

STORY WORKS ALASKA

Storytelling Basics:

Dear Students,

Everybody has a story. Including you.

Inspired by and modeled after local storytelling program Arctic Entries, this workshop will help you develop your storytelling skills. But beware: the suggestions that follow concern a specific style of storytelling: **transformative, first person tales in front of a large, live audience.**

This is, at some level, a storytelling formula. But it is not the only one. Some of this formula should be adjusted (or, more likely, ignored) for stories about another person, or stories told in front of three friends at a campfire. That said, the bulk of the suggestions that follow could apply to all kinds of storytelling.

Be brave and be honest,
The Story Works Team

What We'll be Covering Here:

Essentials:

What kind of story should you tell?

Story Structure:

How to build a story that will make your audience want to keep listening.

Content and Delivery:

Style and Humor
Practice, Practice, Practice

Essentials:

What kind of story should you tell?

For the purposes of this assignment, please choose a story that...

Features YOU as the main character.

This means the story is about YOU and your experiences/feelings/thoughts; you are not just a spectator.

If your story involves other students (in large or small roles) please get their permission before you tell the story aloud.

Entertains the Audience, but also matters to YOU.

Yes, your goal is ultimately to create a story that engages your audience. But first, make sure you care about it. If you don't care about it, odds are that you won't be able to convince your audience to.

Has clear *stakes*.

In other words, what is at risk for you as this story unfolds? Why did the outcome of the story matter to you at the time? Were you worried about your grades? About to drown for the sake of catching a fish? Trying to impress to your 3rd grade crush?

You might not know what your stakes are the first time you try to tell your story – but be on the lookout for them.

Involves a *transformation* of the main character (you).

For this assignment we encourage you to tell a story that involves some change for the main character (you). This transformation may involve learning to accept something, coming to understand something better, surviving an ordeal, or changing your perspective. It can be huge (discovering that you are gay) or tiny (discovering that you love pesto).

Please choose one of the stories you just heard and respond to these questions:

What were the *stakes*? (What was at risk for the main character? Why did the outcome of the story matter to him or her?)

What transformation did the main character undergo during the story?

Structure:

How to help your audience understand –and stay engaged in—your story:

Have a Beginning:

Open with confidence and establish who you were at the time of the story.
Let us know whatever we need to know so that we can understand the story.
Don't give everything away at the start.
But do establish your *stakes*.
And defuse land mines! (i.e. Clear up things that might leave your audience worrying about an issue unrelated to the main theme of your story.)

And a Middle:

The middle is where the adventure unfolds, the gas pains get worse, the chimpanzee chases you around the cemetery, you traverse the town on your beloved tricycle, or you carry your unconscious little brother to safety.
Make sure to return to your stakes in the middle. Remind us what was important to you at the time. Remind us what was at risk.

And an End:

The end should be where your audience comes to understand your transformation.
Avoid meandering and aim for a short, well-rehearsed ending.
But you don't need to fully articulate the "moral" of the story.

Please choose a different story that you just heard and respond to these questions:

Beginning: What did the audience learn in the beginning of this story?

Did the audience need to know more? Less? If so, please explain.

Middle: What was the adventure?

Did you have a sense of the stakes at this stage in the story?
(If so, were they directly referred to or just implied?)

End: How did the storyteller close the story?

What worked for you (or not) about this ending?

Content and Delivery:

Style and Humor:

Show; don't tell.

Bring on the lively details: "The circus smelled like popcorn and children."

You can be funny. But you don't have to be.

Don't hesitate to make fun of yourself. But beware of mocking others.

Genuine humor emerges from conflict and truth.

No notes. They get in the way.

Practice, Practice, Practice:

Practice in front of others. Practice alone. Practice in front of your cat.

Record yourself and listen to it --if you dare.

Try not to memorize your story word for word.

Just memorize the first lines and the last lines and let it flow from there.

Conclusion:

It would be easy to deduce from the suggestions above that a formula for storytelling exists. That is false; there are all kinds of stories, and many successful ones will violate more rules than they will follow. That said, it's easier to break the rules when you know them, and when you know why you are breaking them.