

What's the big deal with stories anyway?

- Stories do heavy lifting in **faith communities**:
 - in sacred texts as doctrine, theology...
 - as on-going revelation of a still-speaking God (your story is a God story)
 - as testimony/witness (depending on the tradition)
- Stories carry meaning:
 - A well-told story catapults you past "you had to be there"
 - The secondary experience of hearing a well-told story conveys the meaning of the primary experience
- Stories make the specific universally accessible (or at least...more so) representing reality, truth, as you've seen, heard, and experienced it.

Story ingredients:

Plot points: what happens? (This is your raw data: memories and anecdotes.)

Built out of scenes:

- people (who's there?)
- in a place (where are you?)
- for a length of time (when was this? for how long? how long ago?), during which
- something happens (what happens in this place, at this time, with these people?)

Stakes: what's it *about*? (aka, who cares? why do/did you care.)

Stories do more than tell us what happened; they reveal what the teller thinks the story is about. In "Frosty the Snowman" **what happens** is that kids find a magical hat and it animates a snowman and then he melts. Depending who's telling it, it could be **about** loneliness, the fleetingness of existence, the magic of childhood, the power of imagination...

(People who listen to, or give, sermons have a leg up on understanding this idea: you know that the same passage of a holy text can be *about* many different things depending on what's going on in the world, community, congregation, lives of individuals.)

Choosing your material ("What am I gonna talk about?")

- Start with what matters to you — even if you think it's unimportant. What's funny? Significant? What do you have *energy* to tell?
- Consider points in your life where something changed, broke, shifted. Look for fault lines, conflict (internal or external)
- Include enough of the story to reach some change, resolution, epiphany. You shouldn't be the same person you were at the beginning.

And:

- Consider a favorite book, TV show, movie, and ask yourself what it's *about*, not what happens, but what it's *about*. What stories from your own life intersect with that?
- Make lists: of everyone you've known (!), places you've lived or visited, jobs you've had, mistakes you've made, dates you've been on, trips, friendships.
- Get a sense of your main character (you):
 - List five words that describe you.
 - List five things you want.
 - List ten things (people/places/artists/books/etc) that inspire you. Is there a through line? Are they all underdogs? overachievers? academics? "outsiders"?

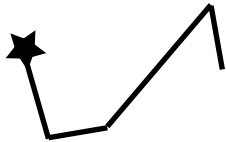
On What and How Much You Share

The good news: you can edit your Self, and your material, however you wish. Leave out what's too raw and not ready for the public. You can tell a *true* story, without telling your *whole* story. The audience is not your therapist nor is it the audience's job to worry about you. You can be vulnerable and real without falling apart.

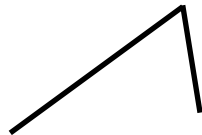
Structure

- Leave out what doesn't serve you. It'll break your heart, but do it!
- Start in the action and set up the stakes.
- Consider the order of the "reveal"
 - chronological unfolding?
 - near the end, back to the beginning?
 - moving around within narrative?
- Have your ending clearly in mind; avoid meandering endings...
- Pay attention to when you are "in scene"/when you are in the room, addressing the audience. Both are important.

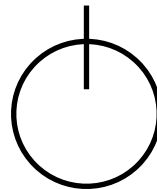
A few trajectories/shapes:



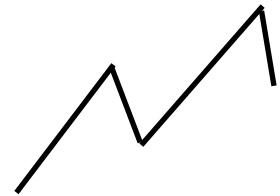
Start big, back up.



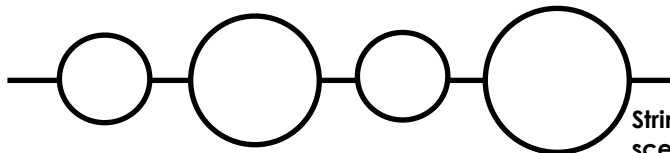
Build gradually, all the way until you get to the end.



End where you began.



Build in an early peak that reveals the stakes, and sweetens the pot for the ending.



String-of-pearls: a series of scenes

Critique/Revision in conversation/workshop

- 1 Feedback to teller: here's what I got. Here's what I loved, what resonated for me, what I can picture clearly.
- 2 Questions for teller: What's confusing? What do I need to know that wasn't included? Why do you think we need to know x, y, or z? (This reveals and clarifies stakes.)
- 3 Editing for time and intention (making it more clear what the story is about): What you should leave out/what *must* be included.

On Performance

- (The moment before)
- Let your own voice come through, *inhabit* yourself
- Slow down. Slow down more
- Use silence/pauses.
- Change pace/energy, especially to signal scene changes
- LET PEOPLE LAUGH.
- Let your underlying thoughts and feelings about the content inform your voice, your tone, your manner.
- Eye contact.
- For *The Moth*, or other speaking without notes:
 - create bullet points of the major building blocks of the story
 - know what your connectors between them are
 - use pauses as page breaks (pause longer than you think necessary)

Go hear stories. Go tell them. Listen to them on podcasts.

Nearly every night in the Chicago area, you can hear (or tell!) live stories.

First Person Live
Do Not Submit
This Much is True
2nd Story
The Moth
Story Lab Chicago

Tenx9 Chicago
Write Club
Story Club
Grown Folks Stories
Essay Fiesta
You're Being Ridiculous