

National Journal Communications Council

**Media
University**

AMU 401: Narrative Storytelling in the Digital Age

Elements of a Compelling Narrative

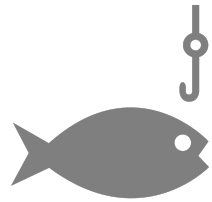
February 6, 2015

Recognizing the Three Components of a Compelling Narrative

Effective Stories Combine Strong Hooks, Rich Plotlines and an Authentic Voice

1. Hook

Captures Audience Attention



- Establishes “what’s at stake” for the character
- Piques interest in continuing to consume the narrative
- Uses specific visuals or situational details to grab viewers

2. Plot

Carries the Audience Forward



- Picks up from the hook to chronicle the character’s evolution
- Contains a clear beginning, middle and end which lead to a compelling call-to-action
- Plays with linear or non-linear structures

3. Authenticity

Supports the Narrative

- Adds and sustains interest through key plot points by illustrating conflict rather than describing it
- Creates a connection between audience and story
- Brings narrative to life for the audience through appropriate details, rather than jargon



1. Hook in Focus: Grabbing Viewers with Well-Known Stakes

Invert Familiar Stories to Attract Audience Attention and Reduce Need for Explanation

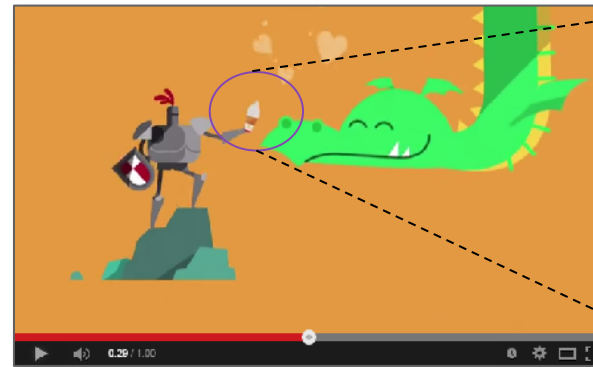
Recognizable Pop Culture Rivals
About to Fight, Establishing
Sense of Urgency...

Classic Battle Between Knight and Dragon in Progress



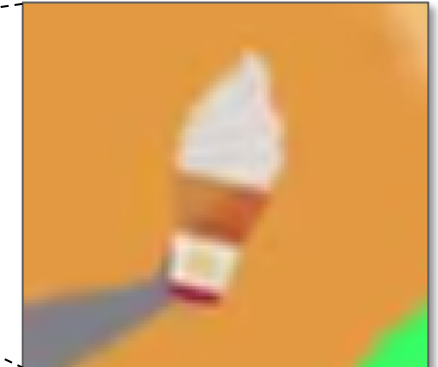
...Before Twisting Conventional
Wisdom on its Head....

Knight Presents Gift and Conflict Ends



...And Offering Subtle
Opportunities for Brand Exposure
in the Process

Gift is McDonald's Ice Cream Cone



Potential Member Applications: Creating Short, Strategic and Subtle Hooks

1. **Leveraging the Power of Familiarity:** Find creative applications for story archetypes that are easy to recognize or instantly relatable (e.g., good vs. evil), especially with limited time
2. **Answering Key Questions:** Affirm that your hook clearly illustrates 1) the main characters in the narrative, 2) what they are doing and 3) why their story matters (i.e., what is the conflict at hand?)
3. **Floating the Brand:** Find strategic opportunities to promote your name and position without being overt (e.g., logos, watermarks, allusions)

Case in Brief



Profiled Campaign: McDonald's "Archenemies" Advertisement

Organization Type: Fast Food & Beverage

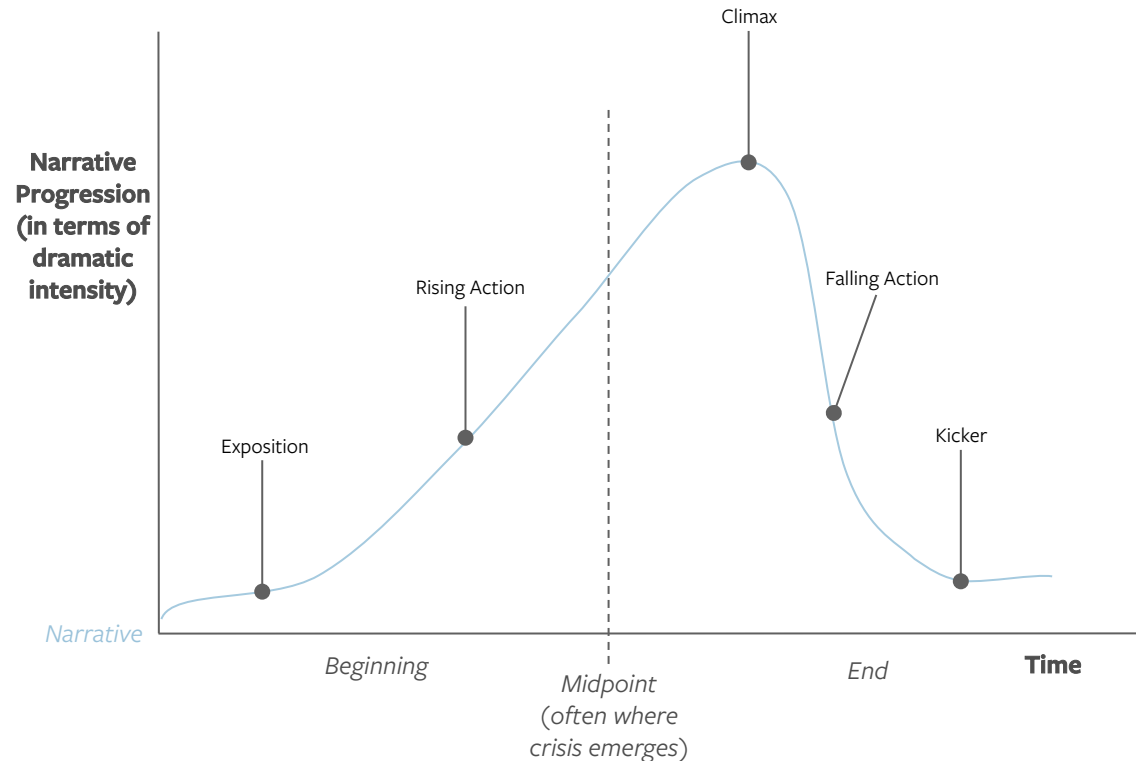
Format: Video, 1 minute



2. Dissecting the Anatomy of a Plot

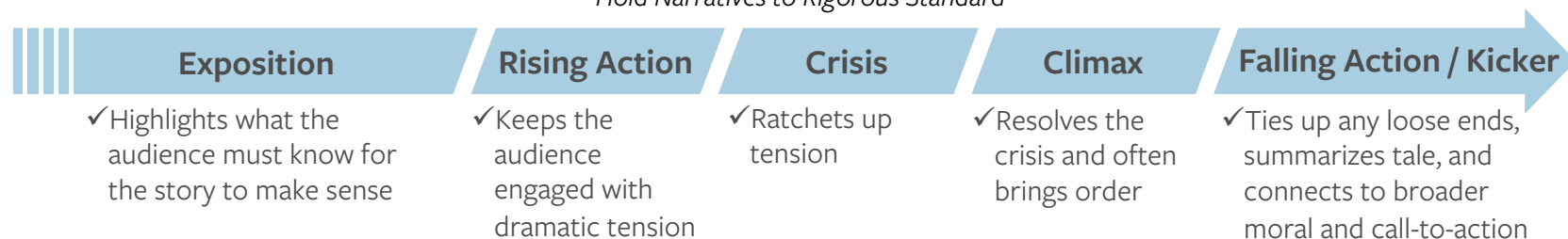
Understand How Key Components of the Narrative Dramatically Unfold...

Strong Narratives Consist of Peaks and Valleys



...And Confirm that Each Step in the Story is Clear and Distinct from the Others

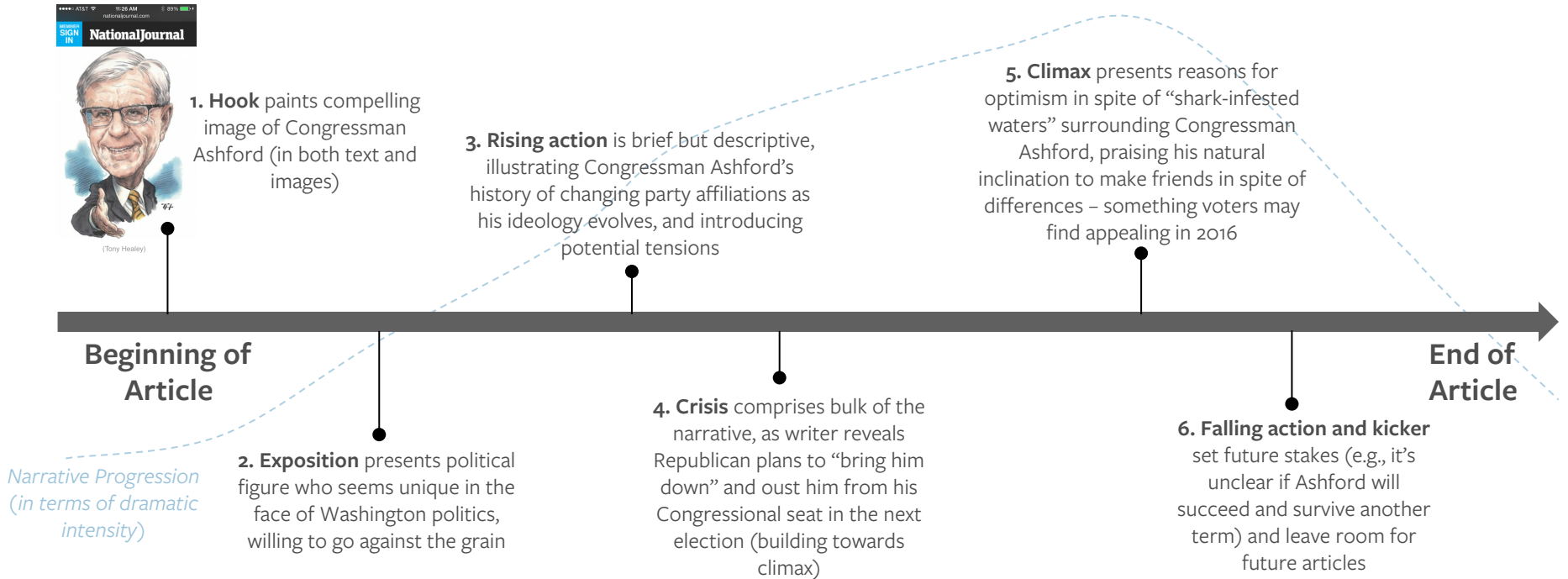
Hold Narratives to Rigorous Standard






Plot in Focus: Pulling the Narrative Pieces Together

Remember the Rules, but Seek Opportunities for Creative Execution



Case in Brief



Profiled Story: National Journal article, “Brad Ashford’s Kindness Campaign”
Organization Type: Media Company
Format: Article, 5 minutes to read

Source: Nora Caplan-Bricker article, “Brad Ashford’s Kindness Campaign,” National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.



Completing Policy Narratives with a Clear Call-to-Action

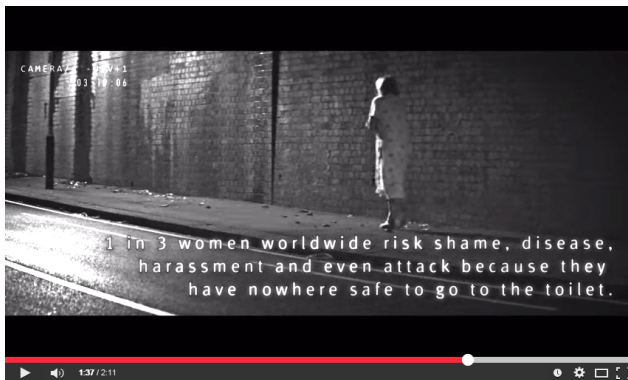
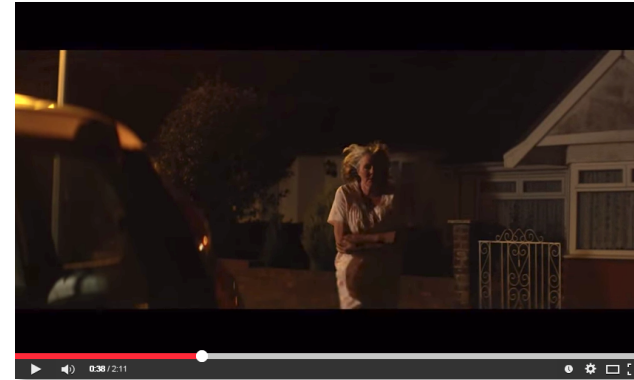
Story Captures Viewer Attention with Hook...

Woman Wakes Up at Odd Hour



...Narrative Action Builds Suspense...

Unclear Why She is Outside in Pajamas



...And the Call-to-Action is Issued
Situation is Absurd, but Untold Millions Face Same Issues Everyday, So Let's Act

...Tale Reaches an Unexpected Climax...
Eventually Realize She is Looking for Restroom

Case in Brief



Profiled Story: WaterAid "1 in 3 women" Advertisement
Organization Type: International Non-Profit Organization
Format: Video, 2 minutes



3. Authenticity in Focus: Finding the Right Narrative Voice

Credible, Honest Voices Sharing Unique Perspectives Always Trump Production Values

Supplemental links give additional context, deeper content experiences and opportunities to engage

Detailed vignette introducing the main character provides a textual hook to entice viewing of the video component, stopping just short of revealing key details to set the stakes

Well-chosen narrative subject connects to audience through engaging details and delivery (e.g., “grandma-sized pack of pills”) and mode of presentation that doesn’t compete for the audience’s attention (i.e., simple video presented in black and white)

Strategically placed social sharing options offer a seamless call-to-action on public or private channels

Case in Brief



Profiled Campaign: New York-Presbyterian Hospital “Amazing Things” Campaign
Organization Type: Medical Provider / Hospital System
Format: Video, 1 minute

Incorporating the Elements to Highlight Industry Impact

Narrative Design, Presentation Effectively Demonstrate Value of NAB Members

Mission statement provides context and reinforcement of story themes, while positioning broadcasters, rather than NAB, as the heroes

Resources

- As the voice of broadcasters in the nation's capital, NAB advocates on behalf of America's free, local radio and television stations and also broadcast networks before Congress, the Federal Communications Commission and the courts.

Public Service
Broadcasters: America's First Informers

University of Oklahoma media arts professor Scott Hodgson and his students, along with Chandra Clark, professor of telecommunications and film at The University of Alabama, compiled stunning footage for a video account of broadcasters' response to the tornadoes that devastated Alabama and Missouri in April 2011. »»»»

Employing Narrative Devices

- 1 Foreshadowing a key character
- 2 Foreshadowing the crisis
- 3 Foreshadowing the climax and falling action

What Makes this Trade Association Story a Success?

- ✓ **Well Executed Multi-Character Arcs:** From the broadcasters to the individuals impacted by the tornado, each character adds emotional and thematic value to the narrative, building toward a strong climax
- ✓ **Gripping Plot with Emotionally Resonant Crisis:** Narrative presents a familiar story archetype (e.g., natural disaster vs. the everyday heroes in its path) and creates an emotional investment in the crisis
- ✓ **Restorative Climax and Falling Action:** Broadcasters successfully prevent massive loss of life, and the narrative focus returns to the normal people most affected by forces of nature
- ✓ **Concluding with Impact:** Narrative ends with the focus on broadcasters whose importance is often questioned but manifests itself most clearly in moments of crisis; presentation alongside NAB mission statement offers subtle reinforcement

Case in Brief

Profiled Campaign: National Association of Broadcasters plug, "America's First Informers"





Organization Type: Trade Association (Media)

Format: Video, 8 minutes

Source: National Association of Broadcasters plug, "America's First Informers," National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

Classifying Content With Key Missing Elements

Avoid the Typical Communications Trap of Calling All Content ‘Stories’

| |  Notable Character |  Hook |  Plot |  Authenticity |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Story A chronicle of how an individual is impacted by a series of experiences</p> | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <p>Interview A conversation that provides insight into an individual’s opinions, beliefs or experiences</p> | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| <p>Profile A short, informational piece describing a person or organization</p> | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| <p>Event Recap A description of recent happenings or experiences</p> | | | ✓ | |
| <p>Testimonial A statement attesting to an individual or organization’s accomplishments or impact</p> | ✓ | | | |

Source: Merriam-Webster dictionary, Meyer Foundation research, National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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