How to make your data stories shine

Hey, everyone, and welcome back. In the last video, we took you through the process of crafting a data story. And in this video, we'll take you through some steps and tips to really make those stories shine.

So first, spend the majority of the time crafting the story. On GitHub, where we keep all of our code and repositories, you can track the progress of a story based on the activity of that repository or how many times that you make commits or change the code in that story. Here we're looking at the commits from my data collection on my story for hyphenated names in pro sports on the bottom and then my front-in build or the visual build that you see on the top. But this really leaves out where I spent most of my time. The story.

Here, I took the liberty of adding in a chart. Full disclosure, you probably shouldn't do this for any data storytelling project because this is one that's made-up data. I estimated it. But to give you an idea of just how much time I spent crafting the story, I've added this chart in. That story chart dwarfs the data and development lines. There's a peak before any of the actual heavy lifting of the data and development starts, and there's one after to make sure that that story comes full circle and what I'm showing is also what I'm telling.

And the story is really, really important because. Right? If you don't have a story, then you're just another pretty project on the Internet.

The second tip is that it's equally important to show as it is to tell. There's a reason that we learn about the concept of show and tell early on in grade school. It works. Both are important for people to learn and absorb. Think of showing as a way of communicating that's a little bit more participatory and collective. It's open for discussion, reactions and feedback, where telling is more like a lecture. You're delivering facts at face value with no response necessary. Combined together, those are pretty powerful. And that's why at The Pudding we're big believers in little things that make graphic special like annotations. Because the graphics themselves show, but the annotations tell.

The other thing to keep in mind is that it's important to know how your audience interacts with your pieces. In an earlier video, I mentioned that 85 percent of New York Times readers never interacted with the piece. And Gregor Aisch, that former member of the New York Times interactive team, says that knowing that the majority of readers don't click buttons doesn't mean you shouldn't use any buttons. And knowing that people will ignore tool tips, doesn't mean you shouldn't use any tool tips or helpers. All it means is that you shouldn't hide that important information behind those interactions.

So we're going to take a look at why interactions can remain useful. And first is, although a lot of readers may never interact with your piece, the most loyal will, the ones that want more information and the ones that are invested in your story. Those are the audience that you really want to target and capture. Interactions also allow readers to dig deep and explore the full dataset, and that means that they can pull back the curtain and make data more transparent and trustworthy. And finally, those interactions can add a lot of whimsy and personality to your story. And those are important for making those emotional connections with your readers.

I mentioned the importance of annotations earlier as a little, small thing that you can add to take your data story to the next level. And Andy Kirk has a wonderful blog that he calls The Little Of Visualization Design, where he catalogs these different techniques that really just add spice, clarity and personality to the graphics.

Here are a few of my favorite things that often get overlooked in data storytelling that The Pudding has used. First, we'll look at something called an orientation assistant or a mini map. In this piece that we called our Hipster Reading List, we looked at books from the Seattle Public Library that hadn't been checked out in forever. The entire pages is a giant book stack, but there's no really way to know how far down these books go until you look at the mini map and this little, tiny book stack on the right of the page. And that gives you a clear idea about where you are in the larger picture.

The second of visualization design that we're going to look at is integrating graphics and labels into the text itself. Here on this piece, we have put this blue line and blue text to indicate that this is what you're seeing in the line below. This eliminates you having to double label the line and makes a clear connection with your reader when they're reading the piece that this is what they're looking at.

Another tool is disappearing small values. Here, this directs the readers eye to the most important values and kind of doubling codes value. One, it's encoded with a size, and then two, it's encoded by the opacity. These little values are still here, and you never lose them. But you just direct the reader elsewhere to the most important content.

We looked at this standup comedy piece on Ali Wong earlier, but this is another great example of a little visualization design. And this is called seamless help. Here, we're placing these pink boxes around the entire perimeter of the page to direct the reader what to do and how to interact with it. It's important that when you're exposing a reader to a nontraditional or different format than they're used to seeing, that you tell them how to use this.

And finally, this is a reader guide in our piece on how you spell celebrity names. It walks you through step by step, how to read these diagrams that you're about to see that are Sankey-esque or Sankey inspired. And then you can see, the final results were all of these diagrams are then presented, and you know how to read them.

The last tip that I want to give you about your data stories is to have fun. It seems like a no brainer, but it's important to remember because if you're having fun telling the story, your audience will have fun consuming the story.

Now I want to walk you through a few of my favorite whimsical bits that we've added to stories at The Pudding and some stories while I was at The Guardian us to show you just exactly how much fun you can have with a data story. Again, we're at The Pudding, so we do a lot of cultural stories and avoid things around the news cycle, which gives us a lot of leeway when we're having this type of fun interactions. You know, we don't want to take a serious topic like stories about abortion or immigration and put these fun doodads in them. But since we're talking a lot about cultural subjects, we have the freedom to do that.

Here, this first piece is a video that we did on NBA three-seconds calls, and I'll play it for you. This section in the bottom right is what you're looking at. It's where a little Lance Stephenson comes and blows the dots to their correct position. If you're an NBA fan, you

know that this gif of Lance Stephenson is very popular. He was trying to throw LeBron James off of his game and blow in his ear, distracting him a little bit. So that is just one way to connect with your reader to make sure that you're including cultural tidbits and cultural moments that they will be able to laugh at.

Here's another great example of a fun character that we added into a story. In this piece, Amber looked at the types of birth control that women across the United States use. And she included this little condom clippy guy in the bottom right corner to help give you a little bit more context and information about each type of birth control. We call them condom clippy because he was modeled after Word's famous paperclip that kept popping up and asking you, "Do you need help?" So in this one, you can kind of click on each of the different types of birth control, and condom clippy will will give you more information.

The next fun bit in a story we'll look at is a piece comparing emo rap to the emo bands of the early 2000s. And this is a little scroll trigger emoji as you slide down. You can see it changes to be just a little bit less sad. I'm giving you an idea of just how sad each of these lyrics are. If you scroll back up, you get the oh my gosh, I'm crying, I'm dying, I'm drowning in my own tears face.

This is a project that I worked on while at The Guardian US with their interactive team, and in itself, it looks like a very outlandish project to begin with. So you're saying, "Woah, the whole thing is fun." But what I really want you to focus on is these little constellations that draw in behind this scary Trump floating orbit, and you'll see that they're all kind of Republican-themed constellations. There was one that was an elephant that just disappeared called the Grand Old Pachyderm. One just came up, called the Bible Belt, and one will come up really soon. There's a bald eagle. So these are just little bitty tidbits that make the story enjoyable.

Here's another one from The Guardian US. This was during the primary elections, where the famous block and painted maps of where candidates won come into place. And they actually use the 8-bit characters to come draw and spray paint in the counties of Iowa themselves. You can see they write in their little machines. There's 8-bit Hillary Clinton and 8-bit Ted Cruz.

Again, having fun in your stories is really important. It makes sure that you're connecting with the reader. It makes sure you're giving them something memorable, and it makes sure that you're meeting them where they are. And that's one of the most important things we can do as data journalists is not ask the audience to come to us. It's to go to them.