

# STORYTELLING IN YOUR ONLINE COURSE

## INTRODUCTION

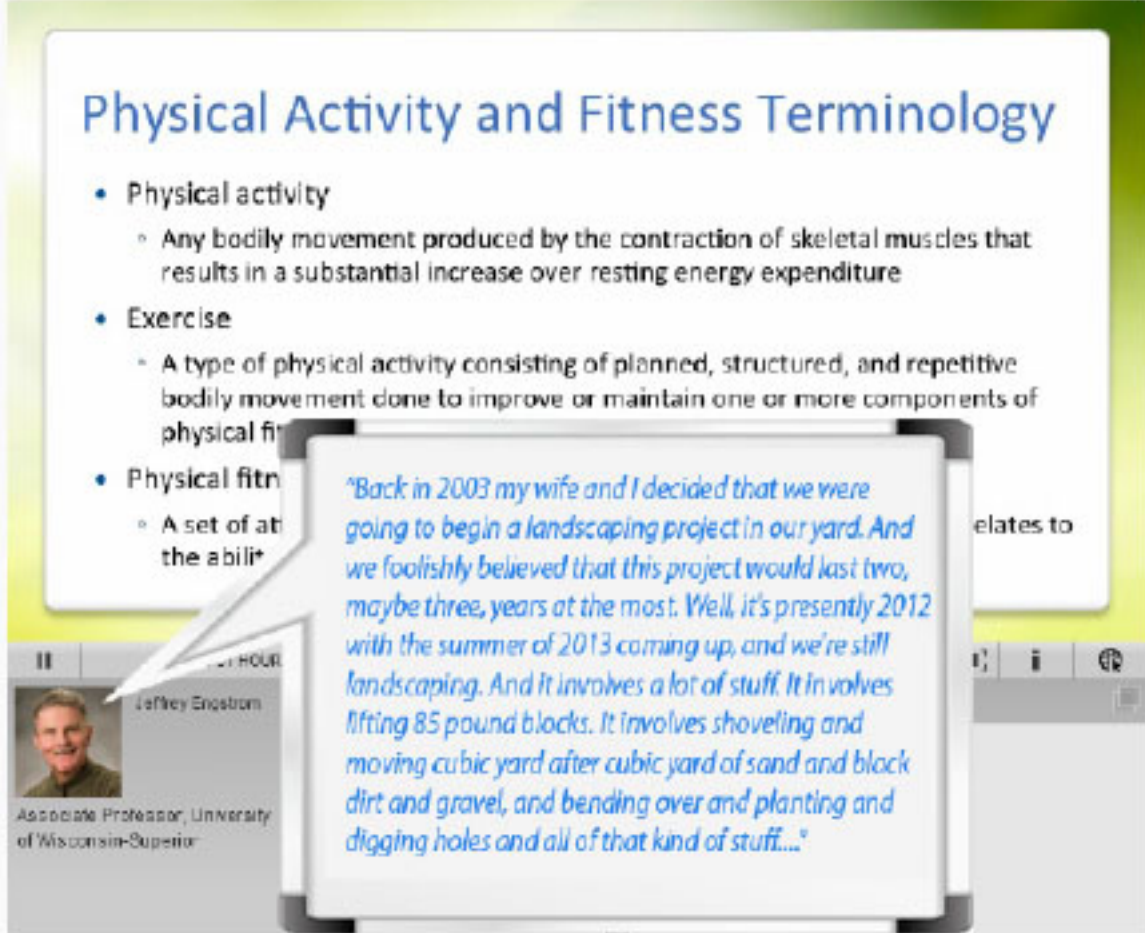
Telling a story is a good way to connect with your students, especially in an online course. Telling a story is a natural way to communicate and hold the listeners' attention. Well-done stories stimulate learners and help them internalize new information.

You can use stories:

- Before or during narrated lectures
- To introduce units or lessons
- With weekly news items
- To guide discussions
- As an icebreaker at the start of your course

## USING STORIES IN NARRATED LECTURES

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 fitness
- **Physical fitness**
  - A set of attributes that allow a person to perform physical activity

*"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 block dirt and gravel, and bending over and planting and digging holes and all of that kind of stuff..."*

Jeffrey Enstrom  
Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Superior

## PLANNING YOUR STORY

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 specific information on the location, time, and other details.
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.
<i>Source: Human Resource Prescriptions, LLC</i>	

### Storytelling Tips & Tools

- Tell a story that is true, fictitious, or a blend of both. Be creative!
- Use simple tools like PowerPoint, a smartphone, or a digital voice recorder to create your story.

- Have fun but stay focused! Remember to keep your story short, engaging, and connected to your learning objectives.
- Reach out to your instructional designer for help! They can help you plan your story, determine the best tools to use, and put your story into your course!

## 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](#)