five elements: character, plot, setting, conflict, and theme.

There are many stories living inside us all. Using certain exercises, such as examining our own memories, can help us find the stories within us that are waiting to be told.

Now that we have a basic understanding of just what storytelling is and how important it is in our daily lives, we’ll be able to see how we can use storytelling techniques to effectively communicate our own stories.