STORYHOUSE HANDBOOK

A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

WELCOME TO STORYHOUSE!

This handbook brings all the "threads" of the Storyhouse training together in one place. It provides Storyhouse facilitators with a rich collection of activities, insights and resources. As you deploy and adapt Storyhouse to your institution or context, we hope you find this tool to be a helpful "one-stop shop" of ideas and support along the way.

"Win-win" is the goal of Storyhouse: students experience life-changing growth as communicators and researchers dramatically expand the impact of their articles. Storyhouse is all about professional development for students and mobilizing research for faculty members. The program only accomplishes its purpose when both aims are achieved.

We would like to extend a huge "Thank you!" to Leena Mohamed Faleel, Navya Sahithi Narukulla and Angwara Nilanont for bringing this resource to life. This team has done an amazing job of adapting their personal experiences as participants in Storyhouse into a tool that will doubtlessly support the learning and experience of others. We are deeply grateful for their dedication to this project and tireless attention to detail.

Storyhouse trainers,
James Shelley and Kieran Waitschies

This handbook was prepared by
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as part of MEDSCIEN 4995E, a Community Engaged Learning (CEL) course at Western University, in collaboration with the Storyhouse program.

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OVERVIEW

The Storyhouse curriculum is designed to empower participants to transform research into meaningful narratives that inspire action. Through a blend of storytelling, science communication, and performance, this approach helps to connect new knowledge with the communities, professionals, and policymakers who can implement them — expanding the reach of research and strengthening its real-world impact.

THE PROCESS

Over a nine-week period, participants will collaborate to test, refine, and perform their narratives. The process is divided into three phases:

- **Weeks 1 to 4:** *Focus on crafting the narrative.* Participants will study their selected article, identify their target audience, and apply principles of story craft and narrative theory.
- **Weeks 5 to 7:** *Emphasis on performance preparation.* Participants will work on managing nervousness, enhancing engagement, and preparing for their final performance.
- **Weeks 8 & 9:** *Reflect & refine.* Participants will reflect on their experience and refine their work for the final podcast and written manuscript, ensuring proper formatting and presentation.

THE DELIVERABLES

Each participant will work towards three main deliverables:

1. **Stage-ready story:** A live narrative performance based on a research study from your institution or organization, presented at a filmed storytelling finale.
2. **Written manuscript:** A lasting, adaptable version of their narrative, suitable for sharing with broader audiences.
3. **Podcast episode interview:** A self-reflective discussion exploring their experience crafting and performing their story, including challenges and surprises along the way.

THE WORKSHOPS

The Storyhouse workshops are designed to help participants bring research to life through storytelling. Each session is a chance to learn, practice, and grow together — blending narrative theory, science communication, and public speaking in a collaborative environment.

Before each workshop, participants will watch a short asynchronous training video that introduces key concepts and outlines the next deliverable. By coming prepared, everyone can make the most of the time together and help one another improve.

Each workshop follows a familiar three-part structure:

Warm-Up activities:
Building a comfortable environment is important for giving and receiving constructive feedback. Warm-up activities help break the ice and give everyone a chance to get comfortable sharing ideas and feedback. These activities not only bring energy into the room but also help facilitators check in on how everyone is feeling and foster a sense of community.

Summary of Training:
This part of the workshop is for revisiting key concepts from the training videos, sharing observations, and clarifying ideas. This is a great opportunity to reflect on the lessons learned and explore how to apply those ideas to each participant's story.

Next Steps:
The heart of each workshop is sharing work in progress. Participants will present their prepared deliverables and receive supportive, constructive feedback from peers and facilitators. It's all about working together to make each story stronger — and celebrating the progress along the way.

SESSION 1: **ORIENTATION**

WEEK 1

Welcome to Storyhouse!

TRAINING TOPICS

- Orientation
- Shared Vision
- Deliverables
- Workshops

DELIVERABLES

- Personal introductions
- Article selection

MATERIALS:
- Session 1 training video
- Session 1 workshop slides
- Onboarding form
- Videography & photography consent form

OVERVIEW

Session 1 serves as an introduction to outline the importance of storytelling in bridging the gap between academic research and real-world application.

Participants will complete their onboarding procedures, review the upcoming workshop structure, and choose from faculty-identified research papers to begin their storytelling journey!

WORKSHOP PLAN

FOUNDATIONS OF STORYHOUSE

Each year, researchers and scientists generate valuable knowledge through their studies. However, much of this research does not reach the people who could benefit from it the most—policymakers, clinicians, industry partners, and even research participants themselves.

Communicate with participants this gap in knowledge dissemination: how do we make academic research accessible, understandable, and actionable for diverse audiences?

Key points to cover:
- The importance of knowledge mobilization and why research should be shared beyond academia.
- How storytelling makes science more relatable and accessible.
- The types of audiences we aim to reach (e.g. policymakers, clinicians, general public) and how this differs from article to article (audience identification & selection processes).
- The structure of the program and expectations for participation.

WHY STORIES?

To make research accessible beyond academia, it must be conveyed in a manner that resonates with people's lived experiences. Research in science communication indicates that storytelling is one of the most powerful methods to engage audiences, evoke emotion, and enhance understanding.

Introduce participants to the key goals of the program and discuss the role of storytelling in science communication:
- **Knowledge Mobilization:** Ensuring research findings reach those who can apply them.
- **Science Communication:** Translating complex research into understandable language.
- **Narrative Theory:** Using structured storytelling techniques to engage audiences.

TIP: Encourage discussion by asking participants to reflect on a time when a story helped them understand a complex topic.

UNDERSTADING THE FINAL DELIVERABLES

Each student will work towards three key deliverables:

1. **Live Stage Narrative Performance:** Participants will present their story at a filmed, end-of-term storytelling event. The recorded video will be a resource for faculty members and the research community.

2. **Written Narrative:** A written version of the story will be developed alongside the performance, providing an additional format for faculty to share with stakeholders
   - *Participants may need to complete Creative Commons licensing and media release forms when submitting their narratives.*

3. **Podcast Interview:** Participants will reflect on their experience in the program and discuss what they learned about translating research into narrative form. This interview will serve as a learning tool for future participants.

> **TIP:** Reassure participants that storytelling is a skill that improves with practice. Encourage them to embrace the process and not worry about achieving perfection in the first draft.

ARTICLE SELECTION

Participants will select research articles that will form the foundation of their narratives, and the right choice can make the storytelling process more engaging.

Here are key pieces of advice to help guide participants:

- **Choose a topic that resonates:** Encourage them to choose something that genuinely interests them or aligns with their passions.
  - Ask: *Would you enjoy discussing this research outside of this program?*
- **Apply to everyday life:** Some research has direct implications for policy, healthcare, education, or industry. If participants struggle to identify a real-world application, encourage them to consider how the findings might impact everyday life.
  - Ask: *Are there real-life examples, patient stories, or case studies that could be woven into the narrative?*

> **TIP:** Encourage participants to pick a topic they can imagine telling a friend about with enthusiasm. The best stories come from a place of curiosity and passion!

ACTIVITIES

Start with a quick online survey or a class discussion to get to know each other. This will give insight into everyone's backgrounds, communication styles, and comfort levels with speaking. After that, jump into some fun icebreaker games to build connections, boost confidence, and set the tone for the workshop.

ALLITERATION NAME GAME

GOAL:
1. To help participants remember each other's names in a fun and engaging way.
2. To encourage **creativity** and **memory recall.**
3. To create a **shared group experience.**

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Establish a theme for the game (e.g., animals, food, flowers, hobbies).
2. The first person introduces themselves using alliteration with their name and a word that fits the theme.
   - *Example: "My name is Lora, and I like Lilies."*
3. The next person must repeat what the first person said and add their own.
   - *Example: "Her name is Lora, and she likes Lilies. My name is Beth, and I like Bluebells."*
4. The game continues around the circle, with each participant adding on to the growing list.
5. The last person in the group must try to recall all the names and words, but they can get help from the group if they struggle!
6. Consider switching themes after a round to keep things fresh and engaging.

ONE RANDOM FACT

GOAL:
1. To help participants get to know each other in a **fun and engaging way**.
2. To find commonalities among participants and **create connections**.
3. To encourage **quick thinking** and **active listening**.

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Each participant takes a turn standing at the front of the room and introduces themselves.
    ○ *Example: "Hi, my name is James. I work at Western University."*
2. They then share one random fact about themselves.
    ○ *Example: "When I was 8 years old, I ran face-first into a soccer post while trying to fly a kite."*
3. Someone in the room must relate their own experience to the previous person's random fact.
    ○ *Example: "Oh! That reminds me of when I accidentally walked into a glass door at the mall!"*
4. Each person can only respond to one fact, ensuring that by the end of the game, everyone has introduced themselves and responded to someone else.
5. The exercise continues until everyone has participated, leading to shared experiences and laughs.

NEVER HAVE I EVER

GOAL:
1. To encourage **self-reflection** and **storytelling**.
2. To promote **open conversation** and shared experiences.
3. To help participants gauge social situations and boundaries.

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Decide on the format:
   - *Either facilitators prepare a list of "Never Have I Ever" statements in advance, OR participants can come up with their own statements during the game.*
2. Each round, one person says "Never Have I Ever..." followed by something they've never done.
   - *Example: "Never have I ever gone bungee jumping."*
3. Anyone who HAS done it raises their hand.
4. Those who raised their hand can share a brief story about their experience.
5. Optional penalty version: If a player has done too many things, they might have to do a small fun challenge (e.g., tell a joke, share a random fun fact, or do a silly dance).
6. The game continues until a set number of rounds or a time limit is reached.

SESSION 2: **ELEVATOR PITCH**

WEEK 2

Reverse Engineer an Article

TRAINING TOPICS

- Structure of a research article
- Elevator Pitch
- Feedback literacy

DELIVERABLES

Present a 2-minute elevator pitch that summarizes the article's:
- Issue/context
- Methods
- Results
- Meaning

MATERIALS:
- Session 2 training video
- Session 2 workshop slides

OVERVIEW

This workshop session focuses on developing clear, concise articulation of the research through the elevator pitch, a two-minute summary designed to engage and inform non-experts.

The primary objective of this session is to ensure that participants clearly understand their specific research article. Participants will first explore different types of academic research papers and the IMRAD structure (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) to better understand how research is organized. The session also introduces feedback literacy, guiding participants in effectively giving and receiving constructive feedback.

WORKSHOP PLAN

UNDERSTANDING ACADEMIC RESEARCH ARTICLES

Before jumping into story creation, it's important for participants to understand the type of research they are working with. Different types of research papers have different purposes, structures, and audiences.

Spend some time introducing some of these common research paper types to participants:

- **Original Research:** Reports new findings based on data collection and analysis. Used to answer specific questions.
- **Literature Review:** Summarizes existing research on a topic and identifies gaps for future studies.
- **Scoping Review:** A broad review of existing literature to explore what research exists on a topic. Helps determine if a more detailed study is needed.
- **Systematic Review:** A structured, comprehensive summary of existing studies on a specific question using predefined methods.
- **Review Article:** A general discussion of recent progress in a field without new experiments or data.
- **Case Study**: A detailed examination of a single person, group, event, or situation. Often used in medicine, psychology, and social sciences.
- **Meta-Analysis:** Combines multiple studies into a statistical analysis to estimate an overall effect size.
- **Book Chapter:** A section within a larger book that discusses a specific topic in detail.
- **Commentary:** A short article giving opinions or insights on a specific topic or previously published research.
- **Clinical Trial Report:** Describes the design, methods, results, and conclusions of a clinical study, often in medicine or health sciences.

TIP: Encourage participants to book time with librarians or statistics consultants if they're confused.

THE IMRAD STRUCTURE: THE BACKBONE OF SCIENTIFIC PAPERS

Most scientific research follows a standardized structure to present information in a logical, easy-to-follow format. It organizes research in a clear way, making it easier for scientists, journalists, and the public to understand.

Ensure that participants are familiar with the IMRAD structure:
- **Introduction**: What problem is the study addressing? Why does it matter?
- **Methods**: How was the research conducted?
- **Results**: What did the study find?
- **Discussion**: What do the results mean? How do they fit into the bigger picture?

WHAT IS AN ELEVATOR PITCH?

An elevator pitch is a short, persuasive summary of the research designed to engage, inform, and spark interest all within 2 minutes or less (the time of a typical elevator ride). Emphasize to participants that an elevator pitch is not a full summary—it's a quick, clear, and engaging explanation.

The exercise has two purposes: First, it provides a low-stakes opportunity for participants to begin articulating the research in their own words. Secondly, it provides an opportunity to ensure that participants clearly and substantively understand the research.

Explain that this exercise is the skeleton that will later support their full narrative:
1. What is the issue?
2. What did the researchers do?
3. What did they find?
4. What does it mean?

> **TIP:** Reinforce that plain language is key. Encourage paraphrasing and translation of jargon into simple terms.

WHY FEEDBACK MATTERS

Feedback helps refine ideas, clarify messaging, and improve presentation skills. However, receiving and giving feedback effectively is a skill. Introduce participants to the key concepts of feedback literacy:

1. **Understanding feedback:** What is the core message?
2. **Asking why:** Why was this feedback given?
3. **Using feedback constructively:** How can I improve?
4. **Reflect:** What is this feedback telling me about how my work is received?

Conflicting feedback: Sometimes, feedback from different people contradicts itself. Problem-based reasoning can help by:
- Asking why the feedback differs.
- Identifying underlying concerns.
- Focusing on key themes rather than conflicting details.

> **TIP:** Receiving feedback can feel sudden or emotional. Instead of reacting, examine the feedback, ask why it was given, and decide what to do with it.

HOW TO GIVE & RECEIVE FEEDBACK: THE RADICAL CANDOR MODEL

The Radical Candor framework, created by Kim Scott, is a guide for giving and receiving feedback in a way that promotes growth, builds trust, and maintains healthy professional relationships. It helps people communicate directly and honestly while showing genuine care and respect.

The framework is built on two axes:
1. **Care Personally (vertical axis):** How much you show that you genuinely care about the person as a human being.
2. **Challenge Directly (horizontal axis):** How willing you are to give direct, honest feedback that might be difficult but helps someone improve.

> **TIP:** Hard conversations are necessary for improvement — ignoring them is a disservice to everyone. Encourage participants to strive for a balance: Be honest AND kind.

Introduce to participants the four quadrants of radical candor to compare and contrast the effectiveness of each feedback style:

Radical Candor (High Care Personally + High Challenge Directly): *This is the ideal quadrant.*	**Ruinous Empathy (High Care Personally + Low Challenge Directly)**
• Honest, direct feedback while showing kindness and care. • Not afraid to challenge someone, but done so with the intention of helping them grow. • It fosters trust, safety, and continuous improvement. Ex. *"I know how hard you worked on this presentation, and I appreciate your effort. One thing I noticed is that some of the data visuals were a bit hard to interpret. Maybe we can brainstorm ways to make them clearer for your next presentation."*	• This is when you care deeply but don't provide honest or challenging feedback out of fear of hurting someone's feelings. • Being kind but avoiding constructive criticism. • It can lead to unaddressed problems and missed growth opportunities. • Over time, this lack of honesty holds both the person and the team back. *Ex. "Great job!" when the work actually needs improvement, because you don't want to hurt the person's feelings.*
Obnoxious Aggression (Low Care Personally + High Challenge Directly)	**Manipulative Insincerity (Low Care Personally + Low Challenge Directly):** *This is the worst-case scenario.*
• This is giving blunt, critical feedback without showing empathy or kindness. • It may feel like "brutal honesty," but it damages trust. • People may feel attacked rather than supported. • Even if the message is true, the delivery discourages growth and creates fear. *Ex. "This is sloppy work. I don't know how you thought this was acceptable."*	• Neither care about the person nor challenge them directly. • Feedback in this quadrant is dishonest, passive-aggressive, or self-serving. • It creates toxicity and erodes trust. *Ex. Pretending something is fine just to avoid conflict or gossiping behind someone's back instead of addressing the issue directly.*

NEXT STEPS: PRESENTING THE ELEVATOR PITCH

Each participant will present a **2-minute elevator pitch** on the paper they're working with based on the IMRAD structure. Begin by reminding participants that the goal of the elevator pitch exercise is to practice speaking clearly and confidently about the research in their own words.

Emphasize that this is not about memorizing lines — it's about familiarity with the research and communicating it naturally, without notes.

Guidelines:
- No notes, no reading — just speaking from familiarity.
- Encourage plain, accessible language — avoid jargon or complex terms.
- Focus on clarity and key takeaways, not fine details.
- Reassure participants: This does not need to be "perfect," it needs to be clear, concise, and conversational.

After each presentation, open the floor for peer feedback. Encourage respectful, constructive feedback using the Radical Candor approach (care personally, challenge directly).

ACTIVITIES

HEADLINES

GOAL:
1. Warm up participants to impulse-based thinking rather than overthinking or striving for cleverness.
2. Encourage word association and quick response, which are essential foundations for good storytelling and narrative flow.
3. Free participants from self-judgment and perfectionism, allowing them to trust their instincts.
4. Show how simple words and connections can lead to creative, surprising, and playful storytelling.

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Have all players stand in a circle.
2. As the facilitator, you may offer a starting word or phrase to spark the game (e.g., "forest" or "breaking news"), but this is optional.
3. The first player will start by saying a headline-style phrase out loud — something short and playful, like a news headline.
    ◦ Example: *"Bear bites forest ranger in national park."*
4. Moving to the left, the next player will create a new headline using the last word of the previous headline as inspiration.
    ◦ Example: *"Park opens new ice cream stand."*
5. Continue around the circle, encouraging fast, instinctive responses.
    ◦ No pausing, planning, or overthinking.
    ◦ Remind everyone: *It's not about being funny or clever — it's about speed, instinct, and connection.*
6. Keep the energy up! Encourage a playful, supportive atmosphere.
7. Continue until each player has contributed several times or until the group feels warmed up and energized.
8. Wrap up with a quick reflection: *"What did you notice about how you responded? How did it feel to focus on connection rather than perfection?"*

RED BALL, RED BULL, BREAD BOWL

GOAL:
1. To enhance focus and concentration in group settings.
2. To improve active listening and non-verbal communication.
3. To develop eye contact, teamwork, and mental flexibility.
4. To encourage quick thinking and adapting to changing dynamics.

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. **Setup:** Have players stand in a circle with enough space between them to allow clear gestures and movement.
2. **Phase 1: Introducing the Red Ball**
   - One player begins by pantomiming holding and tossing an imaginary "Red Ball" to another player in the circle.
   - As they do so, they clearly say "Red ball" while making eye contact and performing an exaggerated throwing motion.
   - The receiving player catches it with a matching gesture and continues passing it on in the same fashion.
3. **Phase 2: Adding the Red Bull**
   - Once the group is comfortable, introduce the "Red Bull":
     - This is mimed by holding both hands as if offering a can, and saying "Red Bull" while passing.
   - Now both Red Ball and Red Bull are being passed around simultaneously.
   - Players must pay close attention to which "item" is being passed to them and respond appropriately.
4. **Phase 3: Introducing the Bread Bowl**
   - Finally, introduce the "Bread Bowl":
     - This is shown with cupped hands in front like holding a bowl, and saying "Bread bowl" while passing.
   - At this stage, all three items — Red Ball, Red Bull, and Bread Bowl — are circulating at the same time.

SESSION 3: **AUDIENCE**

WEEK 3

Crafting an Effective Audience Pitch

TRAINING TOPICS

- Science communication
- Knowledge mobilization
- Audience identification

DELIVERABLES

Prepare a 2-minute pitch that identifies:
- The audience
- Explains why they should listen
- Outlines the action they should take

MATERIALS:
- Session 3 training video
- Session 3 workshop slides
- KAARE Framework

OVERVIEW

Session 3 focuses on audience identification, a critical step in shaping effective communication and storytelling. Participants will analyze the principles of science communication and knowledge mobilization to define their target audience, establish credibility, and craft a compelling call to action.

Before the session, participants should review the workshop materials and may refer to the KAARE Framework for additional guidance. During the session, they will deliver a 2-minute audience pitch, demonstrating their understanding of their specific audience and the actions that this audience might take in response to the research.

WORKSHOP PLAN

TARGETING THE RIGHT AUDIENCE FOR YOUR STORY

Each research project generates valuable insights, but without the right audience, its impact is limited. Understanding who needs this knowledge, why it matters to them, and how to engage them effectively is essential for translating research into meaningful action.

Communicate with participants the importance of defining and engaging an audience before crafting their narrative. Key points to cover:

- The role of **knowledge mobilization** in ensuring research reaches those who can use it.
- How **science communication** makes research more accessible and engaging.
- Strategies for **identifying and understanding target audiences.**
- The **importance of trust, emotion, and clarity** in audience engagement.

WHY AUDIENCE MATTERS

A compelling research story is not just about what is being shared, but who it is for and why they should care. Audience identification ensures that narratives are tailored for maximum impact, allowing research to move beyond academic circles and into real-world applications.

Introduce participants to the core disciplines guiding this process:
- **Knowledge Mobilization:** Connecting research with decision-makers, practitioners, and communities.
- **Science Communication:** Simplifying complex research to make it engaging and relatable.
- **Audience Analysis:** Understanding the needs, values, and motivations of different audience groups.

> **TIP:** Encourage participants to reflect on a time when they were truly engaged by a story. What made it resonate? How can they apply the same principles to their own audience?

UNDERSTANDING THE AUDIENCE & BUILDING TRUST

For a research story to be effective, it must align with who the audience is, what they value, and how they interpret information. Participants must answer three key questions:

1. **Who is your audience?** Define the group that will benefit from or act on this knowledge.
2. **Why should they listen to you?** Establish credibility and connection.
3. **What do you want them to do?** Ensure the story leads to meaningful action.

> **TIP:** If an audience isn't immediately clear, consider who stands to lose the most if they don't receive this information or who has the power to act on it.

APPLYING THE KAARE FRAMEWORK

Participants will use the **KAARE Framework** to refine their audience analysis:

- **K (Knowledge):** What is the new research or information?
- **A (Audience):** Who might need or be able to use this new knowledge and why?
- **A (Action):** What should they do with it?
- **R (Reciprocity):** How can audience feedback shape the message and future research?
- **E (Evaluation):** How will the effectiveness of communication be measured?

> **TIP:** A well-defined audience makes storytelling easier and more impactful. The more specific the audience analysis, the stronger the final narrative.

NEXT STEPS: PRESENTING THE AUDIENCE PITCH

Each participant will prepare and present a **2-minute audience pitch,** answering the three key questions (Who? Why? What?). After each pitch, participants will receive feedback to refine their approach and ensure clarity, engagement, and impact.

> **TIP:** Encourage participants to speak from their own experience rather than positioning themselves as experts. Stories built on personal insight foster connection and trust.

ACTIVITIES

TASK, EMOTION, DISCUSSION

GOAL:
1. To help participants practice using body language and tone to express themselves creatively.
2. To improve communication skills by conveying emotions, tasks, and discussion topics non-verbally and vocally.
3. To promote active participation and teamwork through guessing and expressing ideas.

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Create lists of tasks, emotions, and discussion topics.
2. Participants pair up.
3. Each pair secretly selects one task, one emotion, and one discussion topic from the lists.
   - **Example task:** Blowing up and tying balloons.
   - **Example emotion:** Frustrated.
   - **Example discussion topic:** What's your favorite pizza topping and why?
4. The pair then has 30 seconds to plan how they'll perform the task while expressing the chosen emotion and discussing the chosen topic.
5. The pair begins acting out their task, displaying their emotion, and discussing their topic aloud at the same time.
6. The other participants must guess the task, the emotion, and the discussion topic.
   - For example, "You're wrapping a gift, you seem frustrated, and you're talking about pizza toppings!"
7. Once the task is guessed, the pair reveals their choices, and the game continues with a new pair.
8. Repeat the process until everyone has had a turn.

SESSION 4: **STORYCRAFT**

Sh*tty First Draft

TRAINING TOPICS

- Narrative theory
- Dramatic elements
- Film/theatre studies

DELIVERABLES

- Present a 2-5 minute "shitty first draft"
- Build on week 2 elevator pitch
- Address your target audience
- Incorporate narrative theory elements

MATERIALS:
- Session 4 training video
- Session 4 workshop slides

OVERVIEW

Storytelling is an intrinsic part of being human. From ancient campfires to modern cinema, stories help us make sense of the world. But while stories are universal, narratives are cultural and intentional.

This session will help participants understand the difference between story and narrative, and how narrative theory can help them craft a compelling research story tailored for their audience.

WORKSHOP PLAN

UNDERSTANDING NARRATIVE THEORY

Narrative theory is a branch of literary study that examines how stories are built, how they function, and how they influence the way we see the world. It teaches us not just how stories work but how we make sense of them.

Key elements of narrative theory participants will explore:

- **Characters**: Who are the people (or entities) in the story? What are their motivations?
- **Setting**: Where does the story take place, and how does that environment shape events?
- **Point of View (POV)**: From whose perspective is the story told, and why?
- **Plot**: The sequence of events that create tension, conflict, and resolution.

> **TIP:** Encourage participants to think of their research article as a screenplay. If they were casting a movie, who would the characters be? Where would they film? From whose perspective would the story be told?

CORE NARRATIVE ELEMENTS

Core narrative elements are the essential building blocks of any story. They're the foundational components that help transform a simple sequence of events into a compelling, structured narrative that audiences can connect with.

Provide a breakdown of the core narrative elements and discuss with participants what each one contributes:

CHARACTERS: These are the people (or sometimes animals, objects, or concepts) who drive the action in the story.
- Researchers, study participants, organizations, or even concepts (like a protein or a policy).
- Ask: If you were the casting director, who are the leads? The supporting cast? The background characters?

> **TIP:** The characters don't all have to appear in the final narrative. The goal is to understand the web of relationships and roles.

SETTING: This is the where and when of the story; a strong setting creates atmosphere and context.
- Identify physical locations in their research (labs, clinics, communities).
- Think about sensory details: what does the place feel, smell, or sound like?
- Decide which setting matters most to their audience.

POINT OF VIEW (POV): POV is the lens through which the story is told and defines how the audience will experience the story.
- First person ("I am a patient"), second person ("You are the patient"), or third person ("They are the patient").
- Encourage creativity: Could the story be told from the perspective of a molecule? An organization?
- Ask: Which POV will most effectively connect with your audience?

> **TIP:** Challenge participants to experiment with multiple POVs and notice how the story shifts with each.

PLOT: Plot is the sequence of events—the cause and effect chain that builds tension and leads to a resolution.
- Review the classic structure: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, Resolution.
- A good plot isn't just "this happened, then that happened." Introduce the concept of reversals—moments when things change direction or expectations are flipped.
- Ask: Where does your story start? What changes? How does it end?

DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

While core narrative elements are the building blocks (characters, setting, point of view, plot), dramatic elements are the ingredients that make the story exciting, dynamic, and meaningful. They are the forces within a story that create emotional tension, keep audiences engaged, and drive the story forward.

Desire: creates forward motion; without it, nothing happens.
- What do the characters in your story want?
- What does your audience desire to learn or understand?
- Ask: If no one in your story wants anything, is it still a story?

Risk: what's at stake if the characters don't get what they want. The higher the stakes, the more invested the audience becomes.
- What's at stake if the desire isn't met?
- What's the cost of failure—both in the research and for the broader world?
- Encourage participants to identify risks in their research findings and implications.

Inciting Incident: the event that disrupts the status quo and sets the story in motion.
- What changed to spark this research?
- Look for discoveries or disruptions that catalyzed the study.
- Ask: Why are we telling this story now?

Weakness: flaws or vulnerabilities in the characters. These make characters relatable and allow room for growth and change.
- How do these imperfections lead to change?
- In first-person narratives, leading with imperfection makes stories relatable and human.

Choice: key moments when characters must decide between two paths.
- Choices reveal values, priorities, and true character.
- Encourage participants to find moments where decisions were made in the research process or by those impacted by it.

Conflict: the obstacles or opposing forces standing in the way of the characters' goals. They create tension and keep audiences engaged.
- What obstacles or antagonistic forces did the research face?
- These could be logistical challenges, societal barriers, or natural forces.
- Invite participants to write a "but" sentence to highlight the central tension.

Reversals: unexpected changes in direction or outcome. Reversals keep the story surprising and prevent predictability.
- Where do things flip or change direction in the story?
- Even small discoveries can become meaningful reversals for someone.
- Encourage them to ask: "If [finding] is true, what changes?"

Discovery or Reveal: lightbulb moments that shift understanding or perspective.
- What surprised the researchers?
- What new understanding emerged from the research?
- Highlight the moment where everything clicked or shifted.

Climax: the moment where the big question is answered and the culmination of the story's tension and conflict.
- What does it all mean for people?
- The climax is the answer to the question: "So what?"
- Guide participants to show how the world, or someone's world, is different at the end of their story.

NEXT STEPS: PREPARING THE SH*TTY FIRST DRAFT

In the next session, participants will present a "first draft" of their stories. This draft must integrate three key elements:

- The scientific research itself (facts, findings, and data).
- A clear understanding of the audience (who the research is meant to inform or persuade).
- Narrative techniques (storytelling structures, dramatic elements, and engaging delivery).

ACTIVITIES

HAND GESTURES & FILLERS: THE ART OF PAUSING

GOAL:
1. Improve awareness of speech habits by reducing filler words and using strategic pauses instead.
2. Become more conscious of how often you use fillers and practice speaking smoothly with confidence.

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Choose a topic you feel comfortable speaking about.
2. Speak about it for 30 seconds without using filler words such as "umm," "uhh," "like," "so, yeah," or any other personal speech fillers.
3. If you use a filler word, you must start over from the beginning.
4. Focus on pausing instead of filling gaps in your speech.
5. Use hand gestures, emphasis, and pacing to maintain engagement.

BONUS SESSION: STORY STRUCTURE

THE NARRATIVE BLUEPRINT FOR STRONGER STORYTELLING

This special session serves as a "booster pack" to help participants refine their narratives by exploring different story structures, models, and frameworks. Whether participants need a fresh perspective, a structural tweak, or a more engaging arc, this session provides practical tools to elevate storytelling from good to extraordinary.

By understanding classic narrative patterns, participants can enhance engagement, maintain coherence, and create compelling resolutions. The session also explores how structure impacts both live performance and written manuscripts, ensuring the final story resonates across formats.

> **TIP:** Even if your story is already strong, experimenting with different structures can reveal new depths and nuances.

WHY STRUCTURE MATTERS: THE BLUEPRINT FOR GREAT STORIES

A well-structured story doesn't just entertain—it guides the audience through an emotional and intellectual journey. While Storyhouse emphasized organic creativity first, this session introduces time-tested structures that can serve as inspiration or troubleshooting tools for participants.

Three Reasons to Use This Session:

1. **You're Stuck:** If your story feels unclear, these frameworks offer new ways forward.
2. **You Want to Strengthen Your Story:** Compare your current structure to classic models to hone key moments.
3. **You're Adapting Your Story for Writing:** Learn how different formats require different structural adjustments.

> **TIP:** The goal isn't to force your story into a rigid mold—it's to extract the best elements of structure to make your narrative more engaging.

THE POWER OF KNOWING YOUR ENDING

Start with the End in Mind

Renowned filmmaker Alexander Mackendrick once said,

> *"If you've got a beginning but you don't yet have an end, you're mistaken—you don't have the right beginning."*

This highlights an essential storytelling truth:
- The ending defines the meaning of everything that comes before it.
- When you know where you're going, you can foreshadow, build tension, and create payoff.
- Every scene, conflict, and choice should contribute to the final resolution.

TIP: If you're struggling with your story, pause and clarify the ending. Work backward to ensure every moment builds toward it.

CAUSE-AND-EFFECT: THE POWER OF "BUT" AND "THEREFORE"

David Edgar's Rule: The "But" Test

A compelling story isn't just a series of events—it's a chain of challenges and consequences.

Try writing a one-sentence summary of your story that includes a "But" to introduce conflict:
E.g. A young wizard named Harry attends a magical school and discovers his past—but he must face the dark wizard who killed his parents.

Trey Parker's Rule: Replace "And Then"

South Park co-creator Trey Parker suggests replacing "And then" with "But" or "Therefore" to force cause-and-effect relationships:

Compare:
- Original: *John went to the store, and then he bought a cake.*
- Revised: *John went to the store, but it was closing—therefore, he had to rush to buy a cake.*

Using "But" and "Therefore" makes the story dynamic and engaging by ensuring that every action leads to a consequence.

TIP: Scan your story for moments where you can replace "And then" with "But" or "Therefore" to increase drama and momentum.

CLASSIC STORY MODELS

The Hero's Journey (Joseph Campbell)

The Hero's Journey is a powerful structure for stories that feature a transformation:

1. **Call to Adventure:** The hero faces a challenge.
2. **Refusal of the Call:** Doubts or obstacles arise.
3. **Crossing the Threshold:** The hero steps into a new world.
4. **Trials & Ordeals:** Growth happens through struggles.
5. **The Ultimate Challenge:** A climactic test.
6. **Return & Transformation:** The hero comes back changed.

Examples: Star Wars, The Matrix, Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter.

The Three-Act Structure (Syd Field)

A simple but effective model for almost any story:

1. **Setup**: Establish the world, characters, and the inciting incident.
2. **Confrontation**: The main journey, with rising challenges and a midpoint shift.
3. **Resolution**: The climax and the consequences that follow.

This structure is especially useful for research storytelling, as it provides a clear, logical progression.

The ABT (And, But, Therefore) Framework (Randy Olson)

1. **And**: Set up the situation.
2. **But**: Introduce the problem or conflict.
3. **Therefore**: Present the resolution or key takeaway.

This structure forces clarity and maintains audience engagement—great for concise storytelling, research narratives, and pitches.

Problem-Gap-Hook (Lorelei Lingard)

1. **Problem:** Define the challenge.
2. **Gap:** Highlight what's missing in existing solutions.
3. **Hook:** Present the unique perspective or innovation.

This structure is particularly useful for explaining the value of potential new research projects, science communication and research-based narratives.

STORY SHAPES: KURT VONNEGUT'S NARRATIVE ARCS

Renowned writer Kurt Vonnegut proposed that all stories follow basic shapes:

- **"Man in Hole"** – The protagonist falls into trouble but climbs out stronger.
- **"Boy Meets Girl"** – A character gains something wonderful but risks losing it.
- **"Cinderella"** – A character rises from low fortune to incredible success.

Vonnegut argued that recognizing a story's shape helps create emotional impact.

> **TIP:** Try sketching out your story's shape—does it rise, fall, twist, or repeat? Understanding this can help refine pacing and emotional resonance.

SESSION 5: **ENGAGEMENT**

WEEK 5

Less Sh*tty Version

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TRAINING TOPICS

- Story science
- Performance
- Nervousness
- Engagement

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DELIVERABLES

- Present a 2-3 minute updated "less sh*tty" version of the narrative
- Incorporate week 4 feedback as appropriate

MATERIALS:
- Session 5 training video
- Session 5 workshop slides

OVERVIEW

In this session, participants will refine their story pitches and focus on how to deliver their narratives effectively on stage. Just as a computer needs both hardware and software to function, storytelling requires both content and physical delivery.

We will introduce techniques for managing stage presence, reducing performance anxiety, and using body language to enhance storytelling. Participants will practice delivering their stories with a focus on connection, confidence, and engagement. By the end of this session, they should feel more prepared to perform their narratives in front of an audience!

WORKSHOP PLAN

THE SCIENCE OF STORYTELLING

Stories are more than just entertainment; they are a fundamental way humans communicate. By understanding how storytelling engages the brain, participants can learn to view it not as a matter of luck or talent, but as a skill that can be intentionally developed and controlled.

Introduce participants to these concepts:

- **Neural Entrainment (Brain-to-Brain Mirroring):** When sharing a compelling story, the audience instinctively starts to anticipate what will happen next. Effective storytelling connects listeners with the emotions, actions, or experiences of the characters, allowing the audience to experience what the characters are feeling.

- **Perceptual Coherence:** Our brains make sense of new ideas by linking them to past experiences and placing them into a sequence as stories. Without this, even interesting information can feel confusing and will not stick in the listener's mind.

- **Biophysical Entwinement:** When hearing a dramatic story, our brain releases chemicals like cortisol (for stress) and oxytocin (for empathy), causing us to feel excitement, fear, or joy. This shows that storytelling doesn't just engage the mind but also affects the body.

UNDERSTANDING STAGE FRIGHT: AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

Public speaking anxiety is rooted in evolutionary survival instincts, such as fear of rejection and status loss. By helping participants recognize that this fear is a natural, inherited response rather than a personal flaw, they can redirect their energy from self-consciousness to connecting with their audience.

- **Evolutionary psychology:** In our evolutionary past, survival depended on being accepted within a small social group. Standing out, making mistakes, or being judged by others could lead to losing status or even being excluded from the group.
  - Today, that ancient survival instinct still shows up as nervousness or anxiety when we speak in front of others, even though the threat is no longer life or death.

- **Social status:** Our fears about public speaking are about threats to social status—how respected, valued, or influential someone is compared to others.
  - For our ancestors, having higher social status meant better access to resources, protection, food, and mates, while losing status or being rejected could lead to isolation and danger.
  - In modern situations like public speaking, our brains still react as if standing up and being judged by others could affect our social standing, triggering fear and anxiety.

- **The Spotlight Effect:** People often overestimate how much others notice or pay attention to them.
  - Psychologist Thomas Gilovich demonstrated this through experiments where participants wearing embarrassing shirts thought far more people noticed them than actually did. In reality, most people are focused on themselves and their own social status, not on judging others.

STATUS AS PERFORMANCE

In storytelling and acting, performers need to convincingly adopt the social status of the characters they portray to deliver a believable story, whether it's a king, a leader, or a vulnerable figure.

Participants can use their understanding of social status not only to calm their nerves but also to connect with the audience effectively.

Status Movement in Storytelling: Storytellers can choose to adjust their own status relative to their audience to influence how they are received. Audiences naturally pay attention to changes in a character's status — whether they rise or fall in power, influence, or confidence.

Tracking status shifts (alongside tension or plot changes) keeps audiences emotionally engaged because we are wired to notice and care about social standing and hierarchy.

- **Projecting lower status** (through self-deprecation, humour, or humility) can make a storyteller non-threatening and approachable, removing judgment from the room. This is why stand-up comedians often make fun of themselves — it puts the audience at ease.

- **Projecting higher status** can also be effective, especially if done through confidence, knowledge, and composure.
    - **Prestige Theory:** humans instinctively respect and follow individuals who demonstrate skills, wisdom, or knowledge that can benefit the entire group. In storytelling, a speaker can position themselves as a "prestige figure" by demonstrating competence and contributing valuable insights.

THE AUDIENCE: TO LISTEN OR NOT TO LISTEN

The Stereotype Content Model, developed by social psychologists Susan Fiske, suggests that when evaluating others (especially those we're meeting for the first time), our brains quickly assess them by asking three questions:

- **Warmth**: How friendly, kind, trustworthy, and well-intentioned someone seems. If the audience perceives you as warm, they stop worrying about being criticized or embarrassed. Instead, they lean in and become receptive.
  - *Can I trust this person?*

  Signs of warmth:
  - Smiling genuinely
  - Open body language
  - Inclusive and empathetic language ("We" instead of "I")
  - Listening and showing care for others' thoughts

- **Competence**: How skilled, intelligent, capable, and confident someone seems. The audience wants to trust that you know what you're talking about. If they perceive you as competent, they believe your story has value and relevance.
  - *Do they know what they're talking about?*

  Signs of competence:
  - Speaking with clarity and confidence
  - Good posture and composure
  - Referencing knowledge or experience
  - Structured delivery that shows preparation

- **Sincerity**: How honest, humble and authentic someone seems. If the audience believes you are acting transparently, it shows you care more about the impact of your story than about impressing others.
  - *Can I trust that this person's intentions are genuine and that they'll act fairly?*

  Signs of sincerity:
  - Admitting when you don't know something
  - Showing humility
  - Speaking from personal experience
  - Transparent and ethical communication

PRACTICAL SKILLS TO REDUCE NERVOUSNESS

As participants practice their delivery, provide some key take-home ideas for them to apply and hone their storytelling skills:

Diaphragmatic breathing (diaphragmatic breathing/ belly breathing): Consciously slowing your breath, inhaling deeply through the nose, expanding the abdomen, and exhaling slowly through the mouth.
- It signals the parasympathetic nervous system to relax, reducing anxiety and lowering heart rate and blood pressure.

How to do it in practice:
- *Before speaking, take 3–4 deep breaths to calm yourself.*
- *Between sentences or key points, use a slow inhale to pace yourself and avoid rushing.*
- *Deep breaths create natural pauses — these moments are not just for you, but for your audience to absorb your story.*

Focus on Connection, Not Perfection: Public speaking isn't about delivering a flawless performance. It's about connecting with the people in the room.
- Audiences don't remember every word — they remember how you made them feel. Remind participants that if they make mistakes, but their warmth and genuine desire to share come through, the audience will stay with them.

How to do it in practice:
- *Make eye contact with individuals in the room. Talk to people, not at them.*
- *Speak as though you're explaining something important to a friend.*
- *Focus on making your message clear and meaningful rather than sounding overly rehearsed.*

Extemporaneous Delivery: Speaking naturally, guided by key points or a story structure, rather than reading from a script or memorizing word-for-word. It's halfway between completely improvised and fully scripted.
- It allows participants to be flexible, adapt to the room, and sound conversational. Explain to participants that they can respond to unexpected moments and maintain engagement

How to do it in practice:
- *Know the beginning, middle, and end of your story. Practice enough so that transitions feel natural.*
- *Use mental "checkpoints" (like scenes or story beats) rather than memorizing lines.*
- *If you get lost, ask yourself: "Where does this story end?" and guide yourself back to the destination.*

Feedback & Iteration: Feedback helps participants see blind spots, identify what's working, and improve their delivery. Iteration lets participants sharpen their story into something clear, impactful, and memorable.

- Remind participants to use feedback as a tool for growth, not criticism. They don't have to use all feedback but to instead pick what resonates with their purpose and audience.

> *How to do it in practice:*
> - *Practice in front of a mirror, record yourself, or rehearse with friends.*
> - *Ask for honest feedback — specifically: "What part was confusing?" or "Did I sound rushed?" or "Was there a moment you felt connected?"*
> - *Take notes, adjust, and re-practice. Minor tweaks can make huge differences.*

NEXT STEPS: PRESENTING THE "LESS SH*TTY" VERSION

In this workshop, participants will take the feedback they received in Workshop 4 and revise their story draft. In addition to content refinement, participants will practice delivering their story with attention to posture, gestures, voice control, and pacing.

Key goals for this workshop:
- Participants will prepare to tell their story without reading from a script.
- Build adaptability and the ability to recover from unexpected interruptions
- They are encouraged to record themselves, practice in front of others, or use mirrors to evaluate delivery

ACTIVITIES

KEYWORD DRILL

GOAL:
1. To understand how emphasis changes meaning in a sentence.
2. To develop awareness of tone, pacing, and vocal delivery.
3. To build intentionality in storytelling and clear verbal communication.

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. Choose a simple sentence. Example: "I didn't say she stole the money."
2. Repeat the sentence out loud, each time placing emphasis on a different word.
   - Example:
     - *I* didn't say she stole the money. (Someone else did.)
     - I *didn't* say she stole the money. (I deny saying it.)
     - I didn't *say* she stole the money. (I implied it, but didn't say it.)
     - I didn't say *she* stole the money. (Someone else stole it.)
     - I didn't say she *stole* the money. (Maybe she borrowed it.)
     - I didn't say she stole *the* money. (Maybe it was some money, not the money.)
     - I didn't say she stole the *money*. (Maybe she stole something else.)
3. Encourage participants to exaggerate differences and notice how small shifts in emphasis completely change the message.
4. After practicing the example sentence, have participants come up with their own sentences and repeat the drill.
5. Reflect: After each round, ask:
   - What did you notice?
   - How did the emphasis shift the listener's interpretation?
   - Where in storytelling could this skill help?

SESSION 6: **STORYROOM**

Refining Performance

TRAINING TOPICS

- Biases and heuristics
- Story review
- Dress rehearsal

DELIVERABLES

A 2-3 minute polished narrative prepared for feedback from a professional communications panel

MATERIALS:
- Session 6 Training
- Session 6 Workshop Slides
- The Cognitive Bias Codex

OVERVIEW

Session 6 focuses on refining narrative delivery through an understanding of biases, heuristics, and effective storytelling techniques. Participants will explore how cognitive biases influence audience perception and learn strategies to enhance engagement and credibility.

Before the session, participants should review the training materials and workshop slides. The Cognitive Bias Codex is an optional resource for those interested in deepening their understanding of biases.

During the session, participants will present a 2-3 minute polished version of their narrative in a dress rehearsal format, receiving feedback from a professional communications panel (if available) to prepare for the final performance.

WORKSHOP PLAN

ENHANCING YOUR STORY THROUGH COGNITIVE BIASES

Each story is shaped not only by the storyteller but also by how audiences perceive and process information. Cognitive biases and heuristics influence decision-making, memory, and interpretation, making them powerful tools for crafting compelling narratives. Understanding these mental shortcuts allows storytellers to structure their stories in ways that resonate deeply with their audience.

Communicate with participants the role of cognitive biases in storytelling. Key points to cover:

- How biases shape audience perception and decision-making.
- Ways to leverage heuristics to create more engaging narratives.
- The importance of clarity, emotion, and strategic framing in storytelling.
- Techniques for refining and simplifying stories for greater impact.

WHY BIASES MATTER IN STORYTELLING

A well-crafted story isn't just about the facts, it's about how those facts are framed, received, and remembered. By understanding cognitive biases, storytellers can anticipate audience reactions, create stronger emotional connections, and ensure their message sticks.

Introduce participants to the core concepts guiding this process:

- **Cognitive Biases:** Understanding mental shortcuts that shape perception.
- **Story Simplification:** Removing unnecessary details to maintain clarity.
- **Audience Engagement:** Leveraging biases to make stories more relatable and memorable.

TIP: Encourage participants to think about a time when they were influenced by a story. What made it persuasive? How can they apply similar techniques in their own storytelling?

USING BIASES TO STRENGTHEN NARRATIVES

For a research story to resonate, it must align with how people naturally think and process information. Participants should consider:

- **Confirmation Bias:** Audiences prefer information that aligns with their existing beliefs. How can your story build on this tendency?
- **Anchoring Bias:** First impressions matter. What is the strongest starting point for your story?
- **Availability Heuristic:** People remember vivid, emotionally engaging moments. What will be the most memorable part of your narrative?
- **Narrative Bias:** We naturally seek order and meaning in stories. How can you balance simplicity with complexity?

> **TIP:** If a story feels cluttered, focus on the most impactful elements. A clear, concise narrative is often more persuasive than one overloaded with detail.

REFINING & DELIVERING A POLISHED STORY

Great storytelling isn't just about the content. It's about how it's delivered. Participants will focus on simplifying their narratives, engaging their audience, and refining their stage presence.

- **Eliminating Distractions:** Remove unnecessary elements that dilute the story's core message.
- **Planned Redundancy:** Use strategic repetition to reinforce key points for listeners.
- **Performance Balance:** Expressiveness is key, but overacting can diminish credibility. Finding a natural, confident delivery style is essential.

> **TIP:** Encourage participants to remove one unnecessary element from their story. If the story still makes sense, that element wasn't needed in the first place.

NEXT STEPS: A FINAL PRACTICE RUN

At the upcoming workshop, participants will present a final practice run of their story, receiving feedback from professionals in journalism, science communication, and knowledge mobilization. This is the last opportunity to refine narratives before the mainstage performance.

Expectations for the dress rehearsal:
- Stories should be delivered without speaking notes.
- Narratives should be stage-ready, with minimal last-minute changes.
- Feedback will focus on clarity, engagement, and delivery techniques.

> **TIP:** A strong opening and a clear message will stick with the audience. Focus on refining those elements in preparation for the final performance.

ACTIVITIES

GESTURE CHARADES

GOAL:
To enhance expressive communication by incorporating gestures into storytelling, improving body language fluency in conversations.

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. The game is played like charades mixed with storytelling.
2. Participants must tell a short story while using gestures to illustrate actions, emotions, and key moments.
   - Example: *"Last night, I was playing a game of Xbox (gesture playing Xbox), when suddenly I heard (gesture listening) my dad marching (gesture walking heavily) down the hallway as if he was about to kick (gesture kicking) down the door. He looked (gesture staring) me dead in the eyes and said, 'Are you doing your homework (gesture writing) yet, boy?'"*
3. Facilitators can either provide a story prompt for participants or let them improvise their own stories on the spot.
4. The goal is to make storytelling highly animated and engaging using gestures to complement words.

Credit: @askvinh on Instagram

SESSION 7: **TAKING THE STAGE**

WEEK 7

Stepping into the Spotlight

TRAINING TOPICS

- Live stage orientation
- Finale event staging
- Story rubric

DELIVERABLES

Present your 2-3 minute stage-ready narrative incorporating relevant feedback from previous week's panel (no speaking notes!)

MATERIALS:
- Session 7 Training
- Session 7 Workshop Slides
- Storyhouse rubric

OVERVIEW

Session 7 prepares participants for their final live storytelling performance, focusing on stage presence, confidence, and audience engagement. It provides strategies for managing nerves, adapting to different audiences, and maintaining focus, while encouraging performers to own the stage and deliver their story with authenticity. The session serves as a final motivational send-off, celebrating their journey from research to storytelling.

WORKSHOP PLAN: LIVE PERFORMANCE

TAKING THE STAGE: MASTERING LIVE PERFORMANCE

Stepping onto the stage marks the final transformation from preparation to performance. This session focuses on staging, technical logistics, and storytelling techniques to ensure a seamless and impactful live event. Understanding stage positioning, voice projection, and minimizing distractions allows storytellers to fully engage their audience and deliver a compelling narrative.

OWNING THE STAGE: THE MOMENT OF TRANSFORMATION

Taking the stage is more than just stepping onto a platform—it's stepping into the story. The performance is the culmination of months of work, where all elements of storytelling, staging, and technical logistics come together in one moment.

Introduce participants to key staging concepts:

- **Stage Spikes & Marks:** These indicators guide where performers should stand to ensure proper lighting and framing for the audience and video recording.
- **On-Deck Positioning:** Storytellers must be in the wings, ready to take the stage as soon as the previous performer finishes.
- **Stool Placement:** If used, it must be returned to its designated spike mark for consistency in the performance flow.

> **TIP:** Arrive early at the venue to familiarize yourself with the stage space. Walk through your performance area to understand how it feels to move within the space.

MASTERING STAGE PRESENCE: VOICE & MOVEMENT

A great performance isn't just about words—it's about how those words are delivered. Expressiveness, clarity, and body language all play a role in captivating an audience.

Voice Amplification & Projection

- Assume you'll be using a lapel microphone—ensure your attire allows for proper attachment.
- If using a handheld microphone, be mindful of positioning to avoid muffled sound.
- Project your voice as if speaking to the person in the very last row, ensuring clarity and volume.

Physical Presence

- Use deliberate movements to emphasize key points, avoiding fidgeting or unnecessary pacing.
- If standing, stay within your designated marks to maintain proper lighting and framing.
- If seated, ensure the stool remains in its marked position throughout your performance.

> **TIP:** Practice your delivery using a mirror or recording yourself to refine movement, voice projection, and presence.

ELIMINATING DISTRACTIONS: REDUCING "NOISE"

In storytelling, "noise" refers to anything that disrupts the message being communicated. Identifying and minimizing these distractions ensures a polished, professional presentation.

Types of noise & how to mitigate them:

1. **Physical Noise**: Disruptive sounds, poor lighting, or technical malfunctions.
   - *Solution: Arrive early to adjust to the environment and test equipment.*
2. **Semantic Noise:** Complex jargon or unclear language that confuses the audience.
   - *Solution: Use plain, accessible language.*
3. **Psychological Noise:** Anxiety, stress, or preconceived notions that impact delivery.
   - *Solution: Ground yourself with calming exercises before stepping on stage.*
4. **Physiological Noise:** Fatigue, illness, or lack of hydration affecting performance.
   - *Solution: Stay hydrated, eat nutritious food, and get sufficient rest before the event.*

> **TIP:** Don't call attention to small distractions. For example, if the stage lights are bright, resist commenting on them—it only draws unnecessary focus.

CAPTURING & HOLDING AUDIENCE ATTENTION

In today's world, attention is a currency. Audiences have countless distractions, so every moment of a live performance must be engaging and purposeful.

AVOIDING "MEANING DESERTS"

A meaning desert occurs when the audience loses connection to the story because the purpose is unclear or unengaging.

- Keep transitions smooth and logical.
- Ensure the story maintains momentum without unnecessary tangents.
- Every sentence should serve the story's purpose—if a detail isn't necessary, remove it.

PRE-MORTEM EXERCISE: IDENTIFYING WEAK SPOTS

Before performing, conduct a pre-mortem—an exercise where you imagine your story failing and identify why.

- Did the audience seem disengaged?
- Were key points unclear?
- Were there moments of confusion?
- Was the pacing too slow or too fast?

> **TIP:** Have a friend or mentor listen to your story and provide feedback on clarity and engagement before the event.

NEXT STEPS: PREPARING FOR THE DRESS REHEARSAL

This event is designed to elevate research storytelling into an immersive experience. The final steps before performance involve refining every detail to ensure a seamless event.

Guide participants through this checklist for the their mainstage performance:

- Arrive early to test the space, stage, and microphone.
- **Know your cues:** stay aware of the performance order and be in position before your turn.
- Take three deep breaths before speaking to calm nerves.
- **Own the stage:** you control the moment and decide when to start.
- Pass the mic smoothly: if using a lapel mic, know how to hand it off efficiently.
- Celebrate the finale: after the last performance, all storytellers gather on stage for a celebratory moment.

WORKSHOP PLAN: VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE

Performing on stage and performing on camera are two very different experiences. In this section, help participants understand how to adjust their presence and delivery for an audience through the lens.

PERFORMANCE FOR THE CAMERA VS. FOR THE STAGE

On stage, projection and large gestures matter. On camera, subtle facial expressions and smaller, intentional movements have more impact. Encourage performers to use facial expression and nuanced body language to convey emotion and emphasis.

Facial Expression & Eye Contact: Instead of looking at an audience, participants should decide whether to:
- Look directly at the camera (talking "to" the audience), or
- Focus just off-camera (as if speaking to an unseen listener). Discuss which feels more natural for their story.
- Maintain "eye energy," which is a focused, intentional gaze conveys confidence and connection, even when performed virtually.
- Emphasize facial expressiveness. The camera picks up on micro-expressions that might be lost on stage.

Vocal delivery: The camera can flatten energy. Participants may need to raise their energy level slightly without becoming unnatural.
- Warm, conversational tone: In virtual recordings, an overly theatrical delivery can seem exaggerated. Instead, aim for clarity, warmth, and a natural, authentic speaking style.
- Pacing and pauses: Remind participants that they can pause and breathe. Natural pacing helps emphasize key points without feeling rushed.
- Microphone awareness: Teach participants to maintain consistent distance from the microphone and avoid sudden loud outbursts or trailing off.

Framing & Body Position:
- Find the right frame: Help participants understand "framing" — whether it's head-and-shoulders (medium close-up), or slightly wider (waist up), depending on their movement.
- Stillness vs. movement: In a recording room, unnecessary movement can be distracting. Encourage participants to plan purposeful gestures and maintain a steady posture.

ACTIVITIES

POWER POSE ACTIVITY: RADIATING CONFIDENCE

GOAL: Use power posing and affirmations to mentally and physically prepare for confident public speaking!

INSTRUCTIONS:
1. **Choose a Power Pose** – Select a pose that makes you feel strong, confident, and ready to take the stage.
2. **Hold the Pose** – Stand tall, maintain eye contact, and breathe deeply for a few seconds.
3. **Repeat the Affirmations** – One by one, say the positive affirmations on the screen.

Feel the words as you say them.
- *I am prepared, and I trust myself to deliver my story with confidence.*
- *My voice is strong, my words are clear, and I belong on this stage.*
- *I will connect with my audience, and my story will leave an impact.*
- *I am in control of my breath, my body, and my emotions.*
- *It's okay to feel nervous—nerves mean I care, and I can turn them into excitement!*
- *I am here to share, inspire, and enjoy the moment.*
- *I am proud of myself for showing up and giving my best!*
- *I am now ready to share my story with the world!*

- **Embrace the Moment** – Recognize that confidence comes from within, and your body language can shape your mindset.

- **Step Forward with Confidence** – Carry this energy into your speech, presentation, or performance.

SESSION 8: **PODCAST**

WEEK 8

Reflecting on your Journey

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TRAINING TOPICS

- Reflective praxis
- Evaluation
- Podcast episode production

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DELIVERABLES

Complete a podcast run sheet and participate in a recorded discussion about your narrative, focusing on lessons learned, surprises, and challenges.

MATERIALS:
- Session 8 Training
- Session 8 Workshop Slides
- Podcast run sheet

OVERVIEW

Session 8 focuses on self-reflection and evaluation, a crucial step in refining research communication and nurturing personal development. Participants will analyze their journey of crafting and performing their narrative, exploring the challenges, surprises, and key takeaways from the process. They will also engage in podcast production, learning how to structure engaging discussions that effectively communicate their experience.

Before the session, participants should review the Podcast Run Sheet and reflect on their narrative journey. During the session, they will complete their podcast run sheet and take part in a recorded discussion, serving both as a podcast host and an interview subject. This experience will strengthen their ability to articulate insights, engage in reflective dialogue, and contribute to a broader conversation on research storytelling.

WORKSHOP PLAN

THE STORY BEHIND YOUR STORY: THE PODCAST EPISODE

Your research narrative has been performed and shared, but the journey isn't over yet. Now, it's time to reflect on the experience and translate it into a new format: a podcast episode. This session focuses on self-reflection, integration of lessons learned, and preparing for a recorded discussion about your narrative.

Participants will explore:

- How storytelling has shaped their personal and professional growth.
- The concept of reflective praxis: learning through critical reflection on action.
- The structure and purpose of their podcast episode.
- How to interview and be interviewed about their research narrative.

REFLECTIVE PRAXIS: LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCE

Participants will engage in reflective praxis, a structured approach to learning through action and reflection. This involves:

- **Reflection in action:** making real-time adjustments and learning as you go.
- **Reflection on action:** analyzing past experiences to improve future approaches.

> **TIP:** The more critically we reflect on our process, the more we improve as communicators and researchers.

PREPARING FOR THE PODCAST EPISODE

Each participant will contribute to two podcast episodes:
1. **As a subject:** being interviewed about their experience crafting and performing their narrative.
2. **As a host:** interviewing another participant (or, if applicable, a faculty member) about their research and storytelling process.

The podcast serves multiple purposes:
- **Personal reflection:** helping participants articulate and integrate their growth.
- **Knowledge mobilization:** making research stories more accessible to broader audiences.
- **Community building:** connecting participants across different cohorts.

PODCAST STRUCTURE & KEY ELEMENTS

Participants will complete a Podcast Production Sheet to guide their episode. This includes:

- **A Cold Open:** A compelling quote or moment from the narrative to hook listeners.
- **A Log Line:** A one-sentence teaser that introduces the research problem and question.
- **Host Introduction:** A structured way to introduce the research, the storyteller, and the episode.
- **Interview Questions:** Prompts to guide the discussion, covering challenges, surprises, audience engagement, and takeaways.
- **Closing Reflection:** Final insights from the storyteller and host before concluding the episode.

INTERVIEWING & BEING INTERVIEWED

Effective storytelling relies on engaging conversations. Participants will practice:

- **Active listening:** being present, following up on interesting points.
- **Balancing structure with spontaneity:** using prepared questions while allowing for natural dialogue.
- **Bridging ideas smoothly:** transitioning between key points in a way that feels organic.

> **TIP:** Podcasting is conversational. It's okay to pause, rephrase, and sound natural. It's more important to be authentic than perfect.

NEXT STEPS: RECORDING THE PODCAST

Participants will record their podcast episodes in a live session. They will:

- Use professional microphones and recording equipment.
- Practice both interviewing and storytelling in a recorded setting.
- Have opportunities to redo sections if needed; podcasts allow for editing and revisions.

> **TIP:** Speaking on a podcast should feel more like a conversation than a performance. Embrace the opportunity to reflect and share.

SESSION 9: **THE MANUSCRIPT**

WEEK 8

Turning Performance to Prose

TRAINING TOPICS

- Final text formatting
- Byline and bio
- Staging and publishing

DELIVERABLES

Submission of the final deliverable: written and formatted version of the narrative for publication

MATERIALS:
- Session 9 Training
- Session 9 Workshop Slides
- Creative Commons BY 4.0

OVERVIEW

The final session of Storyhouse marks the transition from spoken storytelling to the written word, guiding participants through the process of transforming their live performances into polished manuscripts. This session explores how to capture the energy, emotion, and structure of a performance in prose, ensuring that narratives remain just as compelling on the page as they were on stage.

Participants will also navigate the next steps for publication and sharing, from manuscript refinement to licensing and distribution. Beyond the technical process, it is a celebration of progress, offering space for reflection on the journey from research to storytelling.

Ultimately, this session introduces the next chapter of each participant's storytelling journey, encouraging them to continue using their voice to inform, inspire, and engage audiences beyond Storyhouse!

WORKSHOP PLAN

FROM STAGE TO PAGE: WHY PERFORMANCE CAME FIRST

Storytelling and writing are deeply connected, yet distinct. Storyhouse strategically prioritized live performance before manuscript development to ensure that narratives were refined through audience engagement, improvisation, and embodied storytelling.

Why This Approach Works:
- Live storytelling provides immediate audience feedback that a written draft alone cannot replicate.
- Performance fosters deeper connection to the material, helping storytellers refine their message.
- The physical and vocal elements of storytelling inform the pacing, tone, and structure of the final manuscript.

Now that the story has been told on stage, participants have a deeper understanding of their narrative, allowing them to craft a stronger, more impactful written version.

> **TIP:** Think of your written manuscript as the final transformation of your story—not just a transcript of what was said, but an enhanced version with added depth and detail.

CRAFTING A COMPELLING MANUSCRIPT

The written manuscript is the final, polished version of the narrative story, crafted for publication and broader dissemination. Unlike the live performance, which relies on tone, pacing, and physical presence, the manuscript must capture the essence of the story through prose. It also ensures that participants' stories live beyond the stage. While live performances are a powerful way to engage an audience, the written version provides a lasting, shareable, and adaptable format that can reach wider audiences and have long-term impact.

Key Considerations for Writing:

- **Enhance Descriptions**: Without physical gestures and vocal tone, add vivid sensory details to create a strong visual for readers.
- **Structure Your Narrative:** Organize the story with a clear beginning, middle, and end, using transitions for smooth readability.
- **Show, Don't Tell:** Use actions, thoughts, and dialogue to bring the story to life rather than relying on exposition.
- **Refine Dialogue:** If applicable, ensure written conversations remain authentic but are clear and purposeful in text form.
- **Pace Your Story:** Use paragraph breaks, headings, and sentence variation to maintain reader engagement.

TIP: Apply lessons from the attention economy (Session 7) to written storytelling—every word should serve a purpose.

FINALIZING & SUBMITTING YOUR MANUSCRIPT

Once the story is refined, the manuscript requires two key additions:

1. **Author's Note:** Each narrative begins with a brief introduction that provides context, audience, and scope of fictionalization.
- *Example Format:*
    - *__Introduction__: Name and background of the author.*
    - *__Research Inspiration:__ Title of the study the story is based on (with a hyperlink).*
    - *__Narrative Perspective:__ Explanation of any fictionalized elements and intended audience.*

2. **Creative Commons Licensing:** All Storyhouse narratives are published under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing free distribution and adaptation with credit to the original author. A link to this license must be included at the end of the manuscript.

TIP: Double-check that your manuscript is polished, structured, and includes the necessary attribution elements before submitting.

PUBLICATION & FUTURE IMPACT

Using Substack for Story Dissemination

- All narratives will be hosted on Substack, providing a centralized platform for sharing written, audio, and video versions of each story.
- Participants will receive an email invitation to set up a profile, which will be linked to their published narrative.
- The publication process may take time, as stories are prioritized based on urgency and faculty research needs.

Opportunities Beyond Storyhouse

Your journey doesn't end here. Many Storyhouse participants have gone on to:

- Adapt their narratives for storytelling competitions.
- Develop collaborations with faculty, researchers, and science communicators.
- See their stories republished or used in educational settings.
- Return as mentors and contributors to future Storyhouse programs.

> **TIP:** Stay connected—Storyhouse is just the beginning of your storytelling journey!

NEXT STEPS: REFLECTION & CELEBRATION

This final workshop together serves two purposes:

1. **Support & Discussion:** A space to ask final questions and refine manuscripts.
2. **Celebration:** A moment to reflect on the journey, share experiences, and recognize achievements.

> **TIP:** Embrace storytelling as a lifelong skill. Congratulate participants for completing this journey, and remind them to continue telling stories that inform, inspire, and impact the world!

✨ **Congratulations on completing Storyhouse! Your stories matter.**

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