

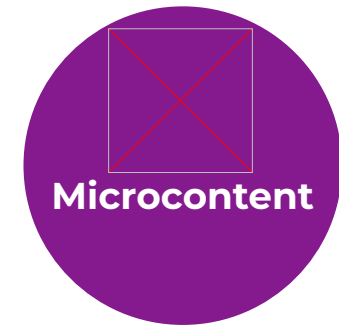


WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

Let's Tell Better Stories

● NONPROFIT
● MARKETING
● GUIDE

The Seven Writing Styles





STORYTELLING

Narratives that include characters, descriptive details, emotions, and plot.





They are not simply anecdotes, which are short accounts of an incident.

Stories have change, drama, emotional depth and meaning.





A story is a **fact**,
wrapped in an
emotion that
compels us to take
an **action** that
transforms our
world.” — Richard Maxwell and
Robert Dickman in *The Elements of
Persuasion*





Why They Work So Well

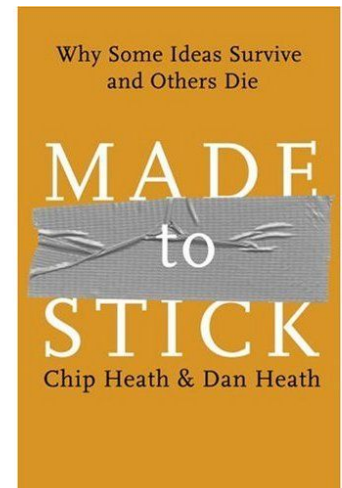
- Easier to remember that fact and figures
- Feed word-of-mouth marketing
- Free!
- Make us human
- Emotional, and therefore inspirational





In one word . . .

Stories work
because they are
STICKY.





Many different story formulas!

The secret is to find the handful that work for you and to use them consistently.

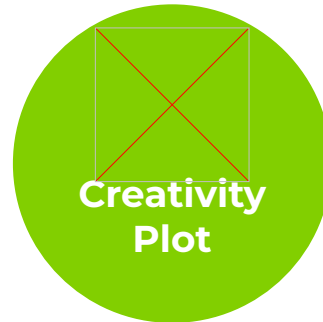




Three Sticky Plots



The Challenge Plot: Good for inspiring and building confidence and empowering action. Classic 3-Act structure.



The Creativity Plot: Good for demonstrating new and innovative solutions to old problems. Inspires people to think big.



The Connection Plot: Good for building empathy, understanding, and connection between people. Big meaning in small seemingly small stories.





- Classic 3-Act structure
- Individual success stories
- Underdogs
- Rags to riches
- Against all odds
- Bootstraps
- **Inspires action, confidence; appeals to our courage and strength**





Writing the Challenge Plot

- Characters at a particular time and place
- Their goals or desires
- Barriers that they must overcome
- How they get beyond those barriers
- Payoffs or triumphs



Act I:

Introduces
the character,
their situation,
and their goal.



Act II:

Character faces obstacles. Tension mounts. Character hits a low.



Act III:

Action peaks.
Character
triumphs, gets
payoff.



Let's Break Down a **Challenge** Plot Story

Introduced to character in time and place.

A sixteen-year-old boy named James leaves home in Los Angeles because his drug-addicted mother beats him and hasn't been to a grocery store in months. But living on the streets is tough, and James resorts to shoplifting and mugging people to stay alive.

Goals and desires (explicit or implied)

Current situation is clear, and there's a hint at Act 2



Let's Break Down a **Challenge** Plot Story

Tension builds.

James is arrested and released several times, and after a few months on his own, he decides that life locked up would be easier than life on the streets. In the system, you still have to fight to protect yourself, but at least you get three hots and a cot. He secretly wishes sometimes that he'd get caught doing something serious enough to really get sent away. Then at least he wouldn't have to worry about food or where he was going to sleep that night.

Dramatic tension peaks — what will happen next to the character?

Rock bottom in the story and the villain is clear.



Let's Break Down a **Challenge** Plot Story

Enter the supporting cast – the nonprofit

Marcus, a Hope House counselor who ten years earlier had been in much the same situation as James, sees the young man trying to shoplift food one day. He offers to buy the kid lunch, then explains that Hope House is a transitional living center that can help James get off the street, allowing him to get his GED and find a job so that he can support himself, legally. “The people at Hope House believed in me and gave me a second chance at a real life. That’s all I really needed,” says James.

Push back on villain, character overcomes barriers

Hope and vision for the future for the character!





Let's Try a Challenge Plot

- Characters at a particular time and place
- Their goals or desires
- Barriers that they must overcome
- How they get beyond those barriers
- Payoffs or triumphs





Reflections or Questions on the Challenge Plot?



Ethical Storytelling



- Is your story accurate, consensual, and protective of the subject's dignity?
- Will they be proud of the way you are sharing their story?
- Google “ethical storytelling” or “ethical creative” for great resources

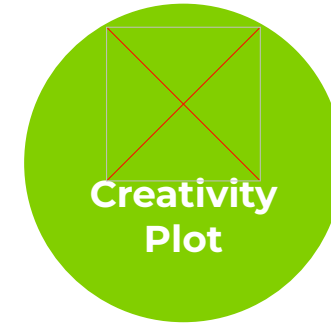


Ethical Storytelling



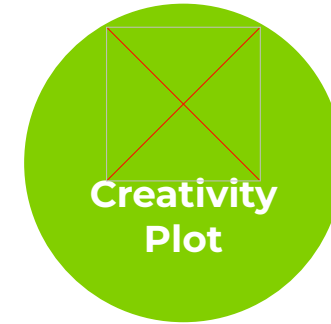
- It's helpful to think of the people whose stories you are telling as content creation partners.
- Is sharing their story with you done as volunteer labor that you will recognize like you would other volunteers?
- Should you view sharing their story as labor that should be compensated like a freelancer, for example, or like you are buying non-exclusive rights to tell the story?





- Aha! Moments
- Breakthroughs
- “What if” stories that work out
- **Inspires us to take a chance, experiment, support a new approach**





Writing the Creativity Plot

- A well-understood problem
- A standard response that just doesn't work
- A new approach (test runs or theories are OK)
- Vision of a new reality



Let's Break Down a **Creativity** Plot Story

Using characters, lay out the well-understood problem.

A farmer named Dan West was ladling out rations of milk to hungry children during the Spanish Civil War when it hit him. “These children don’t need a cup. They need a cow.” West, who was serving as a Church of the Brethren relief worker, was forced to decide who would receive the limited rations and who wouldn’t. This kind of aid, he knew, would never be enough.

Explain the typical, commonplace response to the problem that just doesn’t work.



Let's Break Down a **Creativity** Plot Story

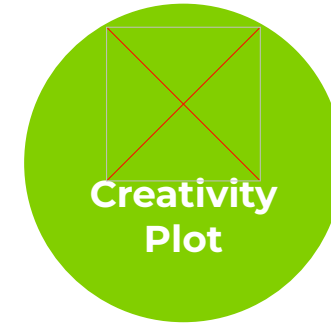
Explain the new approach to the old problem.

West returned home to form Heifers for Relief, dedicated to ending hunger permanently by providing families with livestock and training so they could be spared the indignity of depending on others to feed their children. . . . This simple idea of giving families a source of food, rather than short-term relief, caught on and has continued for over 60 years. Since 1944, Heifer has helped 8.5 million people in more than 125 countries.

Proof of concept with stats or individual triumph

Share the promise and/or the new reality.

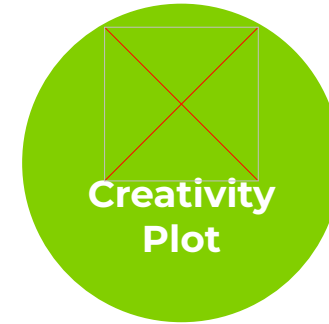




Let's Try a Creativity Plot

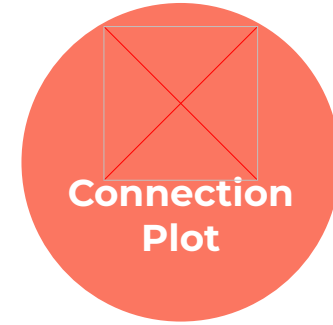
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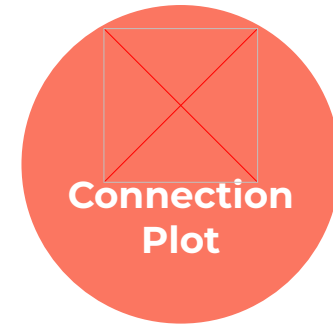
Reflections or Questions on the Creativity Plot?





- Bridging the gap
- We are one
- There but for the grace of God go I
- Big meaning in a small events
- **Inspires compassion, understanding, love, cooperation**





Writing the Connection Plot

- A small, specific situation or event (initial anecdote)
- A surprise, discovery, or epiphany that brings the story to life (but wait, there's more!)
- Connections within the story and with the reader's heart/soul
- Leaves us with a connection to a greater, universal human experience



Let's Break Down a **Connection** Plot Story

(Written in the voice of Janet Volpe, one of the doctors on the trip,
referencing a photo of the family in the story.)

Start with a basic story — introduce the characters and scene.

This is Van Canh with his wife and 9-month-old daughter, Thi Sang. Thi Sang was born with a cleft lip, like her father. When Van Canh heard that Interplast was coming to Cao Lanh, he and his wife decided, despite financial hardship, to leave their family store for the day and make the two-hour bus journey to our clinic day to have their daughter evaluated.



Let's Break Down a **Connection** Plot Story

But then you add some interesting or intriguing facts ...

Fourteen years ago, Interplast operated on clefts on both sides of Van Canh's mouth. He had been told he would need a revision in the future, but because of work and family commitments, he had never been able to make it back for the revision.

The 'But wait, there's more' moment where what we thought was the story shifts to the REAL story

As our team evaluated Thi Sang, we asked Van Canh if he'd like to have his clefts revised during our stay. He and his wife were overjoyed that we would consider this for him. At the age of 26 years, he told us he thought he was too old for Interplast to want to perform another surgery on him and had no money to have the revision performed locally.



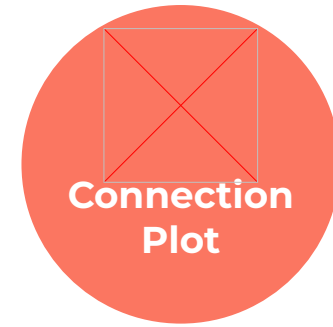
Let's Break Down a **Connection** Plot Story

Universal human experiences or emotions on full display.

We scheduled the surgeries one day apart, and this photo was taken at the time of discharge from the hospital. Van Canh had brought chewing gum from his store; just before going home, he gave each member of our team a stick as a token of appreciation. I taped my Wrigley's Doublemint wrapper in my journal and will always remember this kind and grateful family.

“Show don't tell” is really important to getting this right!

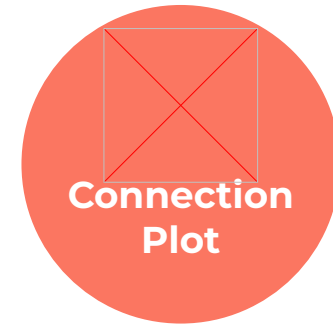




Let's Try a Connection Plot

- A small, specific situation or event (initial anecdote)
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Reflections or Questions on the Connection Plot?





**Any questions as
we wrap up?**



Getting the Most from Your Stories

Do enough research or interviewing that you can tell the story from **at least two different points of view or angles** (e.g. first-person client, first-person caregiver, first-person staff member, or in third person, emphasizing one element of the story over another, etc.)



Getting the Most from Your Stories



- Before you write, know how you will **use the story in at least three different ways**, so that you can write for those purposes.
- Write **three different formats** , e.g. microcontent, short version and long version (or at least make notes on differences)



Keep Learning with a Free Nonprofit Marketing Guide Membership

The landing page features the 'NONPROFIT MARKETING GUIDE' logo in the top left. Navigation links include 'Back to Main Site', 'For Pass Holders', 'For Mentoring Participants', 'Community', 'My Dashboard', and a user profile 'Kivi L'. The main content area has a background image of a woman looking at a tablet. Text reads 'Welcome to Nonprofit Marketing Guide's Learning Center' with a prominent orange button that says 'SIGN UP FOR YOUR FREE MEMBERSHIP'.

Three benefit cards are displayed in a row:

- Learn Your Job:** Includes an icon of a person pointing at a screen. Text: 'Get training and coaching no matter your experience level with nonprofit communications and marketing.'
- Love Your Work:** Includes an icon of a desk with a clock and a laptop. Text: 'Get understanding, support, and community to help you feel confident and happy in your work.'
- Lead Your Team:** Includes an icon of three people with a star above them. Text: 'Learn how to lead your team the CALM not BUSY way for maximum effectiveness and results.'

The screenshot shows the 'Writing & Messaging' community page. The top navigation bar includes a search bar, a 'Go Live' button, and notification icons. The page title is 'Writing & Messaging' with a 'New Post' button. Below the title, it shows 'Posts 18' and 'Members 318'. A large image of a hand writing on a document is featured. The post text reads: 'Let's Get Into Writing and Messaging' by Kristina Leroux (ADMIN), COO and Community Engagement Manager, Nonprofit Marketing Guide. The post says: 'Want to become a better writer or editor? Let's talk about that! Karen Hansen is this space's moderator. ... See more'. It also shows 'Liked by Emily and 2 others' and a 'Like' button. A sidebar on the left lists various categories like 'Start Here / Homebase', 'Q&A: Tactics, Channels', and 'Writing & Messaging'. A 'Members' list on the right includes names like Daniele Berman, Marissa Stein, and Karen Hansen.