

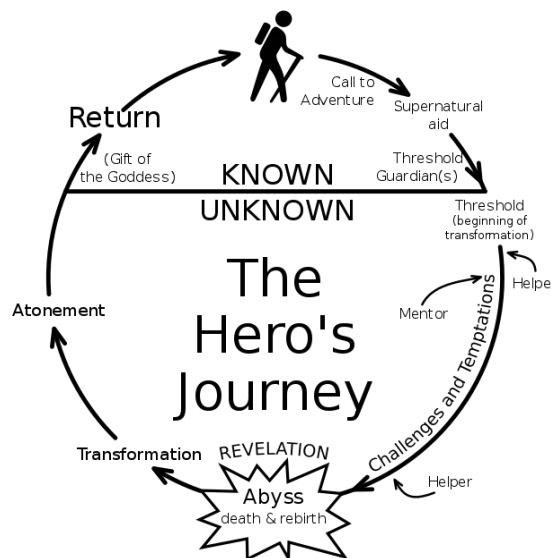
STORYTELLING TEMPLATES

We are drawn to stories from childhood through adulthood because they are engaging and captivating. Human brains are programmed to emphasize with characters in the stories, to follow a sequence of events to learn from, and to witness the exciting journeys the characters embark upon. They are an opportunity to connect emotionally and to unleash our imagination, and as such are easier to remember, follow, and understand. Storytelling, therefore, is a powerful communication tool. Talking about accomplishments, goals, struggles, aspirations, expectations, new initiatives through personal stories can be influential for leaders, salespeople, interviewees, etc.

Here are a few storytelling templates that can be used to structure your stories before a presentation, an interview, a talk, etc.

1. The Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey framework was popularized by Joseph Campbell's mythology book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In the framework, as the Hero traverses the world, they undergo inner and outer transformations at each stage.



The original three stages of the framework, as coined by Campbell, are:

- **The Departure Act:** the Hero leaves the Ordinary World.
- **The Initiation Act:** the Hero ventures into unknown territory and is birthed into a true champion through various trials and challenges.
- **The Return Act:** the Hero returns in triumph.

In 2007, screenwriter Christopher Vogler expanded upon Campbell's three phases, defining 12 stages that make up the story arc:

- **The Ordinary World.** We meet our hero.
- **Call to Adventure.** Will they meet the challenge?
- **Refusal of the Call.** They resist the adventure.
- **Meeting the Mentor.** A teacher arrives.
- **Crossing the First Threshold.** The hero leaves their comfort zone.
- **Tests, Allies, Enemies.** Making friends and facing roadblocks.
- **Approach to the Inmost Cave.** Getting closer to our goal.
- **Ordeal.** The hero's biggest test yet!
- **Reward (Seizing the Sword).** Light at the end of the tunnel
- **The Road Back.** We aren't safe yet.
- **Resurrection.** The final hurdle is reached.
- **Return with the Elixir.** The hero heads home, triumphant.

2. Opportunity - Challenge - Solution - Benefit - Value

This framework is most commonly used when speaking about a value proposition within a market place e.g. in the context of product sales, product launches, advertising and promotion.

- a. Opportunity:** The dialog begins by describing the business *opportunities* that target customers are looking to capture, such as being able to save time, save money, increase revenue, decrease cost,

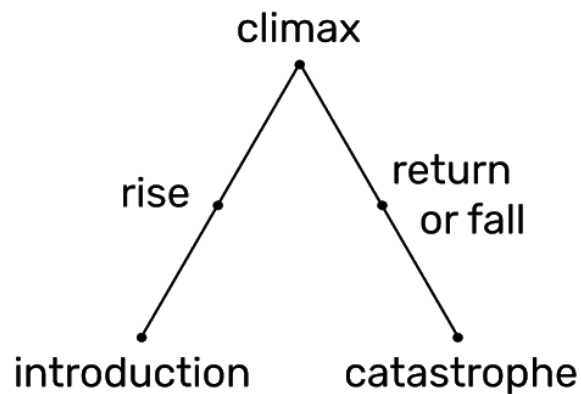
do more with less, do the things they've always wanted to do without hassle. (e.g. you want to exercise to be more fit - *opportunity*)

- b. **Challenge:** The second stage is describing the various *challenges* the customers are likely to face on their journey. This stage identifies customers' real pain points and issues in a creative and attention-grabbing manner. (e.g. you want to exercise - *opportunity* - but you are short on time - *challenge*) The challenges are naturally defined so that the seller / presenter can solve them with their solutions (e.g. technology / products).
- c. **Solution:** The opportunity and the challenge together form a conflict / a constructive tension (see [challenger sale method](#)) which is an obligatory component to set the scene for a classic story. Given the conflict presented, the listener is now feeling disappointed, perhaps a little nervous and hopeless. That's when the presenter presents a *solution* that provides the perfect match between the customers' needs (the *opportunity*) and the *challenge*. (e.g. you want to exercise - *opportunity* - but you are short on time - *challenge*, we bring your favorite yoga and pilates teachers to your living room / your office / wherever you may be through Zoom - *solution*)
- d. **Benefit:** The solution stage is followed by describing and itemizing the key *benefits* of the solution in a way that resonates with the audience. If possible, best is to go heavy on the economic value of the benefits. (e.g. you want to exercise - *opportunity* - but you are short on time - *challenge*, we bring your favorite yoga and pilates teachers to your living room / your office / wherever you may be through Zoom - *solution*. It's cheaper, you don't have to commute, you can do it wherever you are, you have access to 100 different teachers from around the world. - *benefit*)

- e. **Value:** The story ends by painting a picture of what the future will look like, if the audience decides to take action; how better off they will be should they get on board with the solution presented. In this step, the presenter describes the earned business *value* (if and when the listener embarks upon the path laid out in front of them) using detailed, numerical and tangible data. Providing examples and telling success stories about similar customers / listeners that have already made the same choice always provides a powerful conclusion. (e.g. you want to *exercise - opportunity* - but you are short on time - *challenge*, we bring your favorite yoga and pilates teachers to your living room / your office / wherever you may be through Zoom - *solution*. It's cheaper, you don't have to commute, you can do it wherever you are, you have access to 100 different teachers from around the world. - *benefit*, the customers who have signed up to this solution have saved \$x / year, have taken x classes / year on average, have done x more hours of *exercise* than the previous year when they didn't have a subscription, report on feeling more healthy and energetic - *value*)

3. Freytag's Pyramid:

Freytag's Pyramid is a dramatic structural framework developed by Gustav Freytag, a German playwright and novelist of the mid-nineteenth century. He theorized that effective stories could be broken into two halves, the play and counterplay, with the climax in the middle. These two halves create a pyramid or triangle shape containing five dramatic elements: introduction or exposition, rise (a.k.a. rising movement), climax, return or fall (a.k.a. falling movement), and denouement or catastrophe.



- a. **Introduction:** where the story introduces important background information
- b. **Rise:** a series of events to build up to the climax
- c. **Climax:** where the story gets turned around and there is a conflict / tension introduced (usually the most suspenseful bit)
- d. **Fall:** action continues from the climax towards the catastrophe
- e. **Catastrophe or Denouement:** ending the story with a resolution, catastrophe or revelation (Freytag mostly focused on tragedies and hence the resolution / the moment of catharsis is called a "catastrophe" in which the main character is finally undone by their own choices, actions, and energy. The modern interpretations of the model also include Denouement as an option in this final step to include happy endings as well as unhappy ones)

Freytag's pyramid can be most useful when telling a tragic story or one with a negative ending. It can also be complemented by a lesson learned. E.g. Bob was very smart and rich. He built an empire for himself. He did not care about anyone else. One day he needed something. Noone helped him. He was depressed and lonely. He died alone. Bob was my grandfather so I learned that being selfish is not a good quality, money does not solve problems and so what I do is something different...

4. The Pixar Storytelling Template

Emma Coates at Pixar came up with this story framework in a legendary presentation she was giving about the amazing storytelling in Pixar movies. The framework (below) can be used when explaining the impact of a life event, a lesson learned, a turnaround story, a coming of age story, a new product launch, market disruption story, etc.

The 6 steps in the Pixar Storytelling template is:

- Once upon a time there was _____
- Every day _____
- Then one day _____
- Because of that, _____
- And because of that, _____
- Until finally, _____