



How to tell a Story

What is a story? How is it different from a topic? A media story, like a book or oral story, has a beginning, middle, and end. In general, the beginning introduces the location, characters, and topic or theme of the story, the middle progresses the action, and the end ties up all the elements with a conclusion or thoughts about what happens next. Practiced storytellers can alter components to surprise the viewer/listener, but the same elements eventually appear. A topic is one concept, but a story finds a connection to the audience. Your story needs to draw the viewer/listener in, needs to engage that person so s/he will want to find out what happens next.

Planning your story means thinking about who your audience (viewer/listener) is. What do you want them to get from the story?

A media story is told in the form of a set of events in sequence. Unlike real life, media sequences compress time by using a variety of wide, medium, and tight shots. By varying your shots, you don't have to show every second of an action.

Think about where the action is heading. Where is the right spot for the camera to catch that action? Think about the framing of your image. Having your camera planted and allowing the action to enter your frame can be very effective. Taping an object slightly in the foreground of the main action adds depth and interest. Think about your background as well. Would it look better if you changed the placement of the camera?

What shots do I need to get me from point A to point B? Remember to shoot not just the action but also the reaction.

Creating a sequence for your story

There are as many ways to tell a media story as there are storytellers, but here are a few thoughts to keep in mind for your story.

- Early on in your sequence, it might be helpful to have a Wide Shot to establish the location for your story and to give the viewer a sense of place.
- Medium Shots are useful for action sequences as well as for broader strokes for telling a story.
- Close Up Shots add detail and focus on one aspect of the story. They add drama, intimacy, and importance to the content. Too many of these in a row could be claustrophobic, so think carefully about why you want to use them before taping.
- A pan, tilt, dolly, or truck can add excitement and interest to a story, allowing the viewer to be more involved in the action. But quick editing from one shot to the next can give the same effect.
- Zooms can do the same as other moves by changing the emphasis of the scene. Zooming In pays more attention to a detail. Zooming Out allows the audience to put the tighter shot into context with a wider shot, perhaps revealing more information. Zooming In adds to the intimacy. Zooming out takes a viewer back for more perspective. Sometimes zooms can be overused, and it may be better (and faster) to achieve the same purpose by using a series of shots, for example: WS, MS, CU. Sometimes a slight zoom that doesn't change the size of the shot very much can add a bit of interest to the story, but isn't as obvious to the viewer as one that goes from really wide to really close.
- Be careful not to perform any camera move too fast, unless extreme dramatic effect is your purpose. Beginning storytellers might do well to limit the amount of moves the camera makes.