



The Seven Pillars of Storytelling

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Foreword

IF I WERE an architect designing a building I would look to nature – to the great creator, to God, if you like – for structures and principles, for design and style, for strength and beauty and for methods that have evolved over time.

As communicators, we can do the same.

In this book reams of theory has been distilled into practical, simple tools for understanding and applying the power of story.

Ever thought why as evolved beings we don't have more useful dreams at night? Why no one dreams in bullet points? Why the film industry is so large? Or why the gaming industry – which loves narrative based games – is even larger? Why we paint the day in stories, not facts, when we come home to our families?

In the Middle East, centuries ago, a bearded man, a familiar boy who'd grown and looked like any other, trained in his father's humble profession, stepped out on to a mountain and delivered simple stories that have been repeated ever since.

Jesus, for me the most effective communicator there ever was, used parables. The man who claimed to be God spoke in simple stories. Stories about things that everyone could relate to, but not everyone interpreted

or completely understood. Why didn't he expand? Why didn't he explain the context and tell people how to apply this knowledge to their lives? How come this big picture, abstract delivery and metaphorical story has left his messages resonating, relevant and powerful in the world today, 2,000 years on?

Imagine a man, working a normal job in a normal office in a very normal city. Holding yet another meeting around another table in another grey room. A TV displays the words he is saying; the occasional chart from Excel. He travels home on the train avoiding eye contact with his fellow commuters. Yet when he arrives home to two excited children, he throws off his jacket, loosens his tie and he's alive. In his own house the man becomes a prince, a witch, a gorilla, the fair princess herself, then a monster, acting out an entire wedding – leaving his audience happy and enthralled.

In this book reams of theory has been distilled into practical, simple tools for understanding and applying the power of story.

I hope it goes some way to inspire us all to push creativity into work and education as we take increasing steps to use story, art and our God-like nature to connect with our audiences.

- Jon Air, Sparkol Founder

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Introduction:

The power of story

IMAGINE BOOKING IN to your Las Vegas hotel. You make your way to your room and begin to unpack but – horror! You forgot to bring your favourite going-out-shoes.

You bought them on the internet so you jump online to see if you can get another pair delivered to the hotel. But they're no longer on the site. Worried, you call the retailer's concierge service. Unfortunately they don't stock the shoes any longer and, dejected, you assume that's the end of the story. It's not.

The company's headquarters are just outside Las Vegas. The team immediately tracks down a pair of the shoes at a rival store in a local mall. They then drive downtown, purchase the shoes and hand-deliver them to your hotel, without charging a penny. Imagine if that kind of service existed.

It does. This tale about one woman's service from Zappos has been making the rounds since 2011. Zappos is still held up today as a company that treats its customers right. They've sent flowers to a sick customer and rescued a best man whose wedding shoes got lost in the mail.

In these moments of connection, Zappos gained lifelong customers and – crucially – contributed to a narrative about the company. A narrative that fits their vision of providing the best customer service on the planet.

How to win at Christmas

Or take John Lewis. Five years ago the UK retailer took a risk and hired a new agency to produce its renowned Christmas adverts. What the agency did over the next few years would send them stratospheric.

What revolutionary approach did the new ad agency take? Exactly what cave people did around the fire all those millennia ago. They told stories.

The 2011 advert contributed to a 9.3% year-on-year increase of sales and garnered an incredible response on social media.

The following year, using the same approach, John Lewis's seasonal sales went up a staggering 44.3%. A year later they had their most popular campaign to date and the 2014 Christmas video bagged more than 24 million views on YouTube alone.

By this point the retailer's Christmas adverts were more than marketing. They had become cultural events, part of the countdown to Christmas in the UK. They spawned media commentary, critical reviews, social trends and spoof and tribute versions of the ads.

So what revolutionary approach did the new ad agency take?

It was exactly what cave people did around the fire all those millennia ago. They told stories.

Instead of showcasing products, making promotional offers or claims about value, John Lewis told sweet little stories, each with a heavy layer of emotion helped by a schmaltzy cover song.

There was a boy who couldn't wait until Christmas – so that he could give a present to his parents. There was a snowman who ran away – only to return with a gift for his snow-woman. A lonely penguin who trudged downstairs on 25 December – to find a partner under the Christmas tree.



John Lewis Christmas ad 2014

These adverts do what great stories always have. They tug on the heartstrings and appeal to fundamental human desires – to contribute, to be included, to be loved. They build up dramatic tension and deliver an emotional denouement. They create a narrative that we relate to, that we want to share with others. They harness the power of story.

That's what this book is about. Harnessing the power of story for you. You'll learn the seven pillars of good storytelling for repeat success engaging with your audience or market.

Our brains are wired for stories

Jennifer Aaker from Stanford's Graduate School of Business was curious about storytelling's ability

to make us remember things. She had each of her students give a 60-second product pitch, secretly instructing one student to focus on telling the story rather than the facts. Her class wrote down whatever they could remember about each pitch. The results were astounding.

Only five percent of students remembered the stats, but a whole 63% remembered the story. Aaker argues:

When most people advocate for an idea we think of a compelling argument, a fact or a figure [...] But research shows that our brains are not hard-wired to understand logic or retain facts for very long. Our brains are wired to understand and retain stories.

So much so that a story can be 22 times more memorable than facts alone.



Jennifer Aaker: Harnessing the Power of Stories

When you listen to a boring presentation full of facts and figures, two parts of your brain are activated. They're mostly responsible for language processing – giving meaning to the words we hear.

When you're told a story, however, your whole brain wakes up. In addition to the language parts, the parts responsible for sensation and emotion also spring to life – and you experience the story's events almost as if you were living them. Freaky.

The brain doesn't look like a spectator, it looks more like a participant in the action. When Clint Eastwood is angry on screen, the viewers' brains look angry too; when the scene is sad, the viewers' brains also look sad.

– *Jonathan Gottschall, Fastcocreate*

Even freakier, in 2010 a group of neuroscientists at Princeton University hooked both storytellers and their listeners to an fMRI machine as a story was told. They were amazed to discover that when a person tells a story to another person, both their brains show nearly identical activity across most areas. Their brains effectively 'sync up' with one another in a phenomenon known as neural coupling. That's how to connect with your audience.

**92% of consumers want brands to
make ads that feel like a story.**

Other studies using MRI neuro-imagery have shown that, when evaluating brands, consumers primarily use their emotions (feelings and experiences) rather than information (brand attributes, features and facts).

This isn't a subconscious preference either. Your audience are well aware of what they like – 92% of consumers want brands to make ads that feel like a story.

No wonder John Lewis won at Christmas.

Storytelling is your most powerful means of communication

When you think about ad campaigns from Apple or Nike, Guinness or Innocent, you realise that the products aren't centre stage. Instead, they focus on brand ethos, what they stand for. People buy into the story – a mythology that they want to belong to.

We're tired of traditional marketing.
Facts, figures and bold claims bore us.
We switch off at aggressive adverts.
But stories? We're hardwired to see stories as a gift.

We're tired of traditional marketing. Facts, figures and bold claims bore us. We switch off at aggressive adverts. But stories? We're hardwired to see stories as a gift.

Nowadays, the ads that get shared are those that inspire the audience.

Stories help our audience understand who we are. More importantly, they give them a reason to interact with us, to join us on our journey.

And the good news is that you don't need a £7million Christmas budget or a 90-minute Lego Movie script to create a narrative that moves your audience.

What about tweaking your marketing content to focus less on the features of your product and more on the feeling your product gives people? Or finding a way to share the *why* behind your business in your

next presentation? Or spreading the story of a customer whose life you helped to change?

Businesses are using stories to inspire their own workforces, to explain who they are, to capture and transfer knowledge, build communities and engage their customers. They're discovering that having a strong narrative helps a business form a solid identity, ready to innovate and grow.

Storytelling doesn't come naturally to everyone. That's why we wrote this book. We want to show you how stories are put together, in a way that you can easily apply to your own situation.

You don't have to devise elaborate characters and backstories. You just need to understand what kind of stories will work for you. The following seven chapters cover everything from finding your identity as a business, to identifying heroes and villains.

It's time to find your story.

Emotion:

How to give your story a heart

WHAT MAKES SOME stories connect with their audience, while others are forgotten straight away? What is it that makes people feel involved, that gets them on your side – ready to act on what they've heard?

Whether your story is being written, recorded, presented onstage or shouted from the rooftops, these five simple principles will give it emotional impact.



The hero



The villain



The dispatcher



The (magical) helper



The princess



The donor



The false hero

1. Keep it simple

Most stories follow a pretty basic structure, with only a handful of character types to choose from.

These include:

- *The hero*: the protagonist must be friendly and relatable
- *The villain*: struggles against the hero
- *The dispatcher*: character who sends the hero off
- *The (magical) helper*: helps the hero in their quest
- *The princess (or prize)*: the hero deserves her throughout the story but is unable to marry her because of an unfair evil. The hero's journey is often ended when he marries the princess
- *The donor*: prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object
- *The false hero*: takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess

If you're selling bathroom cleaner, you could place your viewer at the centre of the story as the hero with a grimy bathroom. Your product could be the magical object or helper. The villain could be the germs – you get the picture.

Alternatively, you could make your customer the princess who needs saving, and your product the hero. There are many different ways of looking at this, but thinking about roles will help you figure out how all these pieces fit together.

It's the same if your video promotes an idea. You might not be selling a physical product, but your idea can still be the thing that helps the hero complete his quest and live happily ever after.

2. Create and satisfy desire

To convince people of your product or idea, you should show that your product fulfils a need or desire that they have.

In most stories, everything is fine at the beginning before something bad happens and the hero has to fight to make things okay again.

Your customer was getting on quite happily until mildew started destroying their bathroom. You have to demonstrate how your germ-busting product is going to put things right. Think about interesting ways to show the customer that your product will restore the equilibrium to their life. Even better, show them how it will improve their lives forever.

Make achieving a new goal an exciting, rewarding process and your audience will never be bored again.

If you're working in a learning environment, consider tantalising your audience with half-told stories. Tell only half of an intriguing tale and work your way gradually through the information that needs to be learnt, with the promise of learning the outcome at the end.

Alternatively, try working the information into the story itself. What if your hero were to progress each time he or she completed a module? Make achieving a new goal an exciting, rewarding process and your audience will never be bored by the subject matter again.

3. Make it memorable

The stories we tell might all be roughly the same, but you need to define what makes you special. Endless facts might seem the logical way to highlight success or transfer information, but stories are actually the perfect format for creating a lasting impression.

Lois Geller, a marketer and writer for Forbes, believes these four factors are key to a memorable advert:

- Disruptive and relevant visuals
- Strong brand identification
- A brilliant headline
- ‘Something else’

The ‘something else’ is a variable, but often it’s something that inspires curiosity. You want your viewer to ask ‘What’s going on here? This looks interesting’. Hopefully you already have a good idea of what it is that makes your product or idea unique.

4. Be conversational

Imagine you’re telling your story to just one person, a loved one for example. Write as if you were speaking directly to them and them only. Conversations are two-way, so ask questions throughout – even if you answer them yourself.

To make your story memorable, be selective about what information you include. Choose words that your listeners use every day. Replace jargon with everyday words.

Make sure the language you choose is positive and inspiring, not accidentally negative.

For example, 'this video makes learning x easy!' is far more inspiring than 'this video will make learning x less difficult'.

5. Respect your listeners

It's important to be confident in your delivery but also to remember that this is not about you.

**Don't talk about how great you are –
you show how happy your customers
are instead.**

There's a big difference between telling a story and making a sales pitch. If your story is about how you help customers overcome hurdles, show clearly how you do it. This doesn't mean you should talk about how great you are – you show how happy your customers are instead.

Start sentences with you and your instead of I or we. For example, 'Our product is brilliant at removing mildew' is weak compared to '96% of you said you removed more mildew than ever before.'

These five principles are pretty simple, yet they are foundational for telling a story with heart.

But how do you go about deciding what kind of story to tell in the first place?

There's a simple way to do that too. Recognising the universal plots that underpin all stories makes it much easier. In the next chapter we'll learn how to find the right one to bring your message alive for your audience.

Plot:

The 7 universal story plots that entrance audiences

IN THE SEVEN Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories, Christopher Booker explains how our best-loved stories throughout history fall into only 7 distinct story types. He follows in a long line of theorists who have tried to explain why storytelling is such a universally powerful means of communication.

Try to think of a book, film or play that doesn't fit one of these plot types.

This isn't a foolproof list by any means – but just try to think of a book, film or play that doesn't fit one of these plot types.

1. Overcoming the monster

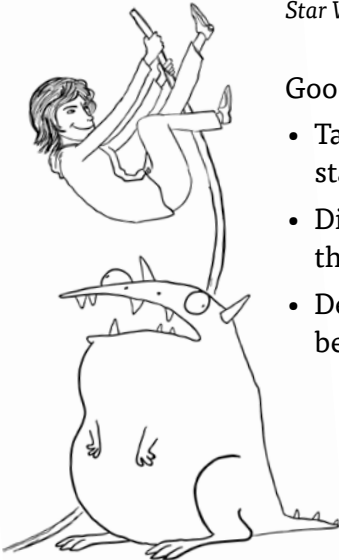
What do Beowulf and *Star Wars: A New Hope* have in common? In both those stories the main character sets out to defeat a powerful baddie or evil force that is threatening his or her home.

Often it will seem that the odds are stacked against the hero, but their courage and resourcefulness will help the hero overcome the threat.

See: David and Goliath, Star Wars, Avatar.



Star Wars A New Hope 1977 Trailer



Good for:

- Talking about succeeding despite the odds being stacked against you
- Discussing the life lessons that an encounter like this teaches you
- Demonstrating how you, your team or company became stronger through adversity

2. Rags to riches

A hero from humble beginnings gains the thing that she wants – money, power, a partner – before losing it and having to fight to get it back again.

The main character usually bites off more than she can chew and can't cope with her success – before growing personally and regaining what she desires.

See: Cinderella, Great Expectations, The Wolf of Wall Street.



Great Expectations Official Trailer #1 (2013)

Good for:

- Talking about the importance of owning up to your mistakes
- Discussing the benefits of taking risks and accepting vulnerabilities
- Demonstrating how your protagonist earned their present-day success





3. Voyage and return

The main character travels to an unfamiliar place, meeting new characters and overcoming a series of trials, all the while trying to get home. Her new friendships and newfound wisdom allow her to find her way back again.

This plot is common in children's literature because it often involves the main character discovering a magical land to explore.

See: *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *O Brother Where Art Thou*.



Alice in Wonderland - Original 1951 Trailer (Walt Disney)

Good for:

- Talking about the benefits of opening up to new experiences
- Showing what your protagonist learned on their travels
- Demonstrating the power of friendship

4. The quest

The hero sets out in search of a specific prize, overcoming a series of challenges and temptations. She may have flaws which have held her back in the past which she will need to overcome to succeed.

She is usually accompanied by a group of comrades with complementary skills that support her along the way.

See: Raiders of the Lost Ark, The Lord of the Rings, Percy Jackson: The Lightning Thief.

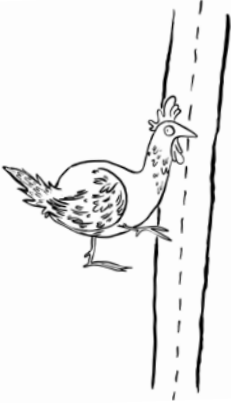


The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring Official Trailer

Good for:

- Talking about the importance of sticking to your convictions
- Showing how your protagonist grows emotionally to be able to succeed
- Demonstrating the power of teamwork





5. Comedy

A comedy is a light-hearted story which centers on some confusion (often involving misunderstandings or mistaken identities) leading to conflict before a happy conclusion and celebrations.

Sometimes the comedy will focus on a hero and a heroine who are destined to be together – but outside forces keep driving them apart. In the end the confusion is cleared up and everyone resumes his or her true identity.

See: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Freaky Friday*, *The Proposal*.



The Proposal - Trailer

Good for:

- Talking about the early difficulties of a partnership – romantic, social or business
- Discussing what your protagonist learned from negotiating a difficult situation
- Demonstrating how both parties now accommodate and support each other

6. Tragedy

The main character is essentially good but flawed and frustrated. She faces temptation and is compelled to break the rules of society, setting in motion a series of events that lead to either her downfall or death.

Sometimes the character comes to regret her choices towards the end of the story, but often it is too late and she dies or is ruined anyway. The downfall of this character is alternately presented as a positive or negative event.

See: *Dorian Gray*, *Scarface*, *Sweeney Todd*.



Sweeney Todd Trailer

Good for:

- Using the principle character to represent and explain a wider problem in society
- Contrasting your own values and principles with theirs
- Demonstrating how not to do things and what we can learn from their mistakes





7. Rebirth

The main character is a bad or unpleasant person who is shown the error of his ways and redeems himself over the course of the story.

Usually it takes a redemption figure to help the villain make this transition. Redemption figures usually come in the form of a child or the main character's love interest, and her job is to reveal how warped the villain's worldview is and to show him love.

See: *Beauty and the Beast*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Despicable Me*.



Despicable Me – Official 2010 Trailer

Good for:

- Talking about an enlightening experience
- Showing the importance of having support from loved ones
- Demonstrating that everyone has the capacity to change for the better

Of course, these plot types aren't the be-all and end-all of storytelling. If you have an idea that fits outside of these categories, or even combines a couple of them – great! But they give you some starting points to choose the plot type that best amplifies your message.

Who said you should always start at the beginning?

The plot is only the start of your journey – next, you need to choose how you're going to tell it. In the following chapter you'll learn eight different ways to structure a plot that have worked again and again throughout history.

Who said you should always start at the beginning?

Structure:

8 Classic techniques for engaging stories

HUMANS ARE HARDWIRED for stories. They love heroes, journeys, surprises, layers and happy endings. Deliver content that captures the hearts and heads of your audience by stealing one of these classic storytelling techniques. Start with the story – the rest will be history.



1. Monomyth

The monomyth, also called the hero's journey, is a story structure found in many folk tales, myths and religious writings from around the world.

In a monomyth, the hero is called to leave their home and sets out on a difficult journey. She moves from somewhere she knows into a threatening unknown place.

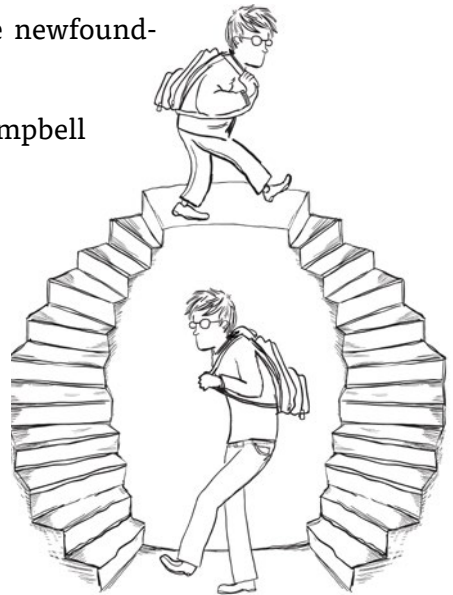
After overcoming a great trial, she returns home with a reward or newfound wisdom – something which will help her community. Lots of modern stories still follow this structure, from the Lion King to Star Wars.

Using the monomyth to shape your presentation can help you explain what has brought you to the wisdom you want to share.

Good for:

- Taking the audience on a journey
- Showing the benefit of taking risks
- Demonstrating how you learned some newfound wisdom

See also: [The Hero's Journey](#) by Joseph Campbell



Japanese yo-yo-er BLACK tells the inspiring story of finding his life's passion, and the difficult path he took to become world champion. He closes by sharing his newfound skills with the audience, bringing his journey full circle.



BLACK: My journey to yo-yo mastery

2. The mountain

The mountain structure is a way of mapping the tension and drama in a story. It's similar to the monomyth because it helps us to plot when certain events occur in a story.

It's different because it doesn't necessarily have a happy ending. The first part of the story is given to setting the scene, and is followed by just a series of small challenges and rising action before a climactic conclusion.

It's a bit like a TV series – each episode has its ups and downs, all building up to a big finale at the end of the season.

32 Structure: 8 Classic techniques for engaging stories

Good for:

- Showing how you overcame a series of challenges
- Slowly building tension
- Delivering a satisfying conclusion

See also: [This interactive mountain diagram at readthinkwrite.org](http://readthinkwrite.org)

Aimee Mullins uses a mountain structure speech to tell a personal story – from being born without fibula bones in her lower legs to becoming a famous athlete, actress and model.



Aimee Mullins: The opportunity of adversity

3. Nested loops

Nested loops is a storytelling technique where you layer three or more narratives within each other.

You place your most important story – the core of your message – in the centre, and use the stories around it to elaborate or explain that central principle.

Successful organizations place the ‘why?’ of what they do at the centre, surrounded by the ‘what?’ and ‘how?’

The first story you begin is the last story you finish, the second story you start is second to last, etc.

Imagine a friend telling you about a wise person in their life, someone who taught them an important lesson. The first loops are your friend’s story, the second loops are the wise person’s story. At the centre is the important lesson.

Good for:

- Explaining the process of how you were inspired and came to a conclusion
- Using analogies to explain a central concept
- Showing how a piece of wisdom was passed along to you

See also: [Simon Sinek’s TED talk](#) shows how successful organizations place the ‘why?’ of what they do at the centre, surrounded by the ‘what?’ and ‘how?’ of their business. Nested loops are an ideal way of framing this message, giving your audience a real insight into your identity.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie uses the framework of her experiences in university and the way that Africa is perceived in the Western world to drive home her argument about stories.



The Danger of a Single Story | Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

4. Sparklines

Sparklines are a way of mapping presentation structures. Graphic designer Nancy Duarte uses sparklines to analyse famous speeches graphically in her book *Resonate*.

She argues that the very best speeches succeed because they contrast our ordinary world with an ideal, improved world. They compare what is with what *could be*.

By doing this the presenter draws attention to the problems we have in our society, our personal lives, our businesses. The presenter creates and fuels a desire for change in the audience.

It's a highly emotional technique that is sure to motivate your audience to support you.

Good for:

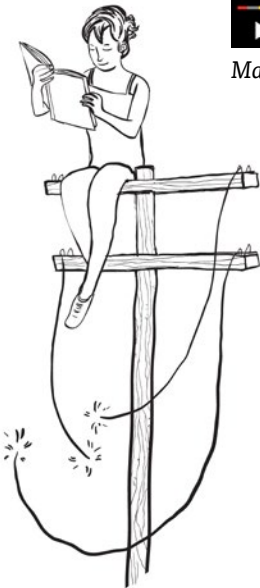
- Inspiring the audience to action
- Creating hope and excitement
- Creating a following

See also: [Resonate](#) by Nancy Duarte

Martin Luther King's speech is famous the world over because it contrasts the racist, intolerant society of the day with an ideal future society where all races are treated equally.



Martin Luther King, Jr. I Have A Dream Speech



5. In medias res

In medias res storytelling is when you begin your narrative in the heat of the action, before starting over at the beginning to explain how you got there.

Dropping your audience right into the most exciting part of your story they'll be gripped from the beginning and will stay engaged to find out what happens.

By dropping your audience right into the most exciting part of your story they'll be gripped from the beginning and will stay engaged to find out what happens.

But be careful – you don't want to give away too much of the action straight away. Try hinting at something bizarre or unexpected – something that needs more explanation. Give your audience just enough information to keep them hooked, as you go back and set the scene of your story.

This only works for shorter presentations though – if you string it out too long your audience will get frustrated and lose interest.

Good for:

- Grabbing attention from the start
- Keep an audience craving resolution
- Focusing attention on a pivotal moment in your story

See also: [An overview of in medias res storytelling at story-papers.com](http://story-papers.com)

Zak Ebrahim begins his talk with the revelation that his father helped plan the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing. His audience is gripped from the beginning, as he begins to recount the events of his childhood and the path he took after his father's conviction.



Zak Ebrahim: I am the son of a terrorist. Here's how I chose peace.

6. Converging ideas

Converging ideas is a speech structure that shows the audience how different strands of thinking came together to form one product or idea.

It can be used to show the birth of a movement. Or explain how a single idea was the culmination of several great minds working towards one goal.

Converging ideas is similar to the nested loops structure, but rather than framing one story with complementary stories, it can show how several equally important stories came to a single strong conclusion.

This technique could be used to tell the stories of some of the world's greatest partnerships – for example, web developers Larry Page and Sergey Brin.



38 Structure: 8 Classic techniques for engaging stories

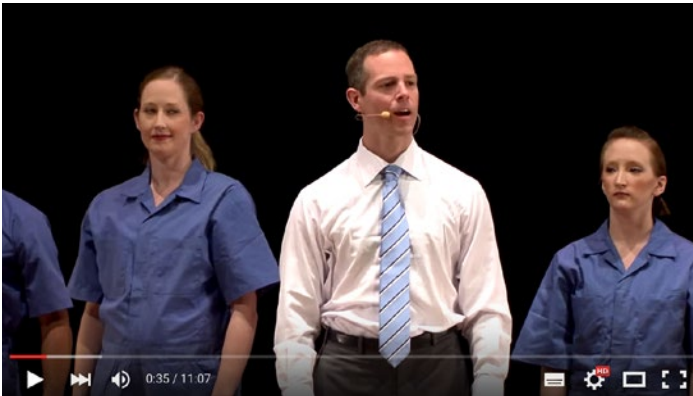
Larry and Sergey met at Stanford's PhD program in 1995, but they didn't like each other at first. They both had great ideas, but found working together hard. Eventually they found themselves working on a research project together. A research project that became Google.

Good for:

- Showing how great minds came together
- Demonstrating how a development occurred at a certain point in history
- Showing how symbiotic relationships have formed

See also: [Steven Johnson's TED talk](#), where he explains how collaboration has fuelled some of history's best ideas.

John Bohannon and the Black Label Movement explain (verbally and through dance) how scientists and dancers came together to form an exciting, dynamic alternative to boring presentations.



Dance your PhD: John Bohannon & Black Label Movement

7. False start

A false start story is when you begin to tell a seemingly predictable story, before unexpectedly disrupting it and beginning it over again. You lure your audience into a false sense of security, and then shock them by turning the tables.

Use a false start to go back and retell your own story in a surprising way.

This format is great for talking about a time that you failed in something and were forced to go back to the start and reassess. It's ideal for talking about the things that you learnt from that experience. Or the innovative way that you solved your problem.

But best of all, it's a quick attention hack which will disrupt your audience's expectations and surprise them into paying closer attention to your message.

Good for:

- Disrupting audience expectations
- Showing the benefits of a flexible approach
- Keeping the audience engaged

See also: Retroactive continuity is when a storyteller goes back and alters the 'facts' in their story. If you are a character in the story you're telling, you can use a false start to go back and retell your own story in a surprising way.

JK Rowling begins her speech at Harvard in a typical fashion. She talks about her time at university and the expectations of her parents. The audience expects her to talk about the growing success of her writing career – instead she focuses on a time in her twenties where she felt she had ‘failed’ in life. What comes next is inspirational.



JK Rowling speech at Harvard 2008 commencement

8. Petal structure

The petal structure is a way of organising multiple speakers or stories around one central concept. It's useful if you have several unconnected stories you want to tell or things you want to reveal – that all relate back to a single message.

You tell your stories one by one before returning back to the centre. The petals can overlap as one story introduces the next but each should be a complete narrative in itself.

In doing so, you can weave a rich tapestry of evidence around your central theory. Or strong emotional impressions around your idea.

By showing your audience how all these key stories are related to one another, you leave them feeling the true importance and weight of your message.

Good for:

- Demonstrating how strands of a story or process are interconnected
- Showing how several scenarios relate back to one idea
- Letting multiple speakers talk around a central theme

See also: [Carnegie Mellon University's guide to story nodes.](#)

Simon Sinek again! His theory might lend itself perfectly to nested loops, but he himself chose to deliver his talk in a petal structure. He tells his audience a series of stories to help illustrate his ideas, each one strengthening his message further.



Simon Sinek: How great leaders inspire action

Of course there are many other storytelling techniques that you can use. What we hope this chapter has done is inspire you to think differently about how you can tell your own story.

**Find your voice – and the stories will
often tell themselves.**

With that in mind, let's move on to voice. The voice that tells the story has a massive influence on how it's received by your audience. Find your voice – and the stories will often tell themselves.

Voice:

The 12 archetypes all successful brands use

WHY DO SO many films seem to have the exact same characters in them? The rugged action hero with a tortured past. The quirky romantic who can't do anything right. The wise cop drowning his sorrows in Scotch.

These characters seem to pop up all the time in books and films – and in the ways we categorise real people too. Psychologist Carl Jung believed that some story characters are instantly familiar to us because they are primal and instinctive, part of a 'collective unconscious' we all share.

These all-too-familiar characters are called Jungian archetypes.

Jungian archetypes have been adopted and examined by all sorts of groups. New Age spiritualists. Biologists. And now branding experts.

Branding agencies will charge a premium to work out which personality types your target audience are likely to have. Then they create an identity and strategy for your business that appeals to those types.

But it needn't be complicated – explore the list below to finding a style that speaks to you.

If you can work out what archetypes your business fits, you can work out what kind of stories you need to tell and find the voice that tells them the best.

1. The Innocent

aka The Dreamer, The Romantic

The innocent's core desire is to be free and happy, and her biggest fear is to do something wrong and be punished for it. Think Wall-E, or Audrey Hepburn in every one of her films. At their best innocents are optimistic, honest and enthusiastic – at their worst they are irritating, boring and childish.

The innocent customer prefers straight-talking, gimmick-free advertising, and is naturally drawn to optimistic brands. Heavy-handed or guilt-inducing advertising is likely to repulse her.



Innocent brands promise simplicity.

Innocent-focused businesses promote themselves as pure, simple and trustworthy. The imagery they use is often natural and unfussy. The worst thing that can happen to an innocent business is uncovered corruption or deceit.

Who does this well?

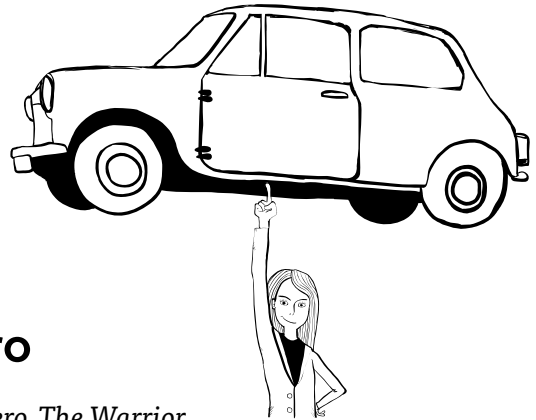
(You guessed it) Innocent smoothies!

This advert's calm, wholesome imagery and straightforward language is specially crafted to appeal to innocent types. It's like a smile coming from your TV set.

See also – McDonald's, Original Source.



Innocent Drinks' first television commercial | Toast TV



2. The Hero

aka The Superhero, The Warrior

The hero's main motivator is to prove his or her worth, and the greatest fear is weakness and failure. Think Erin Brokovich or Michael Jordan. At their best they are brave, determined and skilful – at their worst they are arrogant, aggressive and ruthless.

Hero customers value quality and efficiency in their products. They like to think their consumer choices will put them ahead of everyone else, and aren't likely to be swayed by cute or funny adverts.

Hero brands promise triumph.

Hero businesses promote themselves as good quality and superior to their competition. The worst thing that can happen to a hero business is for a competitor to be rated higher or proven to be better value.

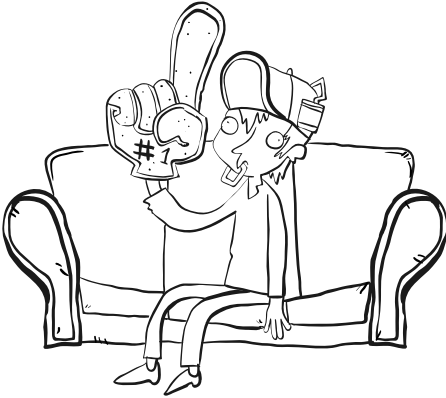
Who does this well?

This advert from Duracell is pure warrior – confident and competitive. When your product is a power supply, your message needs to be powerful too.



Duracell Furby Commercial

See also – [FedEx](#), [Nike](#)



3. The Regular Guy

aka The Everyman, The Good Guy

The regular guy or girl only wants to belong and feel a part of something, and his or her greatest fear is to be left out or to stand out from the crowd. Think Bilbo Baggins or Homer Simpson. At best they are friendly, empathetic and reliable – at worst they are weak, superficial and suggestible.

Everymen appreciate quality and dependability in their brands. They prefer the familiar to the strange, and will emotionally invest in brands they trust.

Regular guy brands promise belonging.

Regular guy businesses are proud of their down-to-earth ethos. Their image is honest and dependable. The worst thing to happen to a regular guy business would be for them to appear greedy or elitist.

Who does this well?

This Carling advert celebrates comfortable blokey friendship. It shows common birthday rituals surviving even in the harshest conditions, elevating these average Joes to the status of heroes.



Carling Belong Explorer ad

See also – [Vodafone](#), the [This Girl Can](#) campaign

4. The Nurturer

aka The Saint, The Parent

The nurturer is driven by her need to protect and care for others, and her worst fear is selfishness and ingratitude for her sacrifices. Think Maria from *The Sound of Music*, or Ghandi. On the positive side nurturers are compassionate, generous and strong. On the negative they are masochistic, manipulative and codependent.

Aggressive adverts are a massive turn-off.

Nurturer customers want to be recognised for their effort, without being patronised. Aggressive adverts are a massive turn-off whereas emotionally-driven adverts often strike a chord.

Nurturer brands promise recognition.

Nurturer businesses offer protection, safety and support to their customers. The worst thing that can happen to a nurturer business is that their products are shown to be harmful or exploitative.

Who does this well?

SMA is the epitome of a nurturer brand. The actual consumers of the product might be babies, but they know the best way to make a sale is to appeal to their underappreciated mums.



SMA Nutrition TV Ad: *You're Doing Great* (Extended Version)



See also – [Ford, Go Compare](#)



5. The Creator

aka The Artist, The Dreamer

The creator is driven by her desire to produce exceptional and enduring works, and she is most afraid of mediocrity. Think Frida Kahlo or Doc Brown in *Back to the Future*. At their best they are imaginative, expressive and innovative – at their worst they are self-indulgent, melodramatic and narcissistic.

Creator customers shun advertising in general but may enjoy experimental, boundary-pushing or novel ads. Creator types are a difficult category to appeal to, but successful creator brands often develop a devout fanbase.

Creator brands promise authenticity.

Creator brands often position themselves as the key to unlocking creativity. The worst thing a creator brand can be perceived as is inauthentic or ‘sell-out’.

Who does this well?

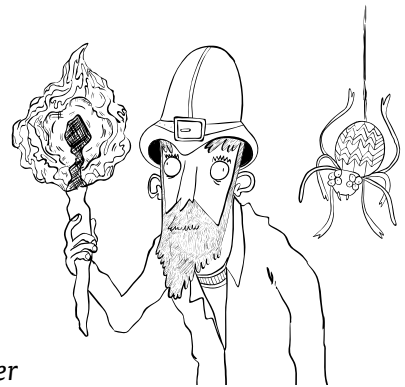
Apple has the creator brand identity nailed. In contrast to Microsoft, which values facts and order, Apple promotes its products as the ultimate creative tools and champions the artistic efforts of its users.





Apple iPad Air 2 ad - Change (2014)

See also – [Lego](#), [Canon](#)



6. The Explorer

aka The Seeker, The Wanderer

The explorer craves adventure and wants to discover the world for herself. She fears conformity and inner emptiness. Think Amelia Earhart or Indiana Jones. On a good day they are independent, ambitious and spiritual. On a bad day they are restless, aimless and flaky.

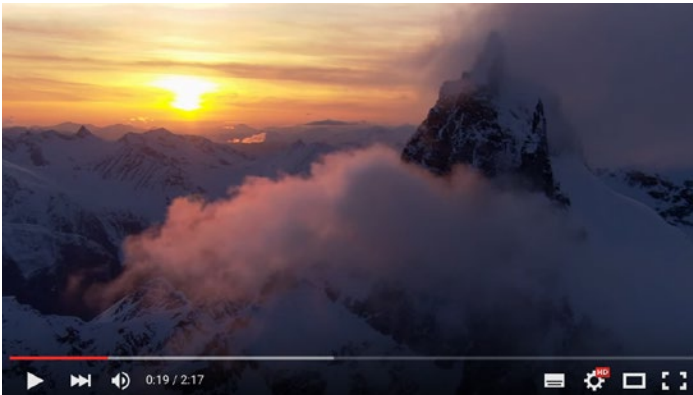
Explorer customers embrace brands that promote freedom and self-discovery, especially those that invite the customer to embark on a journey with them. They are unlikely to be swayed by domestic-focused ads.

Explorer brands promise freedom.

Explorer brands promote themselves as a means to help others experience the new and unknown. The worst outcome for an explorer brand would be to come across as too rigid or corporate.

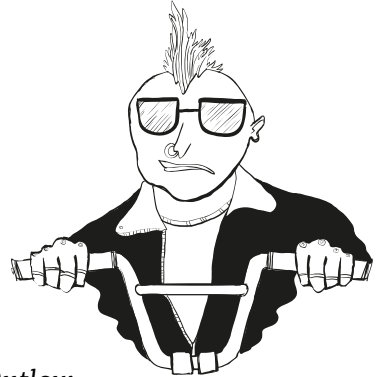
Who does this well?

The North Face is a clear explorer brand as the entire purpose of its products is to aid exploration. However, this ad doesn't focus on the nitty-gritty of the product features – it promotes the very spirit of exploration, aligning the brand with the belief system of its customers.



The North Face: The Explorer

See also – [Go Pro, Phileas Fogg](#)



7. The Rebel

aka The Revolutionary, The Outlaw

The rebel craves revolution or revenge, and her greatest fear is powerlessness. Think Lisbeth Salander in *Girl with a Dragon Tattoo* or James Dean. At their best they are free-spirited, brave and adaptable – at their worst they are destructive, out of control, nihilistic.

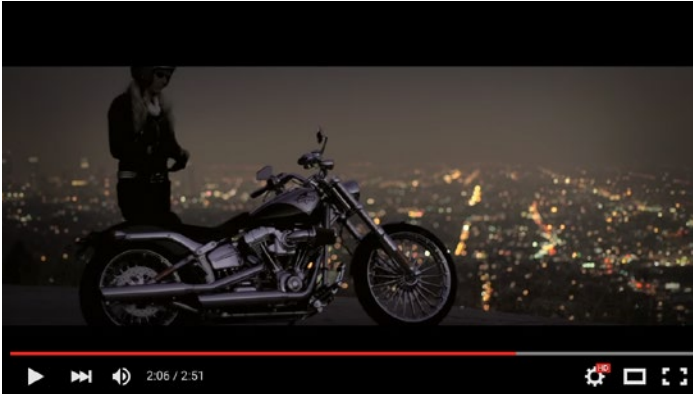
Rebel customers appreciate the unconventional and forcefully reject the status quo. They are likely to value unique or shocking content with no obvious sell to it.

Rebel brands promise revolution.

Rebel brands position themselves as an alternative to the mainstream and make an effort to stand out. Successful rebel brands are likely to have a cult following. The worst thing to happen to a rebel brand would be to be bought out or become too popular.

Who does this well?

When we see tall, blonde women on TV they're usually hyper-feminised and selling beauty products. Harley Davidson's blonde protagonist is different – she's powerful, independent and risk-taking, subverting the convention.



Harley Davidson Advert 2013 (CVO BREAKOUT)

See also – [Levi Jeans, VO5](#)

8. The Lover

aka The Dreamer, The Idealist



The lover lives to experience pleasure in her relationships, work and environment, and she fears being unwanted and unloved. Think Marilyn Monroe or Kim Kardashian. At their best they are passionate, magnetic and committed, at their worst they are people-pleasing, obsessive and shallow.

Lover customers value the aesthetic appearance of goods and services. They are likely to be drawn to premium brands that will make them seem more attractive to others.

Lover brands promise passion.

Lover brands promote themselves as glamorous, with an emphasis on sensual pleasure. Ads will typically focus on how the product feels for the customer. Lover brands can't come across as cheap or business-like or their cultivated air of mystique will be ruined.

Who does this well?

Victoria's Secret has created an extravagant fantasy world where all tastes are catered for – the women featured are personifications of the brand that men can lust after and their female partners can aspire to. It says 'you too can be loved and desired, if you buy into this brand.'



Victoria's Secret Sexy Commercial - Thousand Fantasies

See also – [Galaxy chocolate](#), [Herbal Essences](#)

9. The Magician

aka The Shaman, The Visionary



The magician wants to understand the universe and his or her place in it, but fears unintended negative consequences of their exploration. Think Nikola Tesla or Steve Jobs. On a good day they are driven and charismatic with a capacity for healing. On a bad day they are manipulative, dishonest and disconnected from reality.

Magician customers need to feel they can grow wiser or influence people by using your products. Ads should be as imaginative and inspiring as possible.

Magician brands promise knowledge.

Magician brands promote themselves as the gateway to transformative knowledge and experience. They focus on the individual rather than the group, and flatter the customer by telling them to trust their own instincts (and make the purchase). The worst things a magician brand can be seen as are too structured, regulated or hollow.

Who does this well?

This ad from Disney doesn't focus on the rides or shows at Disneyland – instead it focuses on the experience of a family visit. Disney addresses the individual viewer directly, positioning her as the keeper of knowledge and experience – with the power to influence her child's happiness.



Disney World Advert UK 2011

See also – [Lynx](#), [Lululemon](#)

10. The Ruler

aka The King, The Leader

The ruler is driven by her desire for power and control, and she is most afraid of chaos and being overthrown. Think Margaret Thatcher, or Jay-Z. A good ruler is confident, responsible and fair, whilst a bad ruler is rigid, controlling and entitled.

Ruler customers are naturally dominant and will

Living an affluent lifestyle and navigating life with ease and dignity – a potent ideal for an aspiring ruler.

not appreciate patronising or dumbed-down advertising. They will value ads that reinforce their feelings of power and stability.

Ruler brands promise power.

Ruler brands speak authoritatively, often spreading the idea that they are the lead in their field. Their image is solid, polished and often ‘masculine’. A ruler brand would suffer greatly by being perceived as weak, or by having to concede defeat to a rival company publicly.

Who does this well?

This American Express ad oozes power and luxury. The protagonist is a successful leader of his field, living an affluent lifestyle and navigating life with ease and dignity – a potent ideal for an aspiring ruler.



American Express Card by José Mourinho

See also – Hugo Boss, Rolex





11. The Jester

aka The Fool, The Comedian

The Jester wants to live in the moment and enjoy life, and fearing boredom above all else. Think Dori in *Finding Nemo* or Jim Carrey in almost anything. At their best they are joyful, carefree and original. At their worst they are irresponsible, cruel and frivolous.

Jester customers find regular adverts boring, but will love anything unusual or playful – especially ads that make light of the seriousness of life.

Jester brands promise entertainment.

Jester brands give the impression that they live in the moment, use outrageous imagery and often tease their customers affectionately. Brands targeted at younger people – who will appreciate the silliness – are often jesters. The worst thing a jester brand could do is get embroiled in a bitter lawsuit or be seen to be strict with their customers.

Who does this well?

This Skittles ad is pure silliness. The product itself doesn't even feature – in fact, the entire format of an ad is subverted in favour of a surreal joke. However, it guarantees a lot of views and shares from young jesters and their communities.



Skittles Touch: Cat

See also – [McVities](#), [Old Spice](#)

12. The Sage

aka The Scholar, The Teacher

The sage seeks the truth and wants to find wisdom in every situation. Biggest fears are being misled and being ignorant. Think Yoda or David Bowie. At best they are wise, articulate and open-minded, at worst they are pedantic, self-absorbed and cold.

Sage customers believe that knowledge comes from growth, and constantly look for new sources of information. They prefer ads which challenge them to think in a new way.

Sage brands promise wisdom.

Sage brands promise learning and therefore often make use of higher level vocabulary and symbolic imagery. They trust their customers to grasp difficult

ideas and understand intellectual in-jokes, and avoid becoming too dumbed-down or patronising.

Who does this well?

This advert from National Geographic states a series of quasi-philosophical statements against a backdrop of historical, natural and sociological scenery that gives their statements authoritative weight. It celebrates curiosity and would strongly appeal to anyone who valued developing their understanding of the world.



National Geographic Channel - IF. Live curious.

See also – [the Alpha Course, Khan Academy](#)



You might be thinking ‘my business is a combination of lots of these’ and that’s okay too. Now that you have insight into why companies project themselves the way they do – you can engage with your own audience in new ways.

By identifying the archetypes that you are trying to reach, and nurturing the same traits in your business, you’ll be streets ahead of your competition.

In the words of Sunny Bonnell:

The earlier on in your company’s journey that you can uncover your brand’s true identity – the character your brand is meant to live out – the sooner your team can begin living it and leaving a lasting impression in your audience’s minds.

For more reading, try *The Hero and the Outlaw* by Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson – one of the first books to bring archetypes into branding.

And, talking of heroes, in the next chapter we put an unexpected spin on who the hero is in your story.

Hero:

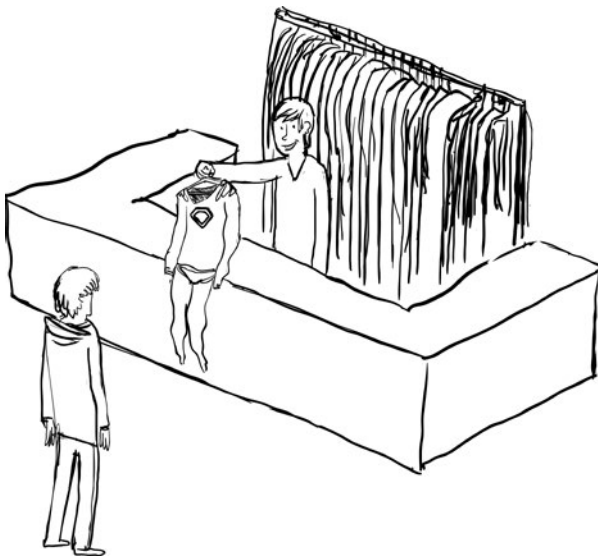
How to make your customer the hero

AS WE'VE SEEN, your customers no longer want just your product or service. They want to know who's doing what, and why. In other words, they want your story – and you need a hero to tell it.

It's tempting to make your business – or an individual from your business – the hero of your story. After all, you know all about you. Many businesses promote their founder or CEO.

But what if your customer was the hero of your story? What if the benefits you provide took centre stage instead of the boss's personal success tale?

Here are five questions to get your story started. Let's continue our mildew remover example from our chapter on emotion – and add some Spider-Man comparisons just for fun.



1. What is your hero's power?

Something sets your hero apart from the supporting cast. They can do something unique that the others can't. What do you help your customers do? What powers do you give that lifts them above their competition?

Spider-Man: The speed, agility, spidey-sense and proportionate strength of an arachnid.

Mildew victim: The ability to have a spotless, germ-free, glistening, fragrant bathroom.

2. How did your hero become 'super'?

Some superheroes are born, others get their powers from an extraordinary experience. In the story of your customer, there is a moment when they realised you were the answer they were looking for. Can you describe those moments?

Spider-Man: Bitten by a radioactive spider on a high-school field trip.

Mildew victim: The white stains were gaining territory, inching ever further around the tub's now-grimy rim. Enough was enough, and so he reached for the bottle of...

3. What threatens your hero?

All heroes have a weakness. A flaw creates drama and anticipation: will it be our hero's undoing? Your customers have weaknesses too, they're only human. What's stopping them reaching their full potential and how will you get them there?

Spider-Man: Uh, his love for family and friends?

Mildew victim: He's in and out of the shower in 10 minutes, every day. It's easy to ignore the creeping fungus. And with no window in here, surely it's a losing battle against humidity and condensation?

4. What drives your hero to do good?

Superheroes gain their powers for a reason: to perform a greater good. They have an inner bell that chimes with your product or service. What is their driving force?

Spider-Man: Fighting bad guys. The robbery and murder of Ben, Peter Parker's beloved uncle, transforms a shy science student into a crime-fighting force to be reckoned with.

Mildew victim: They crave a fungus-free, hygienic bathroom that doesn't put them or their loved ones at risk.

5. Who's the bad guy?

A hero is only a hero if they have a villain to battle with. They stand for everything your hero fights against. So – what great wrong do you help people put right?

Spider-Man: The Green Goblin. Doctor Octopus. The Sandman. Venom. The list is long. In short, they all like doing really bad criminal stuff.

Mildew victim: Mildew – disgusting, rapidly spreading stains caused by excessive moisture, humidity and condensation.

There you have it. A hero in five simple steps. That's one way of providing the mystery 'something' that we talked about in chapter one.

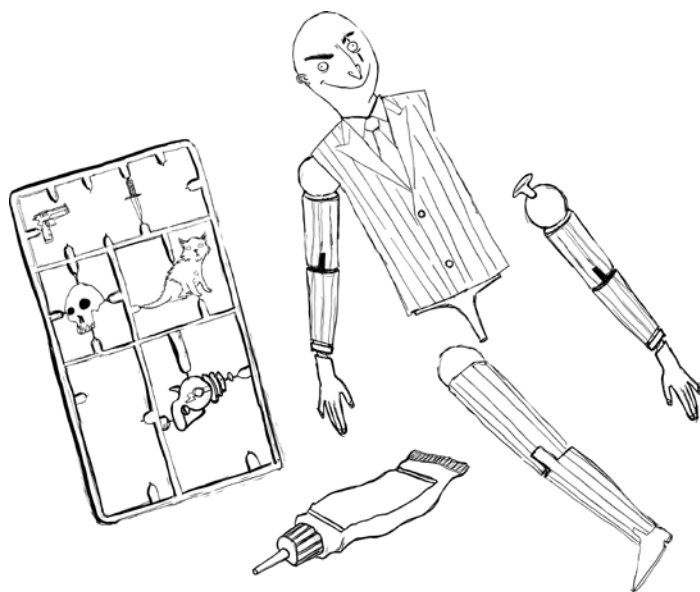
The fifth step, the villain, is an element that often gets overlooked. In chapter six we look at how to create the counterpart that injects depth into your story.

Villain:

How to create a perfectly evil baddie

IF YOU WANT to make your hero shine, put some polish on the villain. Make your champion's nemesis – whether it's a physical obstacle or talking germs – really, really nasty.

Here are six tips to create the perfect baddie.



1. You need a bad guy

You really do. Dr Nekhorvich from *Mission: Impossible II* puts it very nicely:

Every search for a hero must begin with something which every hero requires – a villain.

Which makes sense, when you think that the most basic kind of story involves a hero who triumphs in a battle over something – or against someone.

That someone – your villain – drives the plot. They create problems that need solutions. They give your hero something to do. Otherwise it'd be another cosy night in with Netflix and snacks.

In advertising, your villain might be devilish stomach acid or stubborn stains. By using your product, your customer becomes the hero.

The advertising gurus at Domestos really harnessed the power of ugh when they created these fabulously foul characters.



Domestos germs 4 adverts

2. Invest in the scumbag

One-dimensional villains don't cut it. The more convincing and complex your blaggard, the more captivating your hero.

So it's worth giving your baddie a backstory. Develop it in your mind, even if your narrative barely touches on it. It will affect how you write or animate the character, and give him or her substance.

Ursula the Sea Witch is a talkative type, but even she manages to explain her motives in just a few short lines. King Trident has wronged her. Real bad. She wants revenge.

In my day, we had fantastical feasts, when I lived in the palace. And now – look at me – wasted away to practically nothing. Banished and exiled and practically starving, while he and his flimsy fish-folk celebrate. Well, I'll give 'em something to celebrate soon enough.

Welcome to your plot, ladies and gentleman.



Ursula - *The Little Mermaid* (Disney)

3. Choose from the colourful palette of wrong'uns

Research (conducted in strict lab conditions involving popcorn and library cards) suggests that there are three main ways in which a villain relates to your hero:

Same but different

Some of the most disturbing antagonists mirror the hero almost exactly. As the story plays out, you discover that they both have extraordinary gifts. They just use them for different ends.

Javier Bardem is straight-up terrifying as Raoul Silva in *Skyfall*. He's been touted as the best Bond villain of all time.

But he's unnerving precisely because he starts out just like Bond: a top agent, M's favourite, a hero. He is Bond's shadow self and – therefore – his perfect nemesis.



Skyfall

Polar opposites

But other stories offer you good clean fun by contrasting personalities or worldviews. Classic examples include:

- *Bill Sykes* (grim, abusive, heartless) versus *Oliver Twist* (warbling, naive)
- *Lex Luthor* (brainy, corporate, slick) versus *Superman* (brawny, noble, all-American posterboy)
- *Captain Hook* (old, wily, injured) versus *Peter Pan* (young, wide-eyed, acrobatic)

Anarchy and chaos

Then there are your out-and-out disgusting manifestations of evil. They are irrational, unpredictable and operate outside any recognisable moral framework. Think Sauron, Nurse Ratched, Miss Trunchball.

The Joker is exactly the type of murderous psychopath we love to hate.

Mother Nature can be similarly destructive and inhumane so, in some narratives, your antagonist might be a vast mountain, a hostile planet or an extreme natural phenomenon (think *The Perfect Storm*, *The Day After Tomorrow* and *Waterworld*).

Batman's arch-enemy, The Joker, is exactly the type of murderous psychopath we love to hate. He's a character with power, even off the screen. When Heath Ledger died tragically after portraying him in *The Dark Knight*, the media were quick to speculate that playing The Joker had something to do with it.



The Dark Knight: Top 10 Best Scenes Of The Joker

4. Tell us what they want

Maybe it goes without saying that villains generally have a dastardly plan. Your antagonist must have an aim, however abstract or ambitious: destroy the world, kill Aslan, be prom queen.

**Everyone loves working out the twist,
the plan, the aim, the agenda.**

You can state it up-front (Scar in *The Lion King*), dissemble as a decent person before plunging in the knife (Hamlet's evil Uncle Claudius) or gradually roll out their wicked plan (Mr Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*).

Everyone loves working out the twist, the plan, the aim, the agenda, so take this opportunity to ratchet up the drama.



The Lion King - Scar Confesses

5. Walk the (very fine) line between love and hate

Most villains aren't all evil – or, at least, they weren't always evil. Your villain probably loved his mum, his dog or his first love once. He's not stone-cold evil. She was kind of cute before she turned to the dark side. And so on.

There's a real art to creating someone bad enough that your audience is happy to see them destroyed in the fire of poetic justice, but good enough to be human and realistic – if that's what your story requires.

Across her seven Harry Potter books, JK Rowling deftly reveals Tom Riddle's transformation from hardened, rejected boy to Lord Voldemort, the 'most evil wizard for hundreds and hundreds of years'. We might pity the abandoned child, but we willingly accept that he must die.



Dumbledore meets young Tom Riddle

6. Sometimes it ends in tears

Finally, we mustn't forget those wonderfully subversive narratives where your villain is your protagonist. They fall from grace, inevitably and disastrously, and the plot is all about their undoing – full of retribution and catharsis.

There is no denying that this is exhilarating, voyeuristic and exhausting. The exemplary villain kicks ass again – and keeps us on the edge of our seats, lapping up their mischief and devilry.

Marion Cotillard on screen as Lady Macbeth is a great example. Witness her dramatic downfall:



Macbeth Official UK Teaser Trailer (2015)

A convincing anti-hero is just the ticket for a gripping story arc.

We realise that Macbeth is the protagonist in *Macbeth* but – boy – is his wife interesting.

Of course, there's room for complicated bad guys with mixed motivations, but the principle remains: a convincing anti-hero is just the ticket for a gripping story arc.

The whole purpose of the baddie is to introduce conflict and tension into your story. Without those contrasting qualities, your tale will be too nice, too forgetful.

There are other ways to bring conflict into your narrative too. In the final chapter we dig deep into the dark side to create drama that will have your audience hanging on every word.

Conflict:

Crunching battles that add to a story

Conflict is the beating heart of every story. If the hero doesn't struggle, why should we care what happens?

As with structure and plot, there are a few common types of story conflict. Understand them and become a master of suspense. We've used male pronouns in this chapter but it applies equally to men or women.

1. Man fights man



In these stories, one character is driven by a deep need to do or get something – but another character is determined to stop him.

Often, the hero needs to stop the bad guy having his wicked way. Tension rises to a crescendo as this moral conflict is finally resolved.

Show what you stand for by setting yourself in direct opposition to something.

These stories are a great way to nail your brand's values to the mast. Show what you stand for by setting yourself in direct opposition to something.



Milky Way - Red Car/Blue Car (original 1989 ad)

2. Man fights society

Our hero rages against the machine – often a cruel

or controlling man-made regime. In a romance, social conventions and etiquette stop our hero from getting the girl.

As with man against man, this conflict is a moral one. The hero knows the system is broken and unjust. But how does one man overthrow a powerful, estab-

This is the perfect approach for challenger brands.

lished order?

This is the perfect approach for challenger brands. For companies and products that disrupt the status quo, and announce a new way of doing things.



VO5 Extreme Style - 'The Pliktisijiteur Pageant' (2011)



3. Man fights nature

Bitter cold. Unbearable heat. Perilous journeys. Fearsome creatures. These stories aren't morality tales – they're about the primal fight to survive.

In these stories, a central character struggles against a natural onslaught. Deep down we know he'll make it, the question is: how?

This kind of conflict is tailor-made for travel and adventure products, and brands aimed at sporty or outdoorsy types. Also useful for anything sold as refreshing – beer, mints, deodorant.



Boddingtons Advert

4. Man fights himself

The age-old battle of conscience, this war is waged in our hero's mind. He struggles between good and evil, between following heart or head.

All classic heroes fight their thoughts – their flaws, fears and insecurities. Can they do the right thing even when they're pulled toward an easier or more destructive path?

This story type is great for moreish products you wouldn't want to share, those considered guilty pleasures, and anything that gets you through.



New Fella, Irn-Bru advert 2013



Finally...

The key to a good story is actually really simple. Give your audience a relatable hero – someone they identify with or admire – and provide one of these compelling conflicts for them to overcome.

You'll have them on the edge of their seats.

Final word

‘Memorable stories based on timeless themes build legions of eager evangelists’

– Jonah Sachs

Telling your business’s stories can be difficult. It opens you up to interpretation, broadcasts your values, lays your trials and successes bare. Telling your stories shows vulnerability and takes courage.

Telling your stories helps you to express what makes you different.

Telling stories also makes things easy. It helps you solidify your identity in those tricky early years. It helps you explain what you do in a human way, a way your audience can relate to. It helps you to express what makes you different to – and better than – your competition. It opens the door for people to be inspired and make your story a part of their own.

When you start looking, stories will begin to pop up everywhere. Stories of happy customers, problems solved, innovation and inspiration.

We hope this book will help you find those stories and tell them in the most breathtaking way.

Sparkol's story

IT TOOK US a while at Sparkol to realise what we wanted.

We knew it was something to do with empowering people. We knew that technology provides some of the best ways to do that. But it wasn't until a little tool we made called VideoScribe took off that the penny dropped.

We're here to empower people to engage their audiences.

VideoScribe is one small way to do that – by helping untrained people to make eye-catching and memorable videos.

There are countless other ways it could happen. Sparkol is on a journey to make apps and software, create books and blogs and music and films, hold podcasts and events, and who knows what else – all in pursuit of helping you to get through to the people you want to reach.

We desperately want you to be heard.

So if you have any ideas how we could do that, come and join us on our quest. Tweet us @sparkolhq or chat to us on Facebook.

And if anything in this free book resonated with you at all – pay us back by sharing it with a friend. We'll keep creating resources if we know that they're useful.

Thanks for reading our story. Now go tell yours.

About the author

Ffion Lindsay

Ffion is Sparkol's resident storyteller. She's a feminist sci-fi enthusiast and writes for the New Welsh Review. Follow her [@Dedaleira](#).

