THE **POWER** OF

STORIES
IN BUSINESS

SPRING 2014

TOOLKIT
CARDS

CLIMAX

Find the climax first. Why? It the best part of the story to hear -- which typically means it's the easiest part of the story to write. You can then decidewhethertousethestory's climax to grab attention or end the story with a bang.

"That's how stories happen-with a turning point, an unexpected twist."

- Haruki Murakami
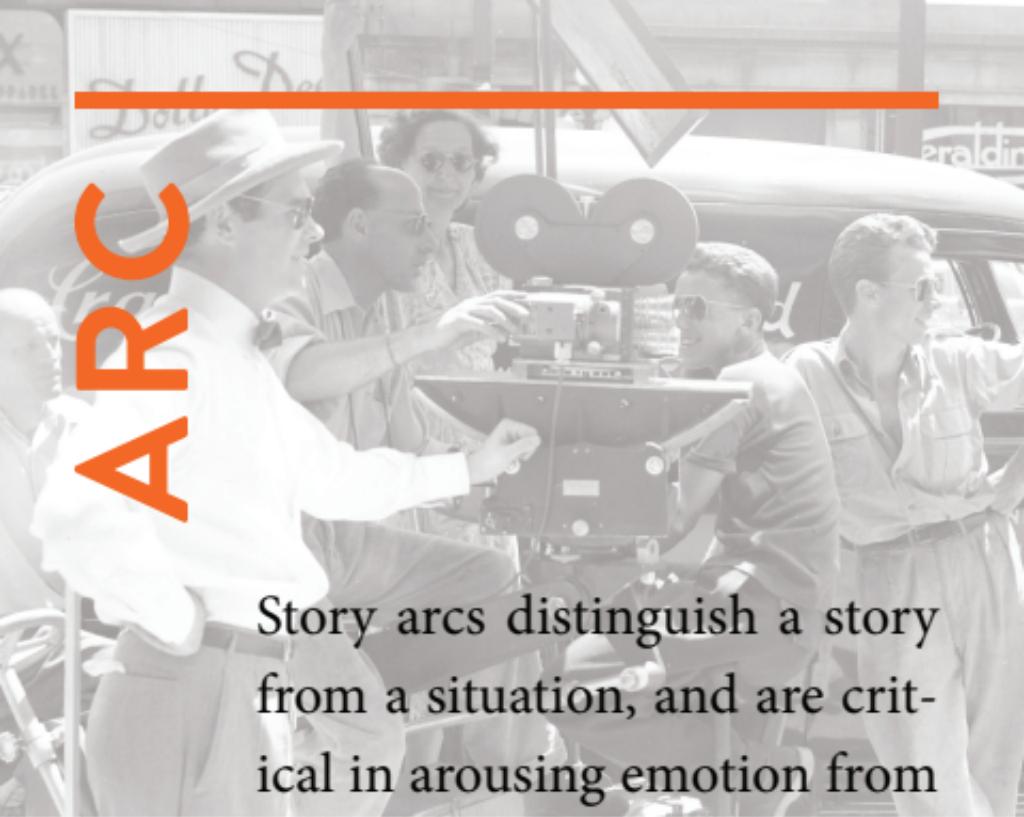
Story arcs distinguish a story from a situation, and are critical in arousing emotion from the audience. To create an arc, consider this "story spine" exercise: Once upon a time… And every day… Until one day…. Because of that… Until finally… End ever since that day…. And the moral is…

"I tend to relate to a character in terms of the arc: what's interesting is where he starts versus where he ends up."

- Edward Norton

MUNDANE

You don't need to have an exotic story to grab attention - just one that has interesting components that can be further developed. Good stories can be revealed in the smallest amd most mundane of moments.

"But there's a story behind everything. How a picture got on a wall. How a scar got on your face. Sometimes the stories are simple, and sometimes they are hard and heartbreaking."

- Mitch Albom

PROTAGONIST

Character is revealed by choices made under pressure. We communicate a character not by what they say but what they do under extreme duress. Build a strong protagonist to lead your story by showing the audience the "what" and "why" behind the choices they make.

"A good story should make you laugh, and a moment later break your heart."

- Chuck Palahniuk

CONFLICT
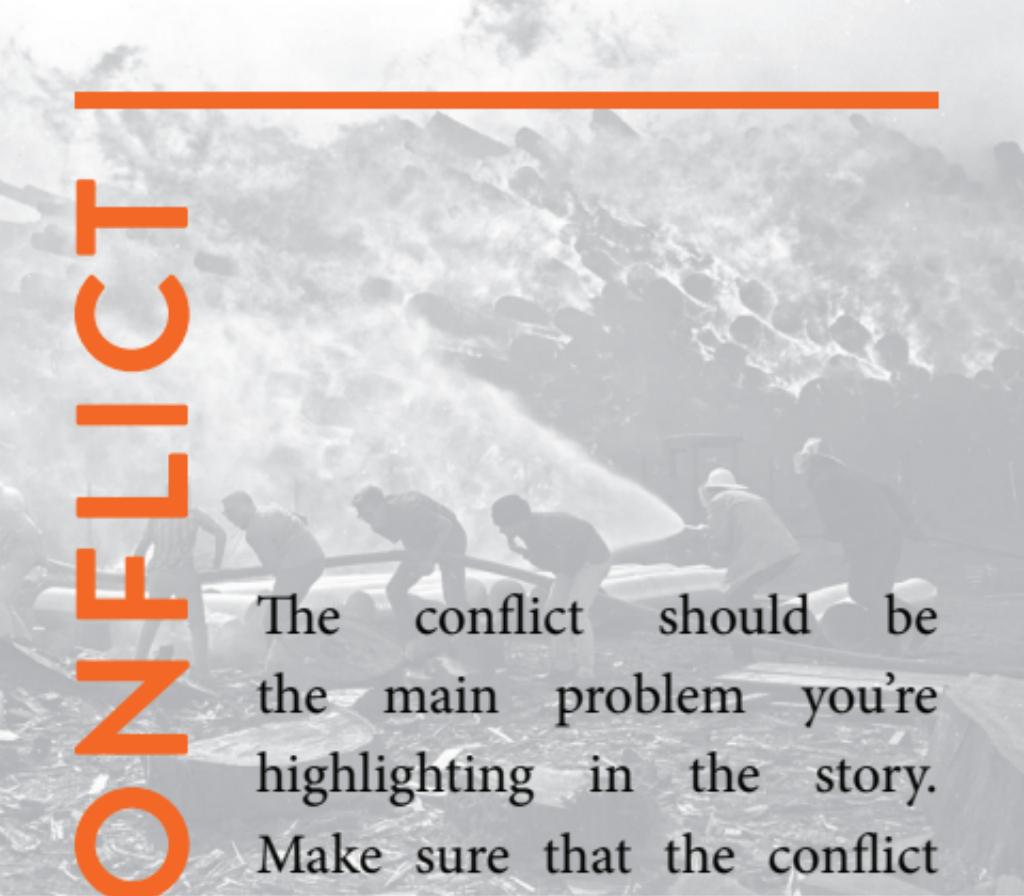
The conflict should be the main problem you're highlighting in the story. Make sure that the conflict ties into the spine of the story and is properly set up in the beginning. Remember to solve the conflict and demonstrate why its significant by the end of the story.

"Happiness is an allegory, unhappiness a story."

- Leo Tolstoy

DETAIL
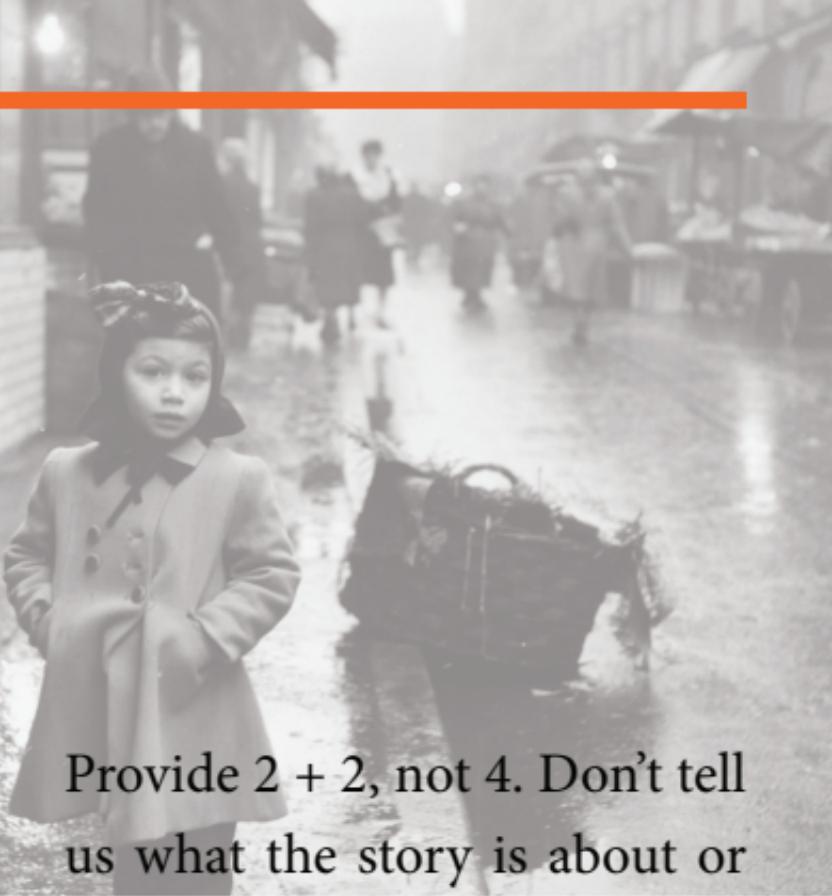
Provide 2 + 2, not 4. Don't tell us what the story is about or what the takeaway is; rather, guide us through the story, providing us with the details that we need to come to our own conclusions. Let the story speak for itself.

"The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon."

- Brandon Sanderson

AUDIENCE
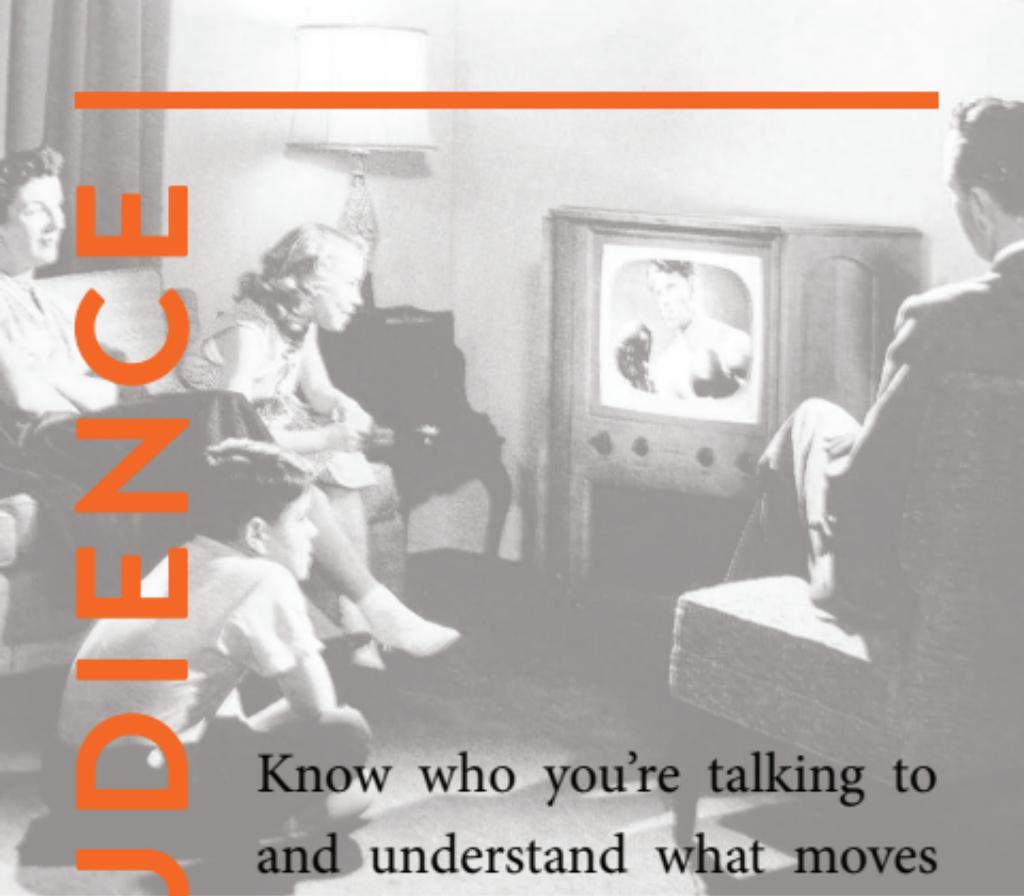
Know who you're talking to and understand what moves them. This will make it easier to craft your story. Tailor your story to fit the needs of your target audience. A story's theme should speak to a specific audience.

"At its best, storytelling can directly and tightly connect the teller and audience."

- National Storytelling Network

FLOW
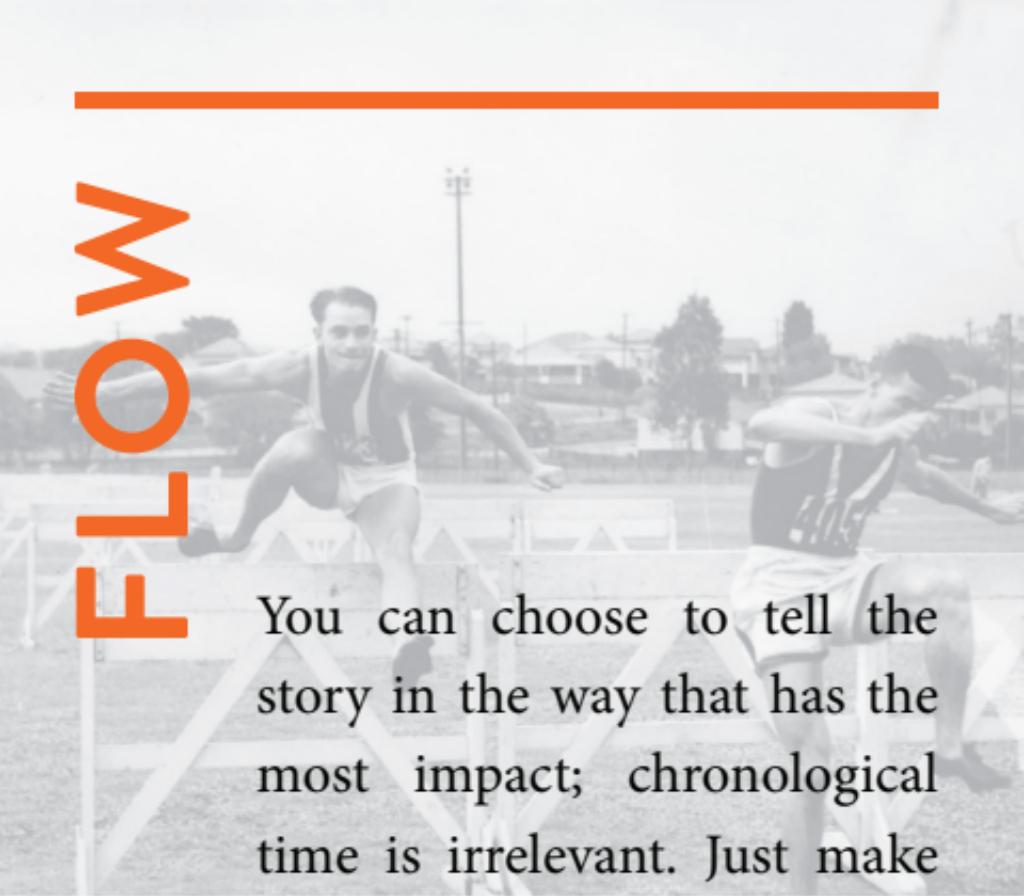
You can choose to tell the story in the way that has the most impact; chronological time is irrelevant. Just make sure your story flows. Focus on answering the questions on people's minds. Note - you'll likely iterate on flow in the story structure at least three times.

"Some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity."

- Gilda Radner

DELIVERY
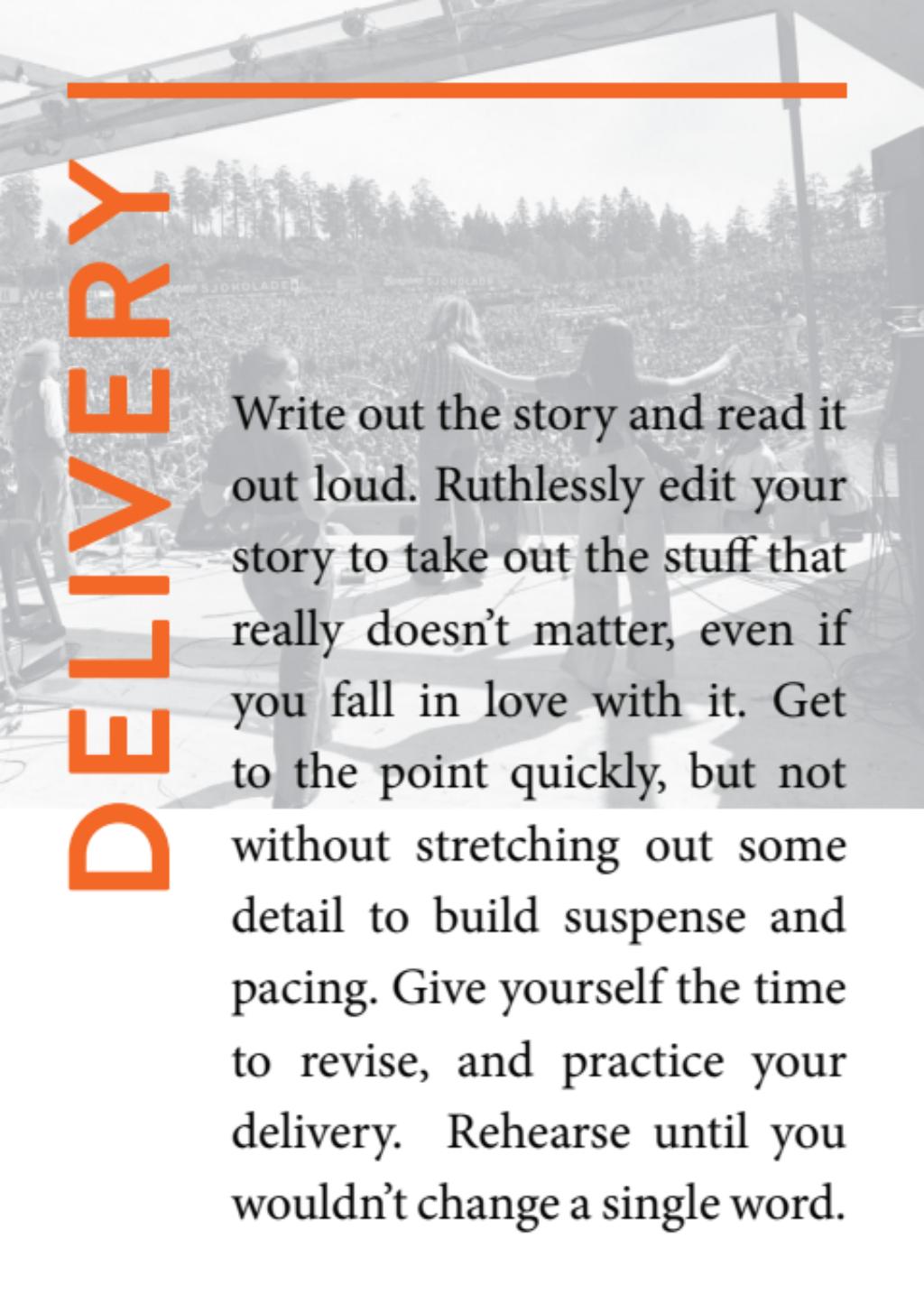
Write out the story and read it out loud. Ruthlessly edit your story to take out the stuff that really doesn't matter, even if you fall in love with it. Get to the point quickly, but not without stretching out some detail to build suspense and pacing. Give yourself the time to revise, and practice your delivery. Rehearse until you wouldn't change a single word.

"Ninety-nine percent is in the delivery. If you have the right voice and the right delivery, you're cocky enough, and you pound down on the punch line, you can say anything and make people laugh maybe three times before they realize you're not telling jokes."

- Buddy Hackett

LISTEN

Listen to others stories well. Like a muscle, listening skills can be improved. Know the contexts in which you listen well; can you recreate them?

"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

- Winston Churchill

BREVITY
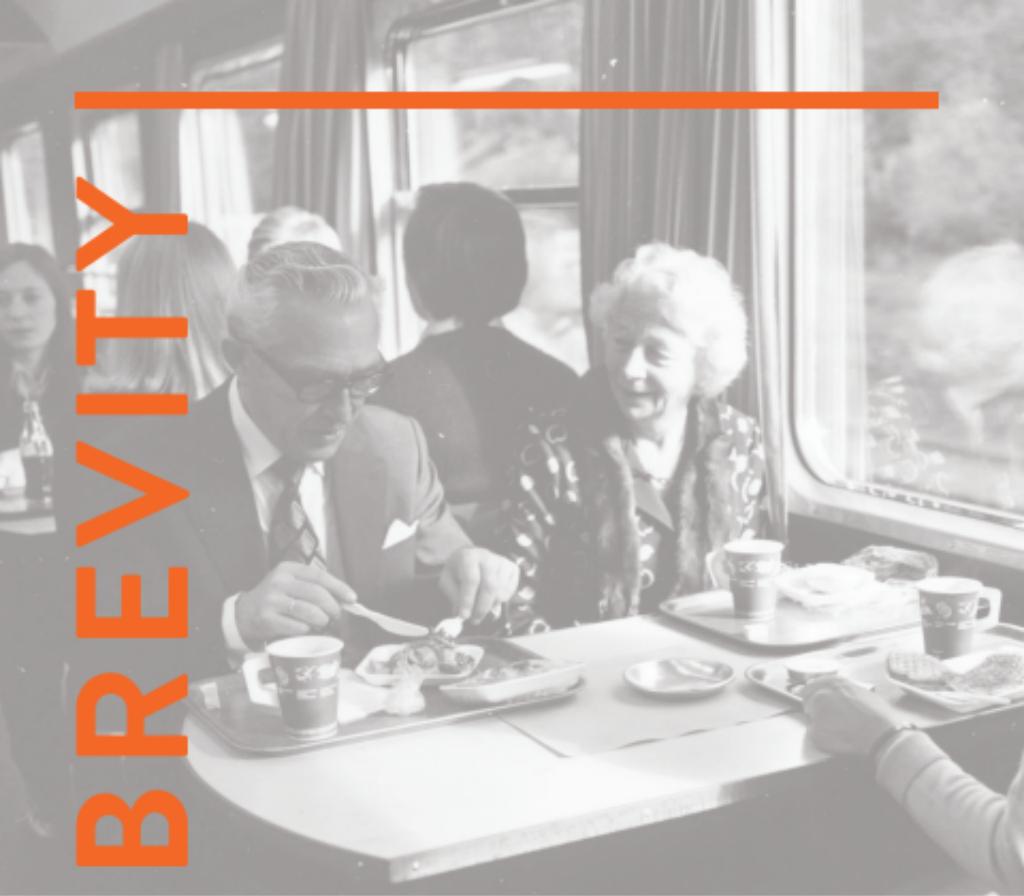
Brevity allows the audiences to make inferences, and makes the audience feel respected. Brevity mystifies.

"Brevity is the soul of wit."

\- William Shakespeare

END

Stop the story when you have said enough to convey your message. You don't always need to answer all the questions in your story. This leaves them asking for more.

"If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story."

- Orson Welles

REACTIONS

The stories worth telling are those that elicit a definite physical reaction in you when you remember them.

"Stories make us more alive, more human, more courageous, more loving."

- Madeleine L'Engle

TRUST

Trust that your audience cares about you and has a genuine interest in learning more about you. Respond to their sincerity with willingness to be confidently candid.

"The last thing I'd learn, well into my career, was how to get on, how to say hello, how to get in with the audience."

- Phyllis Diller

SPREAD

There is a story that people want to hear. And a story that people want to share. They aren't always the same. If you want your story to spread, know the answer to the question: why would someone share it.

"A good story is one you want to repeat."

- James Buckhouse

VISUALS

These are important but need to be supported with words. People who can tell stories with physical gestures, facial expressions, drawings, or images have a leg up.

"Use a picture. It's worth a thousand words."

- Arthur Brisbane

GOAL
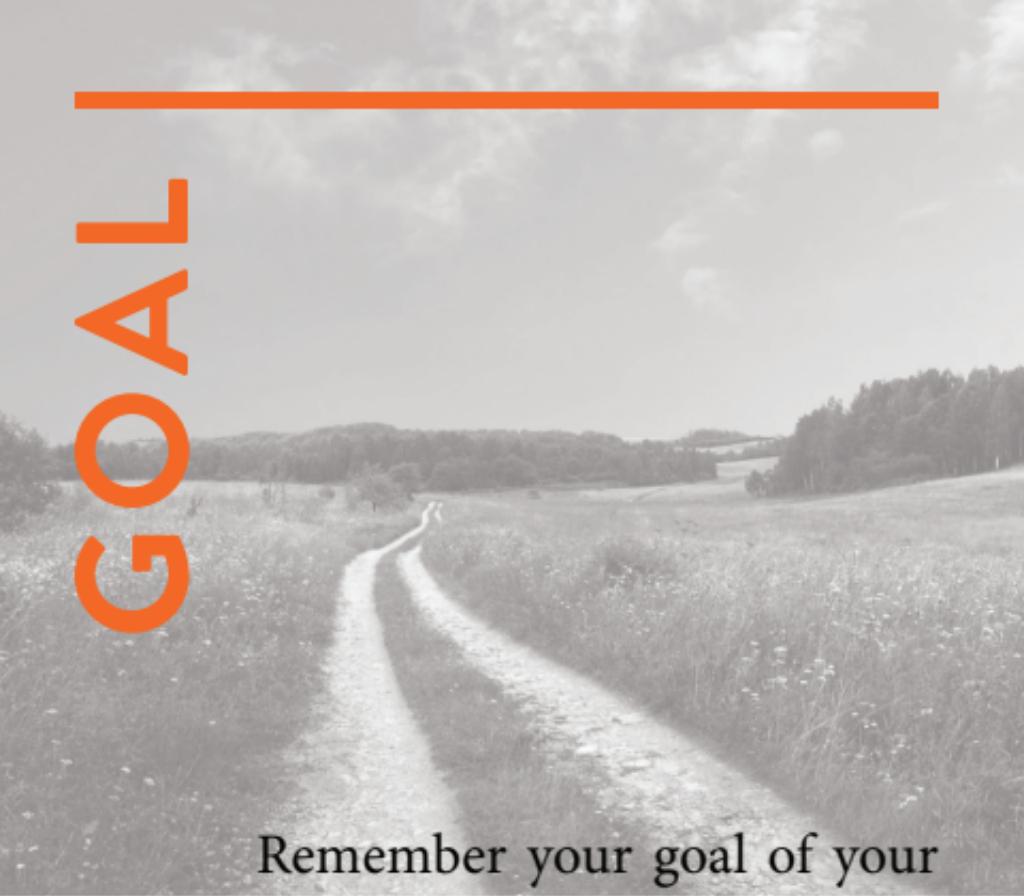
Remember your goal of your story; it help the audience understand what makes you unique and why you are that way. Relate everything in the story back to how it serves the goal.

"A story has its purpose and its path. It must be told correctly for it to be understood."

- Marcus Sedgwick

TENSION
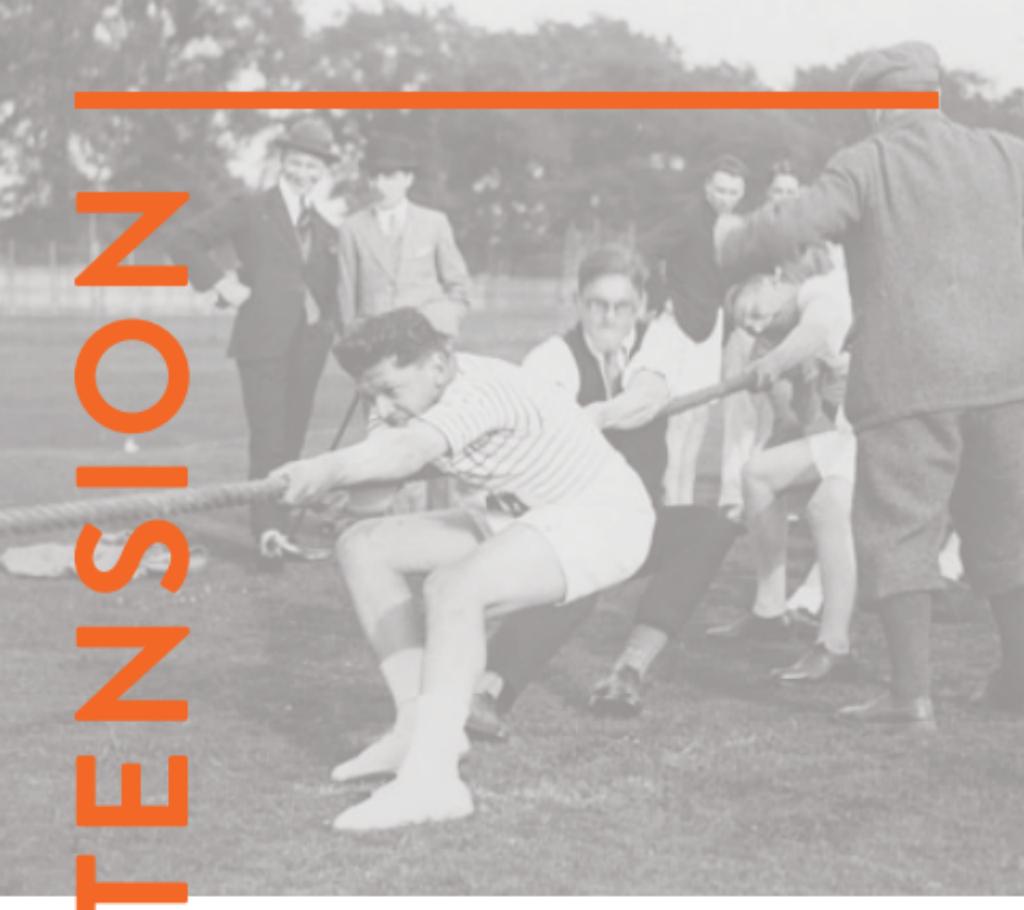
Tension builds engagement and memorability. It can also be an opportunity to flip a negative moment into a positive one.

"The world is all gates, all opportunities, strings of tension waiting to be struck."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

FAILURE

Don't be afraid to try out a story, see it fail, iterate on it, and come back with a better one. Remember the Try, Fail, Succeed exercise from day 1.

"Failures are finger posts on the road to achievement."

- C.S. Lewis

CLARITY
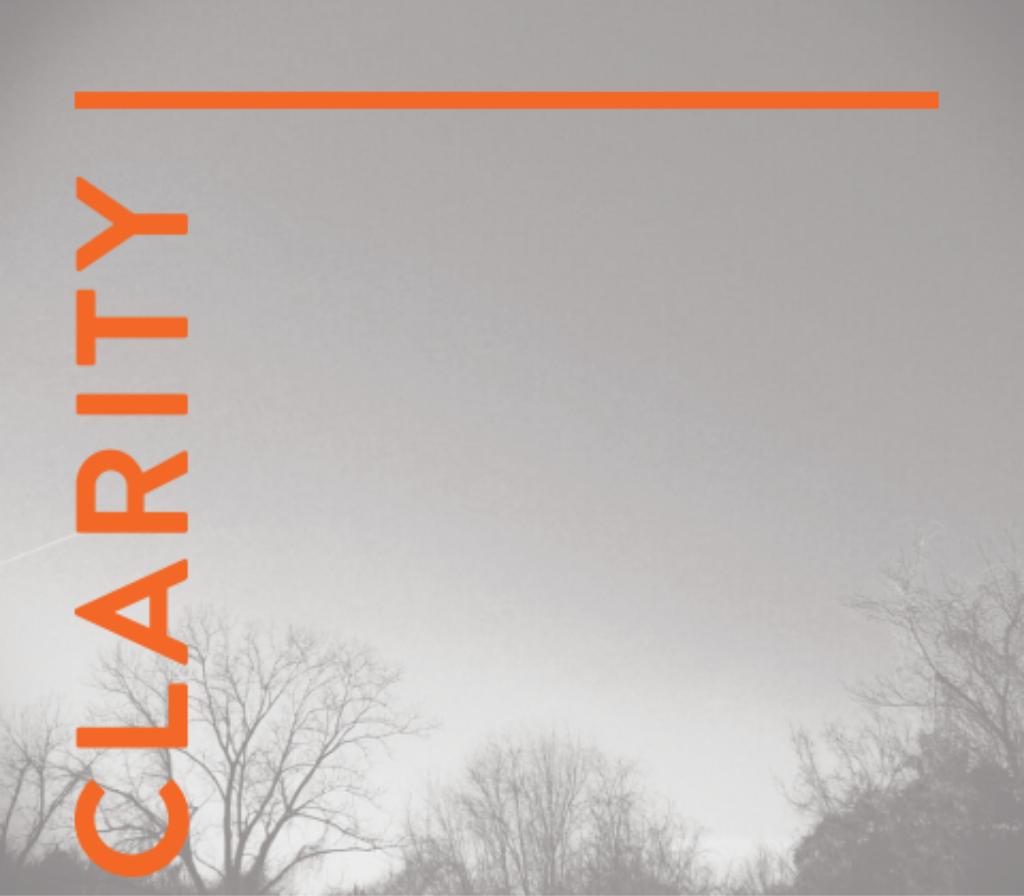
Keeping your goals clear increase your odds of success and momentum. Seek examples of clairty in the wild and learn from the best.

"The greatest beauty always lies in the greatest clarity."

\- Goothold Lessing

BIG PICTURE
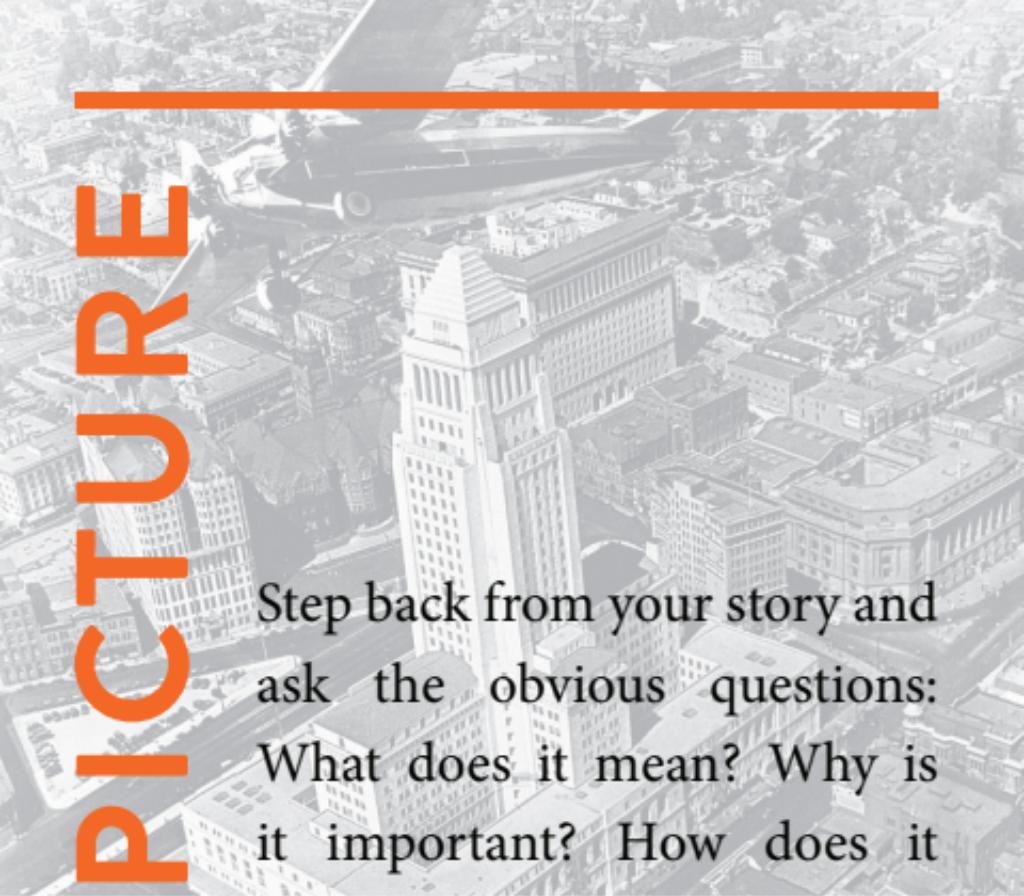
Step back from your story and ask the obvious questions: What does it mean? Why is it important? How does it change the perspective of the person hearing it or reading it? Your story will gain a greater audience and have more impact if it is unique or unusual.

"We're all stories, in the end."

- Steven Moffat