Your Brain on Story

A Summary of Recent Research

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Your Brain on Story
The Mechanisms of Story Engagement, Participation, and Influence

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Engagement: *Emotionally laden attention*

Engagement requires emotional involvement

**Attention:** *Dedicated mental focus over time*

Stories engage and hold attention
Transportation: Voluntary vicarious and experiential insertion of self into the settings, events, and characters of a story.

Relevance: Implying close relationship or importance. “What does this story mean to me?”
Engagement is the essential gateway to influence.

Influence: Changing attitudes, beliefs, values, knowledge, and behavior

Influence = ultimate goal of your communications

Engagement doesn’t guarantee influence. It makes it possible.
For over 150,000 years story and storytelling have dominated human interaction and communication.
150,000 years of storytelling dominance to communicate and to archive learning, wisdom, fact, knowledge, values, beliefs, history, etc.

has evolutionarily rewired the human brain to think in specific story terms.
The human brain is predisposed to think in story terms.

- To Understand
- To Make Sense
- To Remember
You turn incoming information into story before it reaches your conscious mind with your neural story net.
Your **Neural Story Net:**

A fixed, connected set of subconscious brain sub-regions that create and process specific story concepts and informational elements
The **MAKE-SENSE** Mandate

- If the brain can’t **MAKE SENSE**, it won’t pay **attention**

- Your brain has assigned the **MAKE-SENSE** Mandate to the **Neural Story Net**
The Research:

In order to make it make sense,

Listeners routinely:

• change (even reverse) factual information,
• make assumptions,
• create new information,
• ignore parts of your presentation,
• infer connections and information
• infer motive, intent, significance
• misinterpret
The Neural Story Net

• Lies **between** external world and internal mind
• **Distorts** incoming information in order to make it **make sense**
• The story they see & hear **IS NOT** the story you said

**Applying effective story structure**

to your information

**minimizes** that distortion
Your Story Mind in... Action!
Person #1: “Where’s John?”

Person #2: “Well....I didn’t want to say anything. But...I saw a green VW parked in front of Carol’s.”
The Core of a Story
(That which drives a character and hooks a reader)
The **Eight Essential Elements** of the Story Structure

1. **Characters:** The characters that populate essential character positions in the story.
2. **Traits:** Selected elements of character description used to control receiver attitude toward story characters.
3. **Goal:** What a character needs/wants to do/get in a story.
4. **Motives:** The drivers that make a goal important to a character.
5. **Conflicts & Problems:** The sets of obstacles that stand between a character and an established goal.
6. **Risk & Danger:** The likelihood of failure (risk) and the consequences of failure (danger).
7. **Struggles:** The sequence of events a character undertakes to reach a goal highlighted by the climax scene (confrontation with the last & greatest obstacle) and the resolution scene.
8. **Details:** The character, sensory, scenic, and event specific descriptors used to create, direct, and control receivers’ story imagery.
The essential elements of story structure:

- Control engagement
- Feed essential information to the NSN
- Control the Make Sense Mandate
- Create emotional involvement
Story Influence
The Main Story Line

- **3 Characters** (+ 2 supporting characters)
- **2 Events**
- **2 Concepts**
Four key questions define a story’s Influence Potential

1. Who is this story really about for me?
2. How bad is the ending of this story for that character?
3. Who can I blame for it?
4. Who has the power to change the ending if it was bad? (or who gets the credit if it was good?)
The Story Influence Line

System Character

Identity Character → Goal → Foe Character → Climax → Resolution

Viewpoint Character → Motive

Climax Character

Resolution

Residual Resolution Emotion

• 3 Key Characters (+ 2 Supporting Characters)
• 2 Events
• 2 Concepts
• 1 Lingering Emotion

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\[ IP = RRE \left( D_i - D_f \right) \]

Where:

- \( IP \) = Influence Potential ( -60 to +60 )
- \( RRE \) = Audience’s Residual Resolution Emotion (-4 to +4)
- \( D_i \) = Score for the Identity Character (0 to +5)
- \( D_f \) = Score for the Foe Character (0 to -10)
The elements of the Influence Model:

- Create *relevance*
- Complete *transportation*
- Create *identification*
- Create *meaning*
The Main Story Line

System Character

Main Character → Goal → Antagonist → Climax → Resolution

Viewpoint Character → Motive

Climax Character

- 3 Characters (+ 2 supporting characters)
- 2 Events
- 2 Concepts

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