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Tell me a story: Crafting and publishing research in consumer psychology☆

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Abstract

This paper provides a narrative framework for writing empirical research papers in consumer psychology. The components of this framework include focusing on the research contribution, maintaining a consistent plot structure, creating a story with constructs and variables as the main characters, minimizing subplots, and polishing the writing. We assert that integrating a narrative within a research paper enhances the likelihood of publication.

You submitted your best work to a journal. Your hopes are high: the results of your empirical research are consistent, significant and interesting. After several weeks, the reviews arrive. When you read them, you are heartbroken. The reviewers and editors didn't get it! Your paper was rejected! A week later, the latest issue of the same journal arrives in the mail. As you skim through the articles, your dismay is compounded. The empirical results in the published articles aren't nearly as compelling as your own. What went wrong?

In this article, we propose that the difference between consumer psychology articles that are accepted for publication and the top 20% of submissions that are rejected is good writing, in particular, the inclusion of a compelling story (Bem, 2000). Our article is more than a call for good writing in the sense that there are few grammatical mistakes, although that does play a role. Rather, we assert that weaving a consistent *story* throughout your prose is essential to writing an excellent consumer psychology paper (Eisenberg, 2000; Salovey, 2000). Why? Stories are powerful prisms for understanding and framing empirical research and provide readers with a coherent account facilitating their understanding and appreciation for a phenomenon (Baumeister & Newman, 1994).

Why should we, high-minded academic researchers, incorporate storytelling into our publication efforts? While we may be serious-minded academics, we are, as are reviewers, editors, and readers, also people; people who naturally think in terms of stories (Bruner, 1990; Schank, 1990). In order to make sense of what goes on in the world, people create narratives to frame information, ideas, and concepts. By constructing stories, individuals organize their experiences, develop order, explain unusual events, gain perspective and make evaluations (Bruner, 1990). Thus, the meaning of an empirical finding or theoretical concept is understood as a result of its being a part of a story (Polkinghorne, 1988). Much research tells us that people make meaningful evaluations (Pennington & Hastie, 1992), form judgments (Gergen & Gergen, 1988), and inform action (Olson, 1990) as a result of developing a narrative. In writing a research paper, a sagacious author crafts prose that builds upon and benefits from the reader's naturally occurring narrative processing.

A well-written journal submission should offer a consistent, logical and involving story highlighting the contribution of the empirical research. Essentially, stories are narratives, and a "well-told" story is compelling and persuades the reader. Stories have impact because they have the structure, context, and detail necessary to be coherent, relevant and memorable (Schank & Berman, 2002). In a research paper, the story should convey the conceptual contribution of the work and convince the reader

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that this contribution is worthy of publication. Because good stories are both persuasive and enduring, our objective in this article is to translate what we know about storytelling into a framework that can be used to write papers that become published journal articles in consumer psychology.

Our narrative-based framework consists of five steps essential to crafting a compelling research article, summarized in Table 1. First, an article must focus on the research contribution. The research contribution must be the heart of the story. It must be apparent and transparent throughout the article. Next, an article must maintain a consistent plot. Plot structure is an important and defining characteristic of a narrative. Readers have expectations about the structure of a research article, and it is wise to adhere to those expectations. Third, plot content consists of actors, actions, goals, and obstacles. In order to be compelling, a plot typically includes something unusual or unexpected. Fourth, beware of subplots that distract attention from the research contribution. Finally, good writing includes attention to grammar, spelling, and style. One cannot ignore the details of good writing, including selecting a title and crafting the abstract. A good story is well-polished. Following these five steps allows an author to build a compelling narrative frame for an empirical research paper and, we believe, enhances the likelihood a paper will be published. And, although these points may seem transparent, we assert that making a conscious effort to incorporate the elements of a narrative into your academic writing will improve and strengthen your research papers.

How to write a narrative-based research paper

Focus the narrative on your research contribution

> *The most important thing in a work of art is that it should have a kind of focus….There should be some place where all of the rays meet or from which they all issue.*
>
> *Leo Tolstoy*

Writers often advise that a good story requires a focus. The written word is powerful because of the focus it forces from the writer (Hart, 2006). Excellent writing takes time, requiring that the author reflect, organize, calibrate and direct the prose. This process of composition allows an author to eliminate irrelevant issues and create a focus that communicates ideas effectively, leading the reader to the conclusion the author intends to convey. Good writing has a clear focus that the reader is able to summarize (Eisenberg, 2000).

Table 1
Steps to writing a narrative-based research paper

1. Focus on the research contribution
2. Maintain a consistent plot structure
3. Create a story with the constructs and variables as the main characters
4. Beware of subplots
5. Polish the writing

A good story must focus on the critical general idea, or gist, that we want the listener or reader to remember. As Roger Schank (1990, p. 115) suggests, "The process of story creation, of condensing an experience into a story-size chunk that can be told in a reasonable amount of time, is a process that makes the chunks smaller and smaller. Subsequent iterations of the same story tend to get smaller in the retelling as more details are forgotten… Normally, after much retelling, we are left with exactly the details of the story that we have chosen to remember. In short, story creation is a memory process. As we tell a story, we are formulating the gist of the experience which we can recall whenever we create a story describing the experience." This story creation process extends to both authors as they craft a paper and readers as they read and decipher the paper. Readers do not remember a whole story, or a specific narration of a story, but rather the heart of the story: the focus.

Thus, the first step in writing an excellent journal article is to make your research contribution the focus of the story you present in your paper. You must make your research contribution transparent to the reader. Perceived lack of research contribution is the most often cited reason for rejecting papers submitted to academic journals. You must explicitly state the research contribution in your paper and use that contribution as central focus in the story you present. However, the notion of focus goes far beyond merely asserting the contribution of your research in the introduction and discussion sections of a paper: the research contribution must be the central character, the main actor in your research story. Every idea, every sentence, every word in your paper should echo the research contribution. The contribution must permeate the entire paper. You can accomplish this by organizing your article around the problem you are addressing. Your contribution to the literature stems from how you solve this problem.

There are two issues that frequently arise around the articulation of the research contribution in a manuscript. The first problem is that the contribution is unclear. If the research contribution is not clearly communicated in simple, concrete terms, there will be a negative effect on the perceived contribution of the paper. In identifying principles that help ideas to be understood and remembered or sticky, Heath and Heath (2007) assert that concreteness is an essential principle in making an idea memorable. They assert that people's brains are more amenable to remembering concrete language. A well-told story should communicate your research contribution in clear, straight-forward, and concrete terms.

> *I am always telling my students that if they can't explain what they are doing to their grandmothers then they probably don't understand it themselves.*
>
> *Gunter Blobel*

Another way to help alleviate this issue of an unclear research contribution is to assume the role of the non-specialist reader, as Gunter Blobel, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Medicine, advises. Good writing takes into account the reader's

level of understanding, knowledge, and comprehension at every juncture in the paper. Write as though your reader is a graduate student in consumer psychology (Bem, 2000). Academics often suffer from the pitfall of the knowledgeable reader. We are writing to an intelligent audience: other academics. This frequently leads us to assume that the reader will understand an idea without adequate explanation (see Heath & Heath, 2007). However, while readers are smart, they are not mind-readers. As Daryl Bem (2000; p. 9) writes, "Don't expect journal reviewers to discern your brilliance through the smog of polluted writing." Ditto for brilliance of your research contribution.

The second major problem in articulating the research contribution is that authors present too many contributions in a manuscript, leading the reader to wonder which of the contributions are key and in turn to conclude that none of the contributions are particularly vital or important. Heath and Heath (2007) advocate the benefits of simplicity in communicating ideas that are understood and remembered. Simplicity requires finding the essential core of an idea, the single most important thing. Keeping your focus simple helps your communication to be understandable and memorable. It is inevitable that if your paper includes a long list of contributions, some will be stronger and others will be weaker. If the reader uses any averaging model, where the overall contribution is an average of the importance of all the contributions listed, then the weaker contributions will dilute the strength of your paper. It is important, therefore, to focus on your strongest, most compelling contribution throughout the paper. Keep it simple. Save all of the other contributions for the discussion section or for future research.

Developing the narrative structure of your plot

> *The White Rabbit put on his spectacles, "Where should I begin, please, your majesty?" he asked.*
>
> *"Begin at the beginning," the King said, very gravely, "and go on till you come to the end; then stop."*
>
> *Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

What makes a story a story? A vital aspect of the narrative in an academic paper is the plot. A plot in a scholarly paper should offer both chronology (a series of events in time) and causality (the reasons for the events; Prince, 2003). First, in communicating a plot, the academic narrative must be organized in terms of a temporal dimension; the components of your account occur over time. Your story needs to offer an easily discernable chronology. Kerby (1991) asserts that the general objective of a narrative is to achieve closure by framing a story with a beginning, middle, and end because this structure is fundamental to the way readers organize and understand prose.

The second component of the plot in an academic paper is causality. The academic narrative should be structured into an organized framework that establishes relationships between each of the elements of the paper, thus facilitating the reader's ability to make causal inferences. Discerning the causal and intentional relations in the reporting of an academic narrative is essential to understanding the plot of a paper (Pennington & Hastie, 1986). For example, an empirical consumer psychology paper should be written such that what happens in early experiments trigger what is investigated in later experiments. To be clear, the order of the experiments is not based on the history of the empirical investigation, but on the causal flow of ideas. Thus, the typical plot in an academic paper should consist of several causally related episodes; remember that readers are willing to make inferences and even delete (or forget) information in order to make the plot of a story coherent and complete (Baumeister & Newman, 1994).

> *"If the reader gets lost, it is usually because the writer has not been careful enough to keep him on the path."*
>
> *William Zinsser*

It is hard to overstate the importance of plot in a scholarly paper because it influences everything else that goes into a piece of writing (Hart, 2006). As Hart (20006, p. 43) advises, "Writing is, in one sense, simply organized thinking." Readers have expectations about the plot structure of empirical consumer psychology papers and they rely upon these expectations in reading and reviewing papers. It is important to match the plot of your research article to reader's expectations so that readers don't waste valuable cognitive resources deciphering the structure, rather than the content, of your article.

Story grammarians such as Mandler (1984) assert that the plot of stories have an underlying structure that remains relatively invariant in spite of differences in content from story to story. Mandler (1984) identified this as the story schema, a set of expectations about the way in which stories proceed, reflecting regularities from past encounters. We posit that there is a "story schema" for the prototypical plot in academic papers as well. The basic plot structure for almost all consumer psychology journal articles is shown in Table 2.

It is important to articulate this plot structure to the reader and clearly connect each section of the paper to the preceding and following sections. In writing a paper, provide your reader with a logical structure that clarifies how the paper is organized (Salovey, 2000). A common pitfall of scholarly writing is relying on a "boxcar structure" where blocks of writing are devoted to each subtopic and lined up like box cars on a freight train with weak connections between topics or sections. To combat this, include an outline of the paper in the introduction, put reminders at the end of sections, and include topic sentences at the beginning of sections (Starbuck, 1999).

To create a well-written journal article, you need to move in a logical, causal manner from the introduction section to the conceptual framework, and so on throughout the paper. A manuscript should provide a clear and linear sequential plot that begins with the first words in the introduction and extends to the last words in the discussion section. As Bill Starbuck (1999) advises, "Readers should understand the first sentence without reading any other part of the document. They should understand the second sentence without reading anything except the first sentence, and the second sentence should continue the first sentence logically and, often, grammatically."

Table 2
Plot structure for consumer psychology journal articles

Basic components	Expanded example
1. Introduction	a. Set up expectations b. Highlight research contribution
2. Conceptual framework	c. Set the stage: Introduce your characters (constructs and variables) and the relations between them
3. Hypotheses	d. Ask questions, build anticipation about what might happen
4. Experiments 4a. Methodology 4b. Results	e. Present data (Study 1) f. Ask some more questions — perhaps about an unexpected finding g. Provide answers to original and new questions (Study 2) h. A few questions linger… i. More answers (More studies as appropriate)
5. Discussion	j. Denouement: Provide resolution k. Reiterate contribution

It is important that you, early in the introduction, specify what is new in your article, your research contribution. Then, don't get bogged down in a long literature review that strays from the key concepts essential to your contribution. Only include what is necessary to develop the hypotheses tested in your experiments. The conceptual framework section should provide a backdrop for appreciating your contribution and understanding and anticipating your empirical results. Often, your hypotheses can be stated clearly and concisely within the conceptual framework section. Many reviewers feel more comfortable with explicitly stated hypotheses; it's part of their "story schema", it's what they expect in a consumer psychology article. Note that if the hypotheses are H1, H2, H3 — then make sure to continue your reporting and discussion of the empirical results in this order throughout all sections of the paper.

Results sections of empirical journal articles often obscure rather than highlight the critical findings of the empirical research. To avoid this, begin the results section by presenting evidence that the study was properly conducted such as manipulation checks and pretests, then report the results of your experiment (Salovey, 2000). Be sure to provide the reader with an overview of the results at the beginning of your reporting. As Salovey (2000, p. 123) advises, "The reader should not have to read through the entire results section to know whether – bottom line – the experiment worked." Always explain what your results mean — don't leave it for the reader to decipher your results and don't wait for the discussion section to explain your results (Salovey, 2000). State each result in prose prior to recounting the statistical analysis and summarize frequently (Bem, 2000). Often it is helpful to restate each hypothesis, and articulate whether or not it was supported, as a reminder to the reader. The order in which you report the results should convey your story and the contribution of your research. A caution — for many authors, the usual strategy for writing the results section seems to be to report the statistical analysis in the order the results appeared in their SAS or SPSS output. This approach can lead to a results section with prose steeped in statistical jargon that does not communicate the focus and contribution of your findings. And, be sure to keep the reporting in the results section parallel to the introduction, conceptual framework, the hypotheses and method sections (Salovey, 2000).

Finally, the discussion at the very end of your paper is augmentation, not just explanation (Calfee, 2000). It should showcase how your research solved the original problem and reiterate and drive home the research contribution. This is the denouement of your research story: all the lose ends in your plot should be wrapped up in the discussion. Don't lose steam at the end of your paper. A well-crafted finish wraps up a paper, leaving the reader feeling satisfied (Hart, 2006).

Narrative story quality

> *Writing succeeds when it puts pictures inside our heads, when it makes it possible for us to visualize people and landscape, actions and scenes. We remember what we can visualize. We think about what we can remember.*
>
> *Lauren Kessler*

A well-written academic paper should engage the reader such that they become drawn into your narrative and are transported, that is, caught-up or engaged in the story. As Green and Brock (2000) suggest, stories persuade via transportation, which is defined as "immersion into a text", the extent to which individuals become "lost" in a story (p. 702). Transportation makes a story compelling by reducing negative cognitive responding, creating realism of experience and engendering affective responses. A well-crafted paper should captivate readers with a story about your research contribution. As an author, your goal should be to write an article so riveting that the reader gets completely caught-up in it.

The characteristics of a story that contribute to a narrative's quality, characters, setting, and drama, answer the question, "What makes a *good* story?" One model frequently used to describe the overall structure of a story is Fretytag's Pyramid depicted in Fig. 1. In his book *Die Technik des Dramas* (*Technique of the Drama*; 1863), Freytag described the classic structure of a drama. The components of a drama as specified by Freytag are applicable to enhancing the story quality of an academic article. Adhering to Freytag's dramatic structure, the

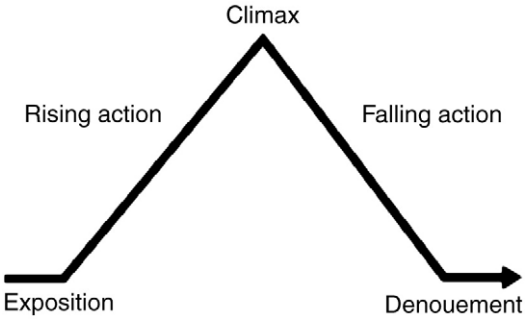

Fig. 1. Freytag's pyramid.

main characters, constructs and variables, are introduced in a paper and, by presenting a conflict or potential conflict among them, the author prepares the reader for the subsequent plot. Next, the plot is propelled by introducing further circumstances or problems related to the main issue, known as the complicating or rising action. Such conflict might include inconsistent results uncovered in the extant literature. The main conflict starts to develop and the constructs and variables are presented in greater detail. In the next component, the plot reaches its climax. Crisis arises in a research story when the theory faces an obstacle, perhaps an unexpected empirical result or a competing explanation. Then, a subsequent component creates new tension in that it delays the finale by further events, perhaps the identification of moderating variables, called the falling action. Finally, the story ends with a denouement, where a solution to the conflict is presented. Thus, the climb towards the climax and resolution create drama in a story, drawing the viewer in, and evoking involvement and emotion.

> *People like a good story. Characters and events are the ingredients of a story, but without a plot they are not a story. Readers want to know why the characters did what they did and how the events are linked. Scientists are people too.*
>
> *Abraham Tesser*

The manner in which we convey plot content is important. A research story should contain characters and events, which are the constructs and variables, as well as goals and obstacles. The plot of an article should be developed such that the constructs and variables are engaged in actions to achieve goals. Overcoming obstacles also adds to the drama. In a research paper, ruling out an alternative hypothesis or a rival explanation is equivalent to overcoming an obstacle. A key point to be made is that the constructs and variables are the actors, *not* the authors. A good story is rarely a summary of the author's thoughts about the empirical results or the author's struggle to develop and execute the research. The goal is to explain consumer psychological processes; the hypotheses in your paper can be thought of as a measure of the degree to which your constructs and variables are achieving their goal of explaining a consumer psychology phenomenon.

As an example of building a story within a journal article, let's look at Escalas (2004), where the author contends that narrative processing of ad content can enhance brand meaning. In order to operationalize brand meaning, which is often idiosyncratic, Escalas develops a construct, self-brand connections, and devises a scale to measure them. If we think of the constructs as characters, this research story has two protagonists: narrative processing and self-brand connections. In an earlier draft, the story began with the history of the life of self-brand connections (e.g., the scale development process). Most good stories do not begin with the birth of one of the protagonists, and if they do, they are not complete within 30 manuscript pages! Thus, through the review process, Escalas was asked to shorten the life history of the scale, moving it to an appendix (because indeed, the value of this character's life should be under scrutiny). As a result, the published paper focuses on the key relationship between the two characters: how narrative processing can positively affect self-brand connections.

We have one final thought. A good story contains something that is unusual or unexpected, a narrative imbalance (Lucariello, 1990; Feldman, Bruner, Renderer, & Spitzer, 1990). This imbalance can take the form of a breach in expectations about how people should behave or how stories should unfold (e.g., an unexpected finding that appears across a series of studies). A narrative imbalance can also be tension between story elements, such as actions that fail to achieve goals. These narrative imbalances lead to increased elaboration and interest among readers as they attempt to explain the imbalance (Lucariello, 1990; Feldman et al., 1990). In the context of a consumer psychology article, an experiment presented early in a paper may produce an unexpected result. This imbalance should be resolved and explained in subsequent studies. Create interest with something unexpected, but provide closure with a satisfying resolution.

Narrative confusion: subplots

> *The artist, having chosen his theme, picks out only those details that are characteristic and of value for his subject. And he rejects all the remainder and puts it to one side.*
>
> *Guy de Maupassant*

A good story must focus on the gist, the main concept, that the author wants his/her listeners or readers to remember. In a novel, adding subplots can help to create a well-rounded universe for the characters to live in. However, for a shorter work such as an academic paper, adding subplots can create confusion, making the focus of the story harder to remember. As Hart (2006, p. 95) points out, "Drifting off point not only makes your writing longer than it needs to be, it also can turn your work into a thick, forbidding bramble." The inclusion of subplots runs counter to the notion of simplicity we have espoused. They add unnecessary confusion and complicate the story. These types of complications dilute what is remembered from the paper, making it less "sticky" and reducing its impact (Heath & Heath, 2007).

> *A journal article tells a straightforward tale of a circumscribed problem in search of an answer… It is not a novel with subplots and flashbacks but a single story with a single, linear narrative line.*
>
> *Daryl Bem*

The plots of the best journal articles are informed by empirical findings. As an author, you should write the article that makes the most sense once you have seen the experimental results. This means you may need to throw out some hypotheses that didn't work out or distract the reader from the main contribution of your research because these create subplots and dilute the research contribution. These initial hypotheses may have been helpful to the historical development of your research, but lacking empirical support, they have become unnecessary subplots. Be aware and wary of such subplots, which can frequently become tangents or second story lines.

It is important to ask: What subplots have been included in your paper? Are the subplots consistent with the primary plot? Your focus, your research contribution, tells you what to leave out and helps you to identify subplots. As we discussed in the narrative focus section, in crafting a research article we are formulating the gist of the idea that we hope readers will be able to recall. We cannot expect readers to remember every detail of a paper, even while reading an article. If we create too many twists and turns in the plot, the reader will most likely get lost. Our recommendation is: "Look for clutter in your writing and prune it ruthlessly" (Zinsser, 2006, p. 16). In particular, eliminate subplots. Make sure every word and idea expressed in your paper contributes to your focus, the research contribution. Anything that veers off that topic is unnecessary and should be eliminated from the paper.

Polishing the research narrative

> *In one sense, the polishing is the least important phase of any writing project…But it's the polish that more discriminating readers see when they first encounter your writing.*
>
> *Jack Hart*

Once a piece of writing has been handed to the reader, "It belongs to the reader" (Gopen, 2004, p. 9). The writer cannot stand next to the reader and correct misunderstandings as they occur. The polishing phase of the writing process is your opportunity to anticipate potential areas for reader misunderstandings and to tighten the reader's grasp of the research focus. If the writing is not polished, if it is unclear, then the ideas will be lost on the reader. "No capable writer turns in finished copy material marred by the errors that shout 'amateur!'" (Hart, 2006, p. 219). Even small errors, such as misspelled words and poor grammar, can negatively impact the reader's assessment of a manuscript.

For some insight into how readers might form initial evaluations of research papers, we turn to some recent research in social psychology. Research on "thin slice" judgments has demonstrated that people, under certain circumstances, are able to make accurate assessments of others based on very brief observations (Ambady, Krabbenhoft, & Hogan 2006). We would like to extend the notion of thin slice judgments to reviewing papers, where thin slice judgments of papers are often formed relatively quickly based on the reader's assessment of several cues including spelling, grammar, a paper's title, references and abstract. In the case of poor writing lacking polish (e.g. spelling mistakes, overly complex grammatical forms, etc.), a thin slice judgment after an initial encounter with just a few 'errors' may evoke negative schemas about poorly written papers and trigger negative thinking.

Much research has shown that thin slice judgments are automatic (Alba, 2006; Ambady et al., 2006; Kardes, 2006; Peracchio & Luna, 2006). In addition, conditions of high involvement are required to update and change these initial thin slice impressions. From the author's perspective, the reader's effort would be better spent on understanding the research focus and on comprehending and remembering the empirical findings rather than on correcting a negative thin slice judgment. Thin slice judgments also evoke an emotional response. The affective reaction to poorly written work is almost certainly negative. Negative affect may spill over onto the reader's attitude towards the paper and may also lead to the reader to distance him or herself from becoming engaged with the material. Minor grammatical and spelling errors can hinder the transportation process discussed in the earlier story quality section, breaking the flow of the writing and undermining the ideas presented by the text (Green & Brock, 2000). The result of these processes may leave the reader unhappy about what he/she is reading, with a poor assessment of both the paper and the ideas presented in the text.

> *If an idea is presented in a sloppy, disorganized fashion, how is one to know whether this fashion of presentation reflects the quality of the idea or merely the quality of its presentation?*
>
> *Robert Sternberg*

Authors sometimes neglect to polish their papers. This is a major miscalculation on an author's part. We believe readers, reviewers, and even editors form "thin slice" judgments of papers based on a handful of cues that are assessed early on in the reading process (Ambady et al., 2006). Consistent with research on thin slice judgments, Dunning's (2006) work on belief harmonization points to the automatic nature of judgment and suggest that as people make judgments they revise their beliefs to eliminate inconsistency. If poor writing causes a reviewer to develop a negative belief about your paper, then other, more subjective, beliefs about your manuscript may be revised downward, diminishing the reviewer's assessment of your manuscript. Therefore, little things matter. A misspelled word can signal that the authors didn't care enough about their work to run an extra spell check. If the authors don't care enough to do that, can a reviewer expect them to have carefully crafted the conceptual development section of their paper? If the sentences describing the empirical results are unclear, can a reviewer trust that the statistical analyses were performed correctly?

Be sure to begin the polishing process on the title page of your paper: take the extra time to create a title that tells what article is about and captures attention. Similarly, carefully construct the research abstract to encapsulate the key ideas and findings of your article. The title and abstract can help you make a good first impression (Sternberg, 2000). Then, carefully edit the entire document. Throughout the paper, remember to keep

the reader in mind. "Clear writing requires empathy. The ability to see things from the reader's viewpoint determines when a message gets through or not" (Hart, 2006, p. 110). A reader-response approach to writing acknowledges the probable knowledge, expectations, and motives of the reader (Scott, 1994). Be sure to follow the style guide for the journal you are targeting, a signal that you crafted your work specifically for that publication. Select relevant and up-to-date references. Check that grammar and spelling are accurate. Be careful about overusing synonyms: we've been taught its good practice to use different words to refer to the same concept to avoid redundancy; however, in a technical article, the reader may wonder if different meanings are implied (Bem, 2000). Check your manuscript for flow: segues, overviews, and summaries can guide your reader through the document. Prose that leads the reader astray earlier in the paper often results in reader misunderstanding in subsequent sections of the paper. During the polishing stage of the writing process, refine your work to make it more focused, forceful, rhythmic, clear and concise (Hart, 2006). Polish is essential.

Conclusion

Stories have been with us throughout time (Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004). Many scholars assert that people naturally tend to think about and interpret the world around them through narrative thought (e.g., Bruner, 1986, 1990; Kerby, 1991). Bruner (1986) even suggests a genetic proclivity for narrative. He proposes that the reason people have no early infancy memories is that they are unable to organize events in narrative form at that stage of development. Much research provides evidence that narrative thinking is extremely pervasive, such that "all of our knowledge is contained in stories and the mechanisms to construct and retrieve them" (Schank & Abelson, 1995, p. 1). People's inclination for narrative processing is so ubiquitous, respondents in studies have spontaneously created stories to explain the random movement of colored rectangles, attributing causality to the movement (Michotte, 1963 in Hermans, 1996). Perhaps narrative thought is universal because it captures the experiential aspect of human intention, action, and consequences; it involves reasons and goals (Riessman, 1993).

Given that stories are the way human beings naturally think about themselves and their world, what better way for authors to communicate empirical consumer psychology findings than to feature them within a story? A well-told story can powerfully convey the contribution of consumer psychology research. Our narrative-based framework for telling a research story consists of five steps for creating a compelling paper. These steps include focusing on the research contribution, maintaining a consistent plot structure, creating a rich story with your constructs and variables as the main characters, minimizing subplots, and polishing the writing. We assert that researchers who follow these five steps and include a narrative within their papers enhance the odds of publishing their work. In the words of the lead author's six year old daughter, Katie, "Stories are fun to read. And, they help you learn and remember things." So, the next time you write a paper, tell a story.

> *If you can harness imagination and the principles of a well-told story, then you get people rising to their feet amid thunderous applause instead of yawning and ignoring you.*
>
> *Robert McKee*

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