

## Digital Storytelling tutorials

### 2. Developing your script

The following material has been adapted from Daniel Meadows (2004) website tutorials on digital storytelling located at [http://www.photobus.co.uk/dstory\\_01.html](http://www.photobus.co.uk/dstory_01.html)

Your script is the most important part of your digital story. A digital story is a personal story told from the heart; with feeling. The most powerful digital stories are told in first person, i.e. they use the word "I". The narrative of a Digital Story is more than just words however; it is also revealed through pictures.

It is important to remember that your script is created to be spoken. Write it as you would speak it. The voice-over is not just words, it's about the way you speak those words. Your voice is unique and its sound is important to the meaning of your story. You are not an announcer. You are not merely performing lines. You are narrating the story as you would tell it to a friend. If you "push it up" or use a manner of speaking which is not your own, you will spoil it. Be yourself.

For a story of around three minutes, the script should be about 2/3 of a typed page. The precise word count however is less important than the rhythm with which the words are delivered. Gaps in the voice-over where the pictures are allowed to carry the narrative are useful. You should also think about varying the pace of your delivery.

A story is like a journey and it is very easy to set off in the right direction and yet never reach your destination. When you get to the end you should be able — as it were — to look back over your shoulder and still see the place you set out from. So, while you are writing, keep asking yourself: "What is my story about?" Do not include anything which dilutes the story's intention.

Think how *few* words and pictures you need to tell the story, not how many. There is never any need to describe what the viewer can already see, or *vice versa*. For example: let's say your story includes a colour picture of a stylish middle-aged woman with a big smile and bright orange hair. She is standing in a kitchen and, though smartly dressed, she wears an apron. On the table in front of her is a rolling pin and a lump of dough. Unedited, your voice-over might read: "My grandmother was very stylish. She took a great pride in what she wore even though she was always in the kitchen baking. She had a trim figure and dyed her grey hair bright orange. She had a wonderful laugh and always smelt expensive." (A total of 44 words). Edited, the passage might read: "My grandmother had a wonderful laugh and always smelt expensive." (Just 10 words, saving 34 words). The point here is that it is only necessary to tell us things that we cannot work out for ourselves by looking at the picture and, even then, only things which keep the story moving on.

Music can be useful when it comes to creating mood and it's always more satisfying to use music and sound effects which you have created for yourself. If you aren't musical (is there anyone out there who *never* hums a tune or whistles one occasionally?) then work with a friend who is. Digital Storytellers use sound effects sparingly.

## More on scripting

*The following material has been extracted from the Digital Storytelling Cookbook by Joe Lambert (2004) available online at Digital Storytelling Cookbook - <http://www.storycenter.org/cookbook.pdf>*

As you are working up your raw material for a story, you are also working up your storytelling, or narrative, voice. Everyone has a unique style of expressing himself or herself that can jump off the page or resonate in a storytelling presentation. Realizing that voice - making it as rich and textured as you are as a person - takes time and practice.

For many professional communicators, the process of moving from a journalistic or technical, official voice to an organic, natural voice is often difficult. It is as if we are trying to merge the two different parts of our brains, the analytical and the emotive, and most of us cannot switch back and forth without getting dizzy. The official voice is the voice of our expository writing class, of our essays and term papers, or our formal memos and letters to our professional colleagues. We have been taught that this voice carries dispassionate authority, useful perhaps in avoiding misunderstandings, but absolutely deadly as a story.

Getting feedback also helps us identify our narrative voice. Reading material to someone who knows us well, and asking him or her to identify which part is true to your voice, is a useful practice. Of course, the crafting of the language, moving away from cliché, eliminating redundancy, and getting out the thesaurus to substitute your overused verbs and adjectives, is also imperative.

Take your time, though, and let the ideas and meanings sink in before you edit. If something feels overwhelmingly right, do not polish it too much. We have had lots of scripts that started out fresh and authentic but by the time the authors and collaborators got through with it, it was filled with succinct, gorgeous, yet characterless, prose. The narrative voice had been polished away.