

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 to 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 shown below, the instructor goes on to use the story to differentiate terms that are commonly and incorrectly used interchangeably.

The image shows a screenshot of a narrated lecture slide. The slide title is "Physical Activity and Fitness Terminology". It contains a bulleted list of definitions for physical activity, exercise, and physical fitness. A speech bubble overlay contains a personal story from Jeffrey Engstrom, an Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Superior. The story describes a landscaping project that has been ongoing since 2003. The slide also shows a video player interface with a pause button and a speaker icon.

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 fitn
 - A set of at the abilit

"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

A CLOSER LOOK

For a story to be a useful teaching tool, it must be relevant to the goals or objectives 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 your stories are just the right length and include 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

Want to learn more? These resources will give you a good start.

- **[Using Stories to Teach: How Narrative Structure Helps Students Learn](#)**

This is a very quick read that links to a 2010 Princeton University study about the power of using storytelling in teaching.

- **[Storytelling in eLearning: The why and how](#)**

This article shares strategies for how to construct stories and integrate them into eLearning.

- **[Learning Through Storytelling in Higher Education: Using Reflection and Experience to Improve Learning](#)**

This Google eBook explores ways of using storytelling as a teaching and learning tool. It includes models of storytelling and explains how to use this technique.

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

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 UW- Extension can help.

*Source: Human Resource Prescriptions, LLC