INTRO TO *Storytelling* FOR
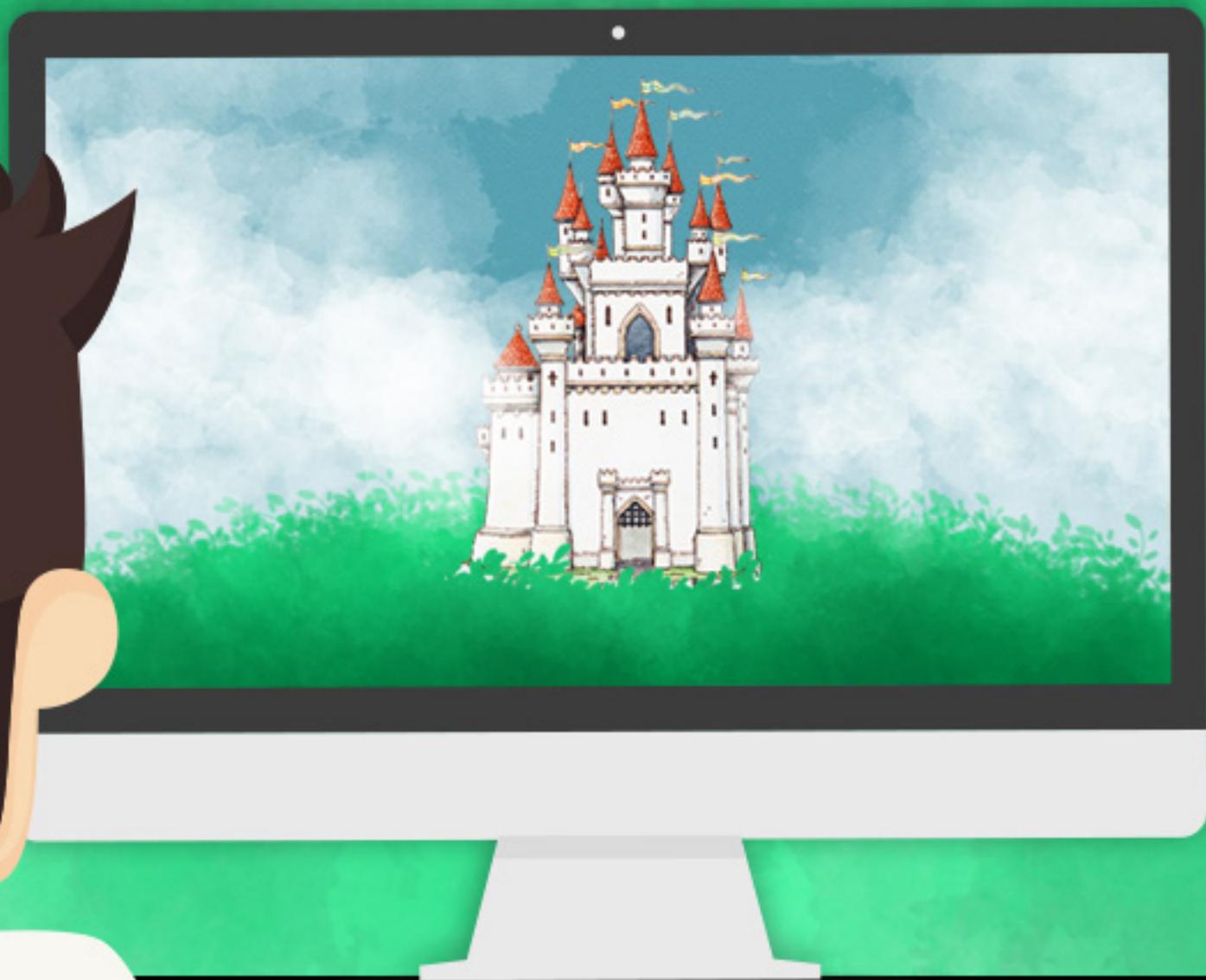# *Instructional Designers*

**The Beginner's Crash Course to Getting Started
with Storytelling in eLearning**

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DISRUPTIVE ELEARNING

ABOUT THIS CRASH COURSE

"The human species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories"

MARY CATHERINE BATESON, WRITER AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGIST

We all love a good story.

Most of us grew up reading more storybooks than textbooks. We may not frequent libraries as much as we did before, but the Kindle more than makes up.

A day at the movies or a Sunday afternoon spent watching a Hollywood classic for the umpteenth time still excites us.

Stories make us laugh till our sides split. They make us cry helplessly. They make us take sides, root for a character, cheer his victories, and feel sad when he has a setback. But more importantly, stories inspire us to become like the heroes and heroines in them. Stories make us think, change our mindsets, alter our behavior patterns, and rouse us to action in a way numbers, charts, and graphs (the so-called facts or technical content) can never do.

Powerful and impactful stories tug at our heart strings and resonate with our values. They not only stir us when we read them but also leave behind memories that keep inspiring us.

Persuasive Storytelling in eLearning

In this age of lightning-fast communication and varied media, we are bombarded with messages from all quarters. How many of these stick with us? How many move us? You have to admit that although many messages pack in oodles of wow factor, courtesy of technology, not many inspire you. That's because they fail to connect with you emotionally.

Do your eLearning courses suffer the same fate? *Scary thought, huh?*

As an instructional designer, you should care. After all, you want your courses to help your audience.

Weave storytelling into your eLearning courses to make them resonate with your audience's hearts. Yes, stories can enrich and make memorable even dull, drab, and complex technical subject matter. Teaching through stories and metaphors is the best way to hook your time-crunched adult audience and keep them engaged till the end. This eBook will teach you how to become a storyteller—at least give you the best insights you need to start.

In this crash course, you will learn about the essential components that make a story and how to introduce these elements into your course, which (*ahem!*) still has to read or sound like an eLearning unit. For instance, every enticing story has a villain. Your eLearning course should also have a conflict and a villain, but they are usually not the good-versus-evil battles or the deadly-weapon-wielding antagonists that we are used to seeing in movies and comics books.

Writing a story is a creative process, but somebody will read your stories. They should make sense to readers. Your story should follow a conventional structure, so your readers don't get lost in the maze of your mind. Besides, as an instructional designer, you are expected to weave stories that don't take anything away from the instructional soundness of the course. Learn about the technicalities of writing a story, especially about the common formats. You see, familiarity is comforting. You also wouldn't want to make the learning journey difficult and cumbersome for your audience; they might decide to leave the course midway.

Once you get into the storyteller's groove, you will want to play with words, structures, and formats. The writer in you will want to paint dazzling pictures and take the readers on exciting journeys. But remember, not all stories lend themselves to all types of eLearning content. Do not forget your role as an instructional designer whose primary goal is to create an instructionally effective eLearning course. This crash course will inform you about the different formats of stories that are suitable for specific content types.

This course also packs in lots of handy tips to help you during the brainstorming and storyboarding process. Create a checklist out of these and pin it where you can glance at it occasionally.

Storytelling for Instructional Designers is your one-stop resource to master the art of crafting stories that enrich and add novelty and enduring value to your eLearning courses.

CULTIVATING THE STORYTELLER'S MINDSET

"Inside each of us is a natural-born storyteller, waiting to be released."

ROBIN MOORE, AWAKENING THE HIDDEN STORYTELLER

Before starting with this course, forget for a moment that you are an instructional designer. Adopt the mindset of a novelist who is about to let his readers into a fascinating and unknown world of wonders.

Instructional Designers as Storytellers

Instructional designers should start thinking they are storytellers too. How do they pretend to transform seemingly drab learning matter—HR policies, fire safety guidelines, Six Sigma principles, customer experience management, and the like—into engaging stories that will keep learners hooked? Only by telling stories!

So, YOU, instructional designer, have to change your mindset and start thinking like a storyteller.

→ **Stop thinking in terms of Bloom's verbs and learning objectives.** Instead, imagine you want to tell the story of a hero who has overcome seemingly impossible challenges.

→ **You want your readers to be motivated by the hero's actions.** So do not think answers; instead, think about different personalities and their various attitudes and behaviors that move others to act.

→ **You want to tell the life story of a person.** So do not think pages; instead think about episodes.

→ **In your hero's life, each episode flows into another and every action has a consequence.** So when creating your eLearning course, do not think about chapters or modules; instead, think about scenes.

WHY DO YOU NEED TO TELL A STORY?

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You have the content to read up and chunk. You have to schedule meetings with the SME. You have to speak with the business executives to figure out the learning objectives. It seems you have your hands full. Why should you bother to rack your brains and think of a story? Why would you need to **tell a story** in an eLearning course?

That's because stories help you connect emotionally with your audience and keep them engaged throughout the duration of the course. Your audience learns better if they can relate to the context and the characters in the story and feels inspired by the outcomes to change their behavior and thought patterns. Stories simplify complex technical content. You can use stories to explain abstract concepts and create roadmaps for the learners to teach them how they are supposed to act.

Stories not only make an eLearning course engaging but also add instructional value to it.

How Do Stories Create Emotional Engagement?

Human beings are emotional creatures. We would rather ask a friend or a co-worker for advice than rely on a manual. The image of just a swanky car doesn't excite us. But when the advertisers claim it can pack in the whole family (Timmy included) and picnic paraphernalia, we suddenly begin toying with the idea of buying it. We all have a soft spot for the underdogs. Emotions sway us, and we feel inspired when we can relate to the protagonist or the circumstances in the story.

Here's how stories make an eLearning course more engaging:

→ **Stories tug at the heartstrings.** There is a child inside every one of us. It loves stories. It goes wide-eyed with wonder reading about or listening to the exploits of its heroes. It cheers the hero and bays for the villain's defeat. The child is emotionally involved with the story. When you weave stories into your eLearning courses, you can connect with your audience emotionally. When you connect with your audience emotionally, you are a step closer to making them believe in you.

→ **Stories whet our curiosity.** A good story—whether it is in a book or on the TV—keeps us up at night. We keep turning the pages of a book or forget to surf channels because we want to know, "what will happen after this?" When you weave your eLearning content within an engaging story, your audience will gobble it up. Add a dash of suspense and pepper some teasers to make your content dramatic. Your audience will be curious to learn more. A story told well also engages more areas of the brain as the learner engages with it and tries to figure out what's happening in his head or predict the hero's next move. So there is active learning, which is more effective than rote learning.

→ **Stories help learners relate to the content.** Life situations and problems that mimic the learner's reality and a hero that he can relate to increase engagement with the story. Stories feel more alive and real than charts and statistics. When the learner can relate to the content, the learning experience becomes memorable.

→ **Stories resonate with the learners to inspire action.** The kid inside of us loves to believe in stories and wants to emulate its favorite heroes. Stories make us suspend our judgmental tendencies and convince us that our heroes are right in whatever they do. When your story resonates with the audience and the hero strikes a chord with them, you can inspire learners to modify behavior and reorient their thought patterns and attitudes.

How Do Stories Make a Course Instructionally Effective?

Explaining content through stories is an effective instructional strategy, and it is not just kids who learn better this way. Stories engage the brain and make it work in ways that statistics and dry facts cannot ever accomplish. In fact, stories provide a welcome respite to your adult corporate learners from their daily dosage of presentations and charts and make them curious to explore and engage with the content.

Here's how stories make eLearning courses more instructionally sound:

→ **Stories provide context and relevance.** Your adult corporate learners are application- and results-driven individuals. You cannot wow them or impress them enough to spend their precious time taking your course if they cannot fathom *what's in it for them.* By mimicking the reality of the learners in the plot, a story provides context and relevance to the course. Learners know how the course will help them resolve their workplace problems or teach skills and behavior that will let them advance in their careers.

→ **Stories make it easier to remember the teach.** We remember the stories—the fairy tales, the animal tales, and the superhero comics—we had read when we were kids. Do we remember in such detail what we studied in middle school? We don't. That's because, according to research, **63 percent of people remember facts** if these are presented couched inside a story compared to a paltry 5 percent when the information is bombarded on them in a conventional presentation format.

63% *of people remember facts if these are presented inside a story*

→ **Stories can make complex and abstract concepts lucid.** The scenarios you create within a story and the actions of the hero do more than just instruct. They provide a roadmap to the learners by actually demonstrating how they should act in specific situations. Stories make it easier to explain complex and abstract concepts with anecdotes and analogies. Teaching through stories reduces the cognitive load of an eLearning course.

→ **We are adept at processing information presented through stories.** We have been listening to and reading stories since time immemorial. You have to learn to read charts and interpret various kinds of graphs. But do you have to be told how to make sense of a story? *No.* That's because you are familiar with the structure of a story. You can intuitively process information from a story. You just read on. Teaching through stories is effective because the learner can concentrate on assimilating the teach instead of taxing his brain trying to figure out how a story works.

→ **We are more open to learning through stories.** <u>Adult learners</u> are long past their school days. They are no longer driven by external factors—fear of parents or the headmaster and societal expectation that one should complete high school—to undertake a learning program. What is more, adult learners are no longer as curious as they were when they were kids. The innate curiosity of a child makes him more receptive to learning than the average adult who is skeptic

and rolls his eyes at the thought of sitting in a (virtual) classroom and going though textbooks (the course). Stories break through the mental barriers usually present in adults and make them curious about the content in the course.

→ **Stories facilitate interactive presentations.** Stories let instructional designers create interactive courses that keep learners engaged. You can inject humor, throw in thought-provoking questions intermittently, or tease the learners to solve problems throughout the course. Because a story is informal, you can tweak its structure to incorporate interactivities.

→ **Stories give our gray cells a workout. Stories engage multiple areas of the brain.** You cannot deny that stories hook you and take you in completely. You are fully aware and present at all times during the course, so you don't miss out on critical information and instructions. Greater engagement facilitates deeper learning.

Using stories in eLearning courses makes sense because of the way people learn today—they want results quickly, they want to figure out things for themselves, most of them are bored with numbers and dry facts, and all want to be entertained when they are learning.

TIME TO PUT ON YOUR STORYTELLER HAT!

To do:

→ **Watch** TED video **How to tell a story**

→ **Bookmark** the **Storytelling Periodic Table**

→ **Buy** the book **Powerful Storytelling Techniques** (only $19.95)

→ **Listen** the **9 Storytelling Podcasts You Need to Hear**

→ **Subscribe** to **Nancy Duarte's Blog**

→ **Download** the **Storytelling Manifesto** (Free)

Finally, **read** this article: **Why The Art of Storytelling is All In The Mindset**

Upcoming next!

lesson #1

Why Do You Need to Tell a Story?

lesson #2

Key Elements of a Story

lesson #3

Understand Your Story

lesson #4

Story Types You Can Use in eLearning

lesson #5

How to Master the Art of Storytelling

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