

STORY TELLING

CSC491, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

EVERYTHING IS A STORY.

**STORYTELLING HAS BEEN HUMANITY SINCE
WE FIRST STARTED COMMUNICATING.**

**IN THE BEGINNING, WE
TOLD STORIES THROUGH
CAVE DRAWINGS.**



**AND CONTINUED TO SEE
THESE PRACTICES
THROUGH ANCIENT EGYPT.**



**STORYTELLING HAS REMAINED UNCHANGED
FOR MILLENNIA. WE ARE ALL STORYTELLERS
WHETHER YOU REALIZE IT OR NOT.**

WHAT IS A STORY?



WHAT IS A STORY?

The poet laureate Randall Jarrell, describes a story as being a chain of events that begins at one place and ends at another “without any essential interruption.”

Mark Twain, a famous author, agreed. His first rule of writing was “that a tale shall accomplish something and arrive somewhere.”

WHAT IS A STORY?

The most important part is that a story intends to arrive at a target destination. It has an intent in mind.

WHAT IS A STORY?

This is cool and all, but what the heck does this mean? We're programmers, not writers.

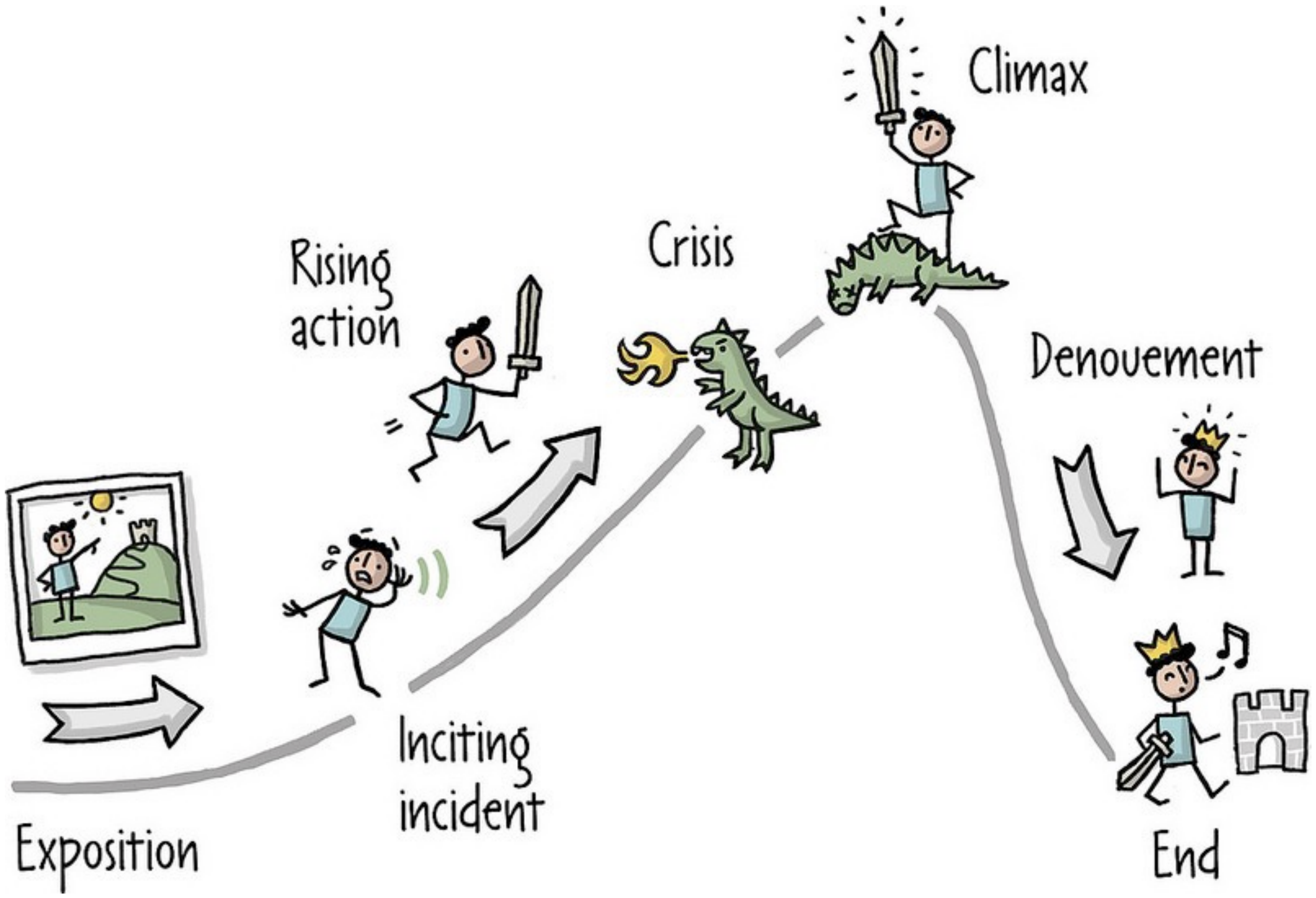
Well, think about it for a second.

WHAT IS A STORY?

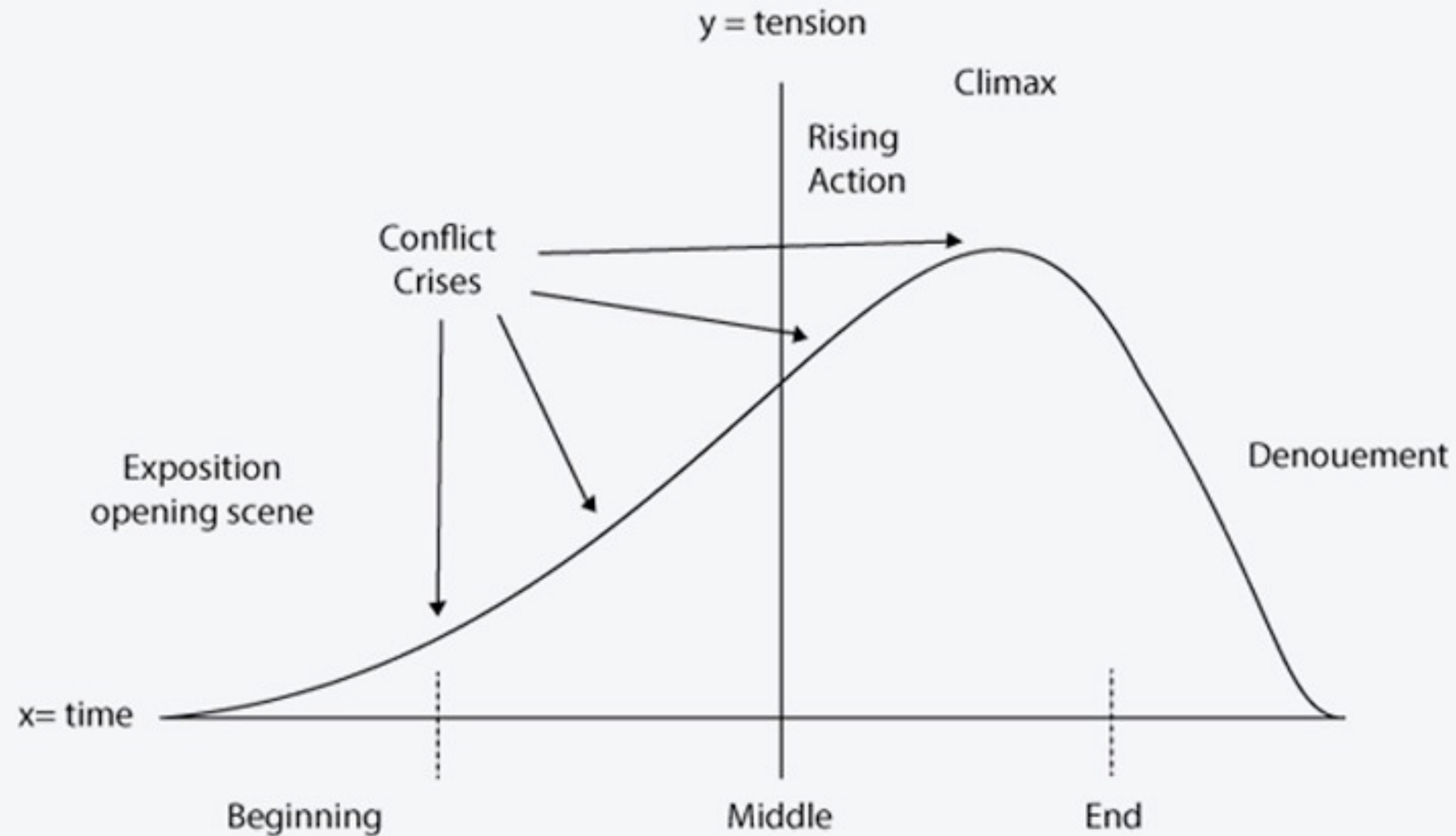
When you consider a story is a “set of events (or descriptions of events) that lead to a target destination”, then many things fit that description. Things like:

- This lecture
- Oral communications
- A comment online
- A text message / conversation
- An email
- An assignment
- Describing your code change to someone so they can review it
- The code itself
- Literally anything that communicates anything

HOW TO GET TO THE TARGET DESTINATION



Story Structure



Stories are split up into 3 sections: beginning, middle, and end.

HOW TO GET TO THE TARGET DESTINATION

The most classic structure of a story contains 6 parts:

1. **Beginning: setting and exposition**
2. **Conflict: a problem**
3. **Rising action: solving a problem**
4. **Highest point: or culmination touching the core of a problem**
5. **Falling action: that leads to solving the problem**
6. **Outcome: how the problem is solved**

OUTCOME: HOW THE PROBLEM IS SOLVED

This is our target destination. Every other part of the story is how we get to this.

CASE STUDIES : PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

CASE STUDIES

- 1. Video Games**
- 2. Product Design, Brands, Marketing**
- 3. Oral and Written communication**
- 4. Documentation**
- 5. Presentations, talks, and lectures**
- 6. Code**
- 7. Data**

CASE STUDIES : VIDEO GAMES

Video game storytelling is a vast area of study. Research into stories and their effect on the game is a research topic for some computer scientists.

CASE STUDIES : VIDEO GAMES

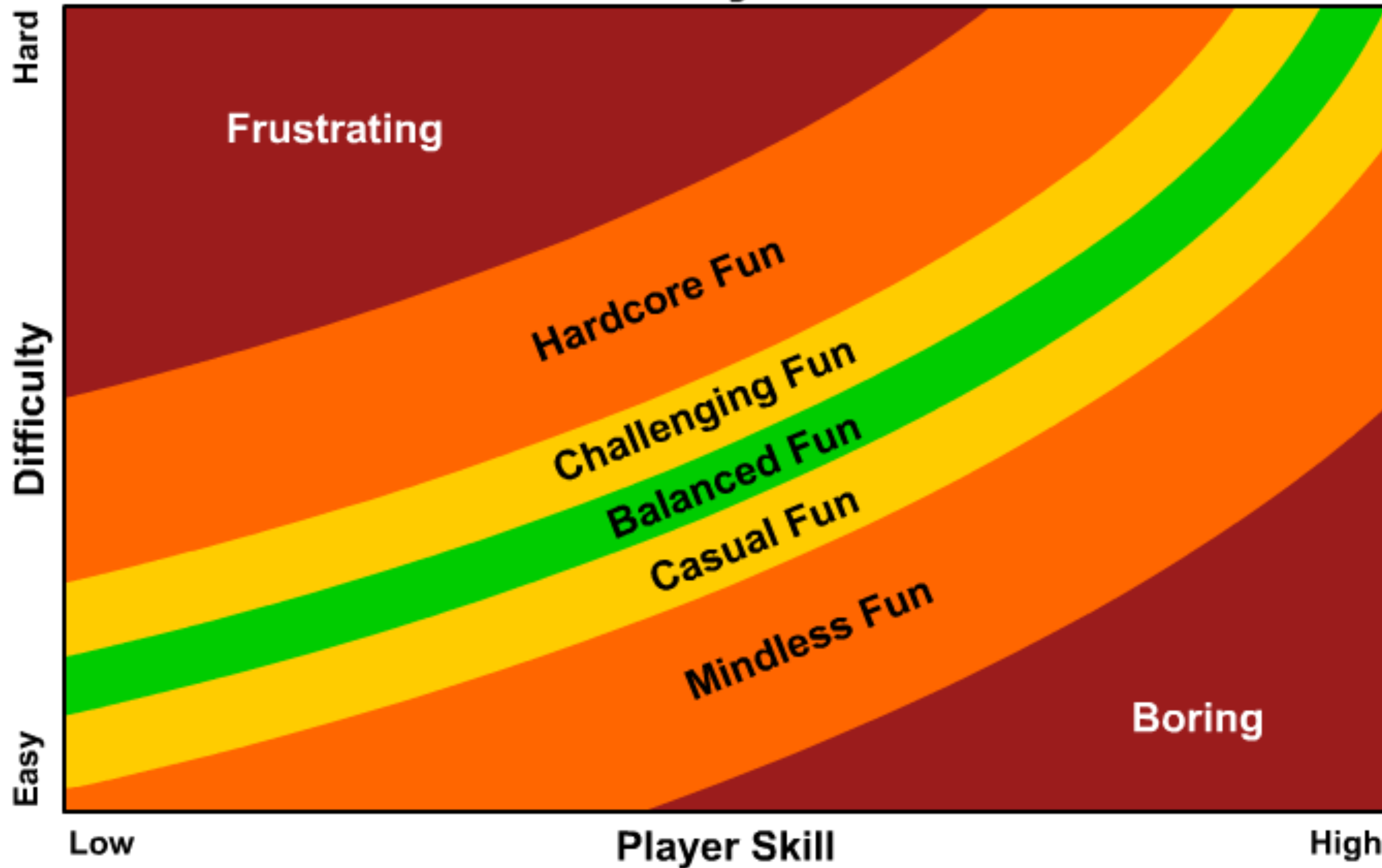
Have you noticed that when you play a video game and it becomes obviously more difficult, but it doesn't *feel* like it's that much more effort or more difficult?

CASE STUDIES : VIDEO GAMES

That is by design. Game makers carefully craft their story such that the difficulty increases with your skill. This keeps the game's perceived difficulty relatively smooth without becoming too overbearing*.

*** Games in the “masocore” genre like Dark Souls purposefully break this to be “super hard” as part of the game**

Difficulty Curve



CASE STUDIES : DESIGN, BRANDS, MARKETING

A FEW YEARS AGO, I WAS CREATING A SEQUENCE OF SCREENSHOTS TO SHOWCASE AN APP IN THE GOOGLE PLAY STORE. I HAVEN'T REALIZED BACK THEN, BUT CONTEMPLATING ON HOW TO PUT TOGETHER THE MATERIALS, WAS ACTUALLY THE PROCESS OF WRITING THE PLOT.



Netflix

Netflix, Inc. Entertainment

★ Editors' Choice

★★★★★ 7,297,255

T Teen

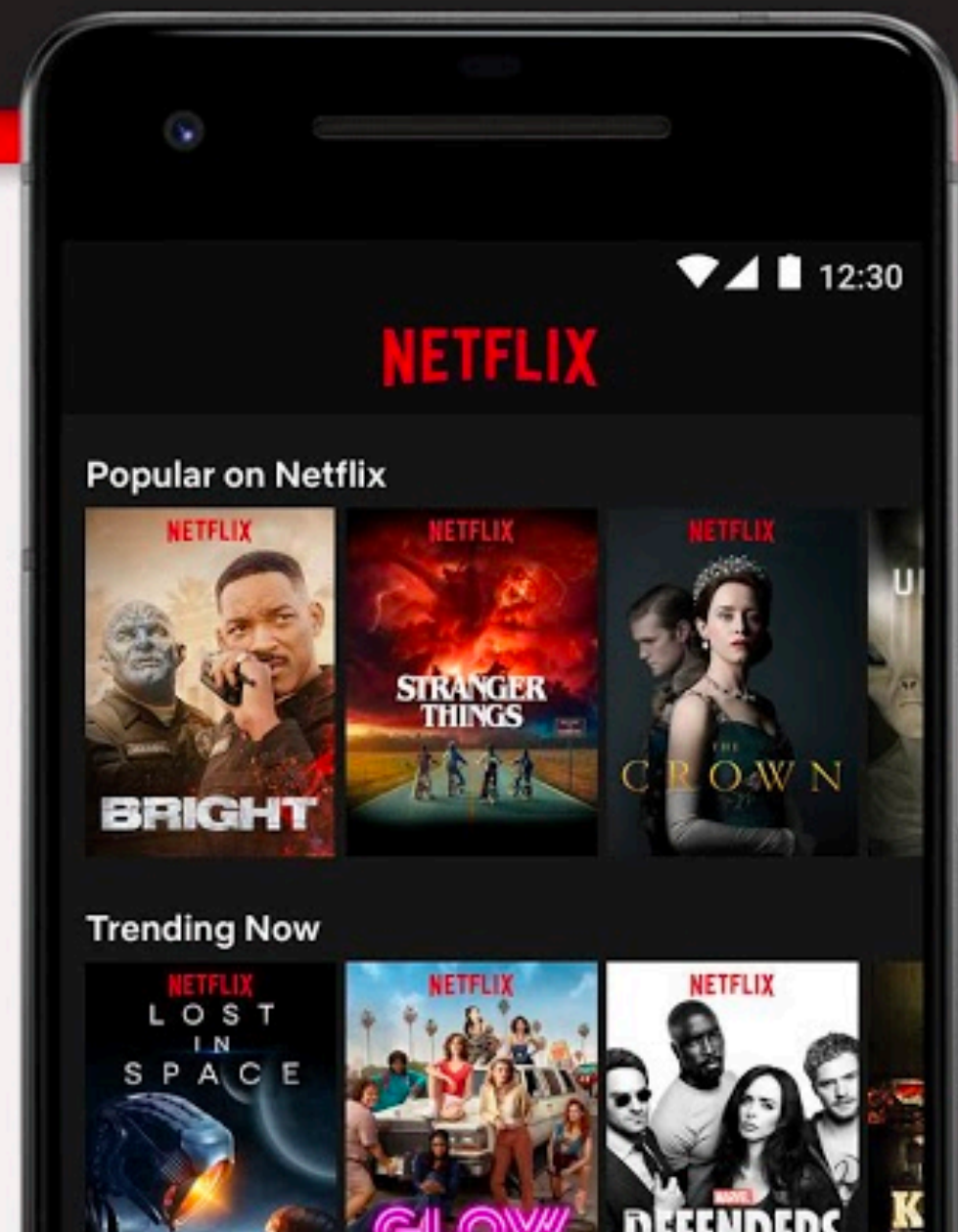
Offers in-app purchases

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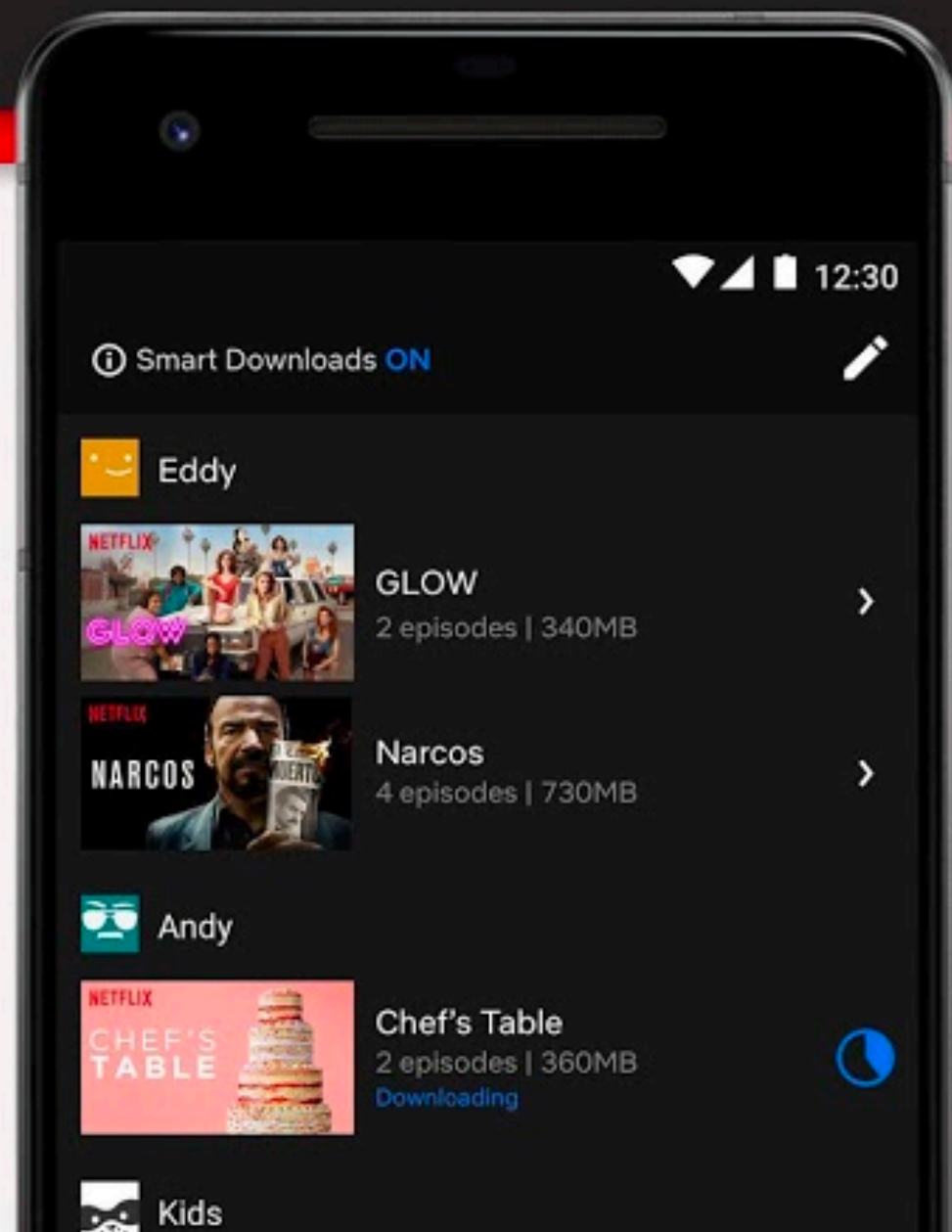
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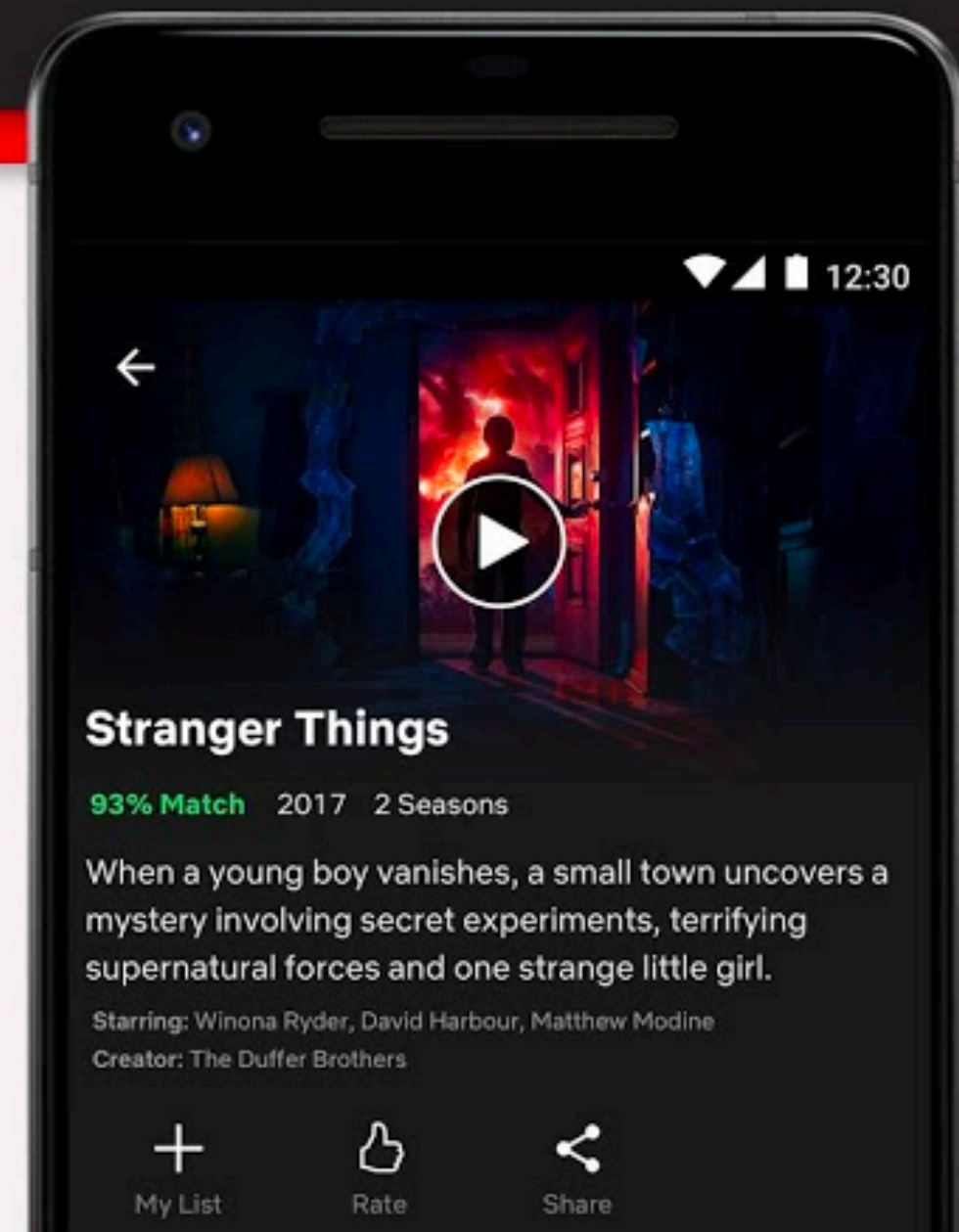
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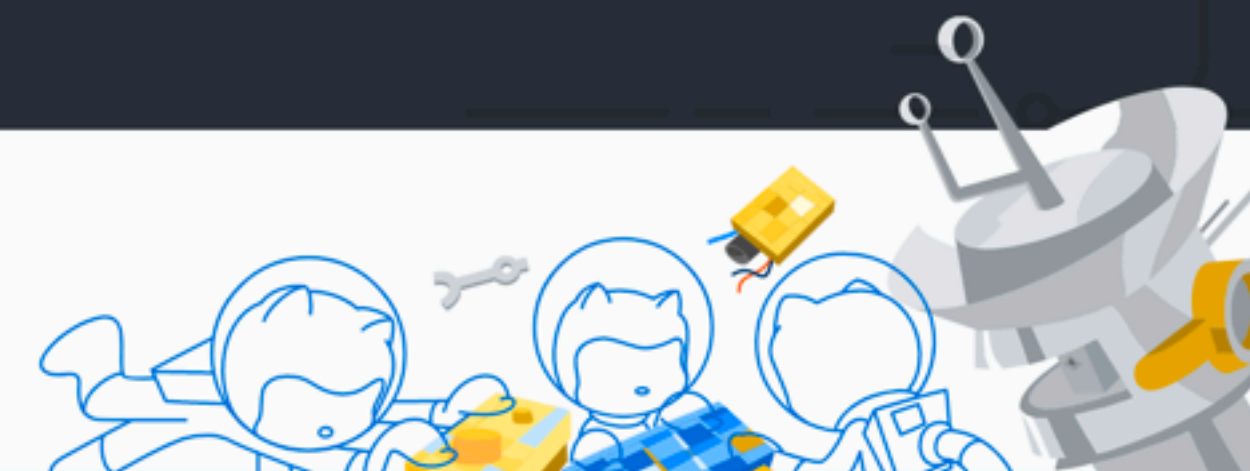
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CASE STUDIES : ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

When you are talking to someone (that isn't a casual conversation), you need to consider a few points:

- 1. Who am I talking to?**
- 2. What am I asking for? (What outcome do I want?)**
- 3. What information does that person care about?**
- 4. Is that person really busy? Highly stressed right now?**
- 5. Is now a good time for them?**
- 6. Am I prepared to answer the questions they might have?**

CASE STUDIES : ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Example: Proposing a new project to the CEO

- 1. Maybe they have a busy schedule?**
- 2. Does it need the attention of the CEO?**
- 3. What is the outcome that you want?**

CASE STUDIES : PRESENTATIONS, TALKS, AND LECTURES

When I write a talk or presentation I first consider what I want to teach (outcome). Then I usually end up with some bullet points, align those with the audience, and build out a presentation from there.

- 1. Once I have a set of points, an understanding of my audience, and a target destination, then I can start writing the actual presentation.**
- 2. I make sure all points belong, ruthlessly cutting anything that is not lending itself 100% to the target destination.**
- 3. Then I expand, add human emotion, and do my best to bring you on a journey that starts off with an introduction, a problem, solution, and conclusion. I keep points small and pointed, and try to engage you.**

CASE STUDIES : CODE

We've seen how this can be applied to writing, oral communication, presentations, and other avenues.

But this also applies to your code

CASE STUDIES : CODE

When you're writing a function, feature, or program... it's telling a story.

It's a story of that functionality. It's a story for the person who reads that code in the future.

Let's look at an example.

CASE STUDIES: CODE

```
def grade_assignment(params)
  comment = Comment.new
  assignment = Assignment.find(params[:id])

  assignment.grade = params[:grade]
  comment.body = params[:body]
  comment.save!
  assignment.add_comment(comment)
end
```

This is a small psuedo-code that you can probably read, but it takes some effort. The writer didn't think of the story they wanted to tell: we are grading an assignment. Let's fix it.

CASE STUDIES: CODE

```
def grade_assignment(params)
  # First of all, the most important piece of information is this assignment,
  # So let's start with that
  assignment = Assignment.find(params[:id])

  # Next, this function is supposed to be for grading.
  # Let's not bury that functionality when we don't need to
  assignment.grade = params[:grade]
  assignment.save!

  # A side effect of this function is that a comment can be made.
  comment = Comment.new(body: params[:body])
  assignment.add_comment(comment)
  comment.save!
end
```

CASE STUDIES: CODE

```
def grade_assignment(params)
  assignment = Assignment.find(params[:id])
  assignment.grade = params[:grade]
  assignment.save!

  comment = Comment.new(body: params[:body])
  assignment.add_comment(comment)
  comment.save!
end
```

This is the same functionality, except the story is more clear when you read it: We can easily see that we grade an assignment and comment on it as there are 2 distinct sections. This is a simple example, but it can be more complex.

CASE STUDIES : DATA

Data is an amazing tool. We can take large amounts of information and boil all of that down into a number or a graph.

Numbers are meaningless by themselves. They only become valuable in context. That context is a story.

\$15 MILLION DOLLARS

\$15 MILLION DOLLARS

MONTHLY RECURRING REVENUE

\$15 MILLION DOLLARS

MONTHLY RECURRING REVENUE

UP 15 PERCENT MONTH OVER MONTH AND 100% YEAR OVER YEAR

CASE STUDIES : DATA

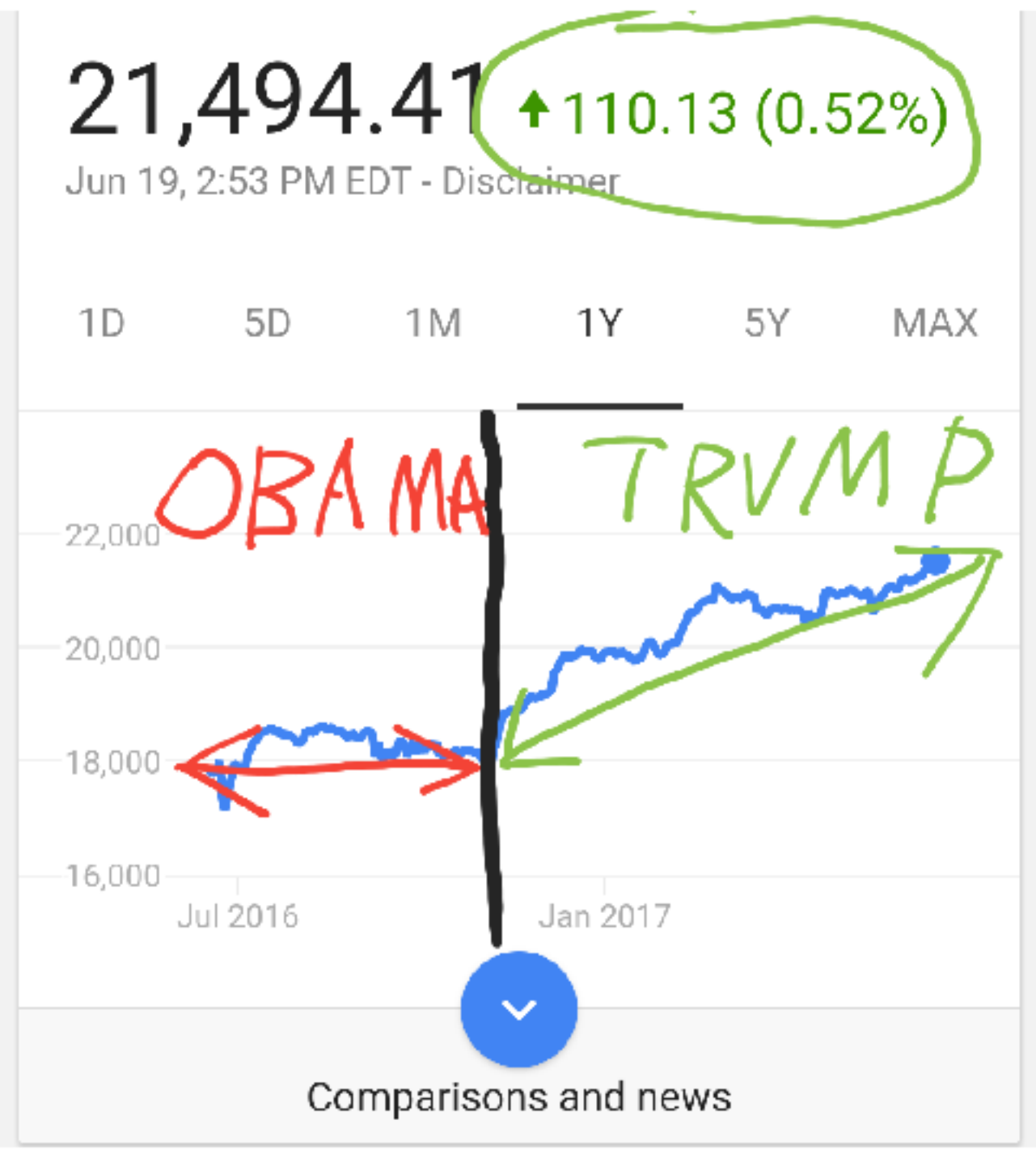
As you can see, that single number had context added onto it. It became more useful.

**However, for some people a graph overlayed with last years information is too much.
You've made the story worse for them.**



Obama

Reality



r/The_Donald

HOW TO BE A GOOD STORY TELLER

THERE IS NO SINGLE ANSWER TO THIS ONE, I BELIEVE. BUT PASSION COULD BE A GOOD STARTING POINT. I PERSONALLY DO FIND COMICS (REALLY GREAT MATERIAL FOR STORYBOARDING INSPIRATION), AWARD WINNING COMMERCIALS (BECAUSE THEY HAVE A BRIEF PLOT LINE AND USUALLY ARE WITTY), BOOKS, OF COURSE, AND LIFE SITUATIONS EXPLORATION (TRYING TO PLAY A ROLE OF AN ANTHROPOLOGIST IN DAILY SITUATIONS) HIGHLY INSPIRING FOR A STORYTELLING.

1. WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

2. WHAT IMPACT DO YOU WANT TO HAVE?

***3. WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR
AUDIENCE TO TAKE AWAY?***

4. WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR AUDIENCE?

***5. BE RUTHLESS. CUT WHAT ISN'T
NECESSARY TO THE STORY***

6. *DON'T THROW IN SPOILERS*

WHEN TELLING A STORY, STICK TO THE CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER THAT THINGS HAPPENED TO YOU IN REAL LIFE. IN OTHER WORDS, DON'T GIVE US DETAILS THAT YOU YOURSELF DIDN'T KNOW, UNTIL THE PART OF YOUR STORY WHERE YOU DISCOVERED THEM.

BY TELLING US WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN LATER, YOU LOSE THE TENSION IN YOUR STORY. FOR EXAMPLE, IF YOU WERE TELLING A STORY ABOUT A JOB INTERVIEW, THEN SAID, "AT THIS POINT, I DIDN'T REALIZE THAT THEY'D ALREADY GIVEN THE JOB TO SOMEONE ELSE" – WE STOP CARING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS IN

THIS IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE, AS PAUL J. ZAK'S STUDIES FOUND, TENSION IS ONE OF THE KEY ASPECTS OF HOLDING ATTENTION IN STORIES. BY THROWING IN "SPOILERS", YOU LOSE THIS TENSION, WHICH, ZAK SAYS, IS ESSENTIAL TO CREATING EMOTIONAL RESONANCE BETWEEN THE STORYTELLER AND THE AUDIENCE.

[HTTPS://WWW.SCIENCEOFPEOPLE.COM/HOW-TO-TELL-A-STORY/](https://www.scienceofpeople.com/how-to-tell-a-story/)