

# STORYTELLING IN YOUR ONLINE COURSE

## INTRODUCTION

Telling a story is a good way to connect with your students, especially in an online course. Telling a story is a natural way to communicate and hold the listeners' attention.

You can use stories:

- Before or during narrated lectures.
- To introduce units or lessons.
- With weekly news items.
- To guide discussions.

Well-done stories stimulate learners and help them internalize new information.

## EXAMPLE

Using stories in your narrated lectures is a great way to illustrate concepts, demonstrate best practices, encourage reflective thinking, and punctuate key concepts. In the example below, the instructor uses a story to differentiate terms that are commonly and incorrectly used interchangeably.

**Physical Activity and Fitness Terminology**

- Physical activity
  - Any bodily movement produced by the contraction of skeletal muscles that results in a substantial increase over resting energy expenditure
- Exercise
  - A type of physical activity consisting of planned, structured, and repetitive bodily movement done to improve or maintain one or more components of physical fit
- Physical fitness
  - A set of abilities that relate to the ability to perform well in a variety of situations

"Back in 2003 my wife and I decided that we were going to begin a landscaping project in our yard. And we foolishly believed that this project would last two, maybe three, years at the most. Well, it's presently 2012 with the summer of 2013 coming up, and we're still landscaping. And it involves a lot of stuff. It involves lifting 85 pound blocks. It involves shoveling and moving cubic yard after cubic yard of sand and black dirt and gravel, and bending over and planting and digging holes and all of that kind of stuff...."

Jeffrey Engstrom  
Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Superior

# STORYTELLING IN YOUR ONLINE COURSE



## A CLOSER LOOK

For a story to be a useful teaching tool, it must be relevant to the goals or objectives of the course or lesson and be well-paced or timed. If you will be using a story as a primary focal point for a lesson or activity, it's especially important to have it well thought out. Planning your story will help you make sure it is just the right length and includes the right information. Follow these eight steps\* to make the most of your stories.

1. Set the stage	What is the context of the story? Provide information on the location, weather, and other conditions.
2. Introduce the characters	Give visual and emotional descriptions of the characters. What are their relationships?
3. Begin the journey	Communicate the goal and describe the journey.
4. Encounter the obstacle	The obstacle is what makes the story compelling.
5. Overcome the obstacle	What's necessary to overcome the obstacle? This is where the teaching happens.
6. Resolve the story	Tie up loose ends and make sure your audience knows how everything works out.
7. Make the point	Keep it simple—one clear point.
8. Ask a question/debrief	Tie the story back to your learners. Make your story their story by asking an engaging question.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Explaining the moral of the story](#) by *Cognition Journal*
- [Storytelling in eLearning: The why and how](#) by *eLearn Magazine*
- [Learning through storytelling in higher education: Using reflection and experience to improve learning](#) by Routledge & CRC Press

\*Source: Human Resource Prescriptions, LLC



You have creative license!  
The story you tell can be true,  
fictitious, or a blend of both.

Have fun, but stay focused and  
remember that long, rambling  
stories do not improve learning!

With some simple tools like  
a webcam, PowerPoint, or  
a digital voice recorder, you  
can easily add stories to  
your online course, and the  
instructional designers at  
UW Extended Campus can  
help!