



## Search

## Courses

- > [Content](#)
- > [Delivery](#)
- > [Visual Aids](#)
- > [Tutorials](#)
- > [Archive](#)
- > [Contributors](#)

[Home](#) >> [Courses](#) >> [Delivery](#) >> Delivery Applications

## **The Art of Storytelling in Presentations**

By Jim Endicott, Owner/Manager of Distinction

Wedged in the Appalachian Mountains in the eastern half of Tennessee is the two-century-old town of Jonesborough. As small towns go, this one is relatively rich in history but its greatest claim to fame isn't its strategic significance in the Civil War or a famous resident. Jonesborough has distinguished itself as the epicenter of a worldwide revival in storytelling and the National Storytelling Center. Lest you relegate the art of storytelling to small town libraries on a Saturday morning, a quick visit to their Web site ([Storytellingcenter.com](http://Storytellingcenter.com)) and their Creative Applications pages will broaden your perspective considerably. You'll discover that the same set of skills that keep a 5-year old glued to a Sunday school teacher are not unlike the balance of spoken versus visual material (augmented by some good personal communication skills) that keep an anxious board of directors or high profile client intently listening to your "story."



**"Stories constitute the single most powerful weapon in a leader's arsenal."**

Dr. Howard Gardner, Professor, Harvard University, and Author of *Leading Minds*

We'd like to believe that the art of delivering a good presentation is unique. After all, we use this software called PowerPoint to capture our thoughts, laptops and electronic projectors blast colorful images on the wall and, oh yea, all audiences are different too - or are they? Before you abandon the idea of storytelling for a more traditional approach to presentation delivery, let me challenge your ideas about the presentation process. If I win, you'll change for the better. If I lose, you get to keep doing things the way you always have.

### **It's about the story, not the storyteller**

Imagine for a moment that we took the story away from the storyteller. All the very best delivery skills and beautifully illustrated pages could not sweep the audience along for even a minute. In the same way, presentations desperately need a strong underlying story that is appropriate for the audience. It needs to connect with issues, characters and personal interest that represent common ground with the audience. For lack of a compelling story, many presentations have died a slow death.

### Strong opening statement (Opening chapter)

In the opening moments of a presentation, an audience will make a quick determination if the presentation they are about to sit through is about them, the presenter or their prowess with the software and technology. We use the opening moments of a presentation to create clear relevance to an audience, often times through a well-rehearsed opening personal story or

challenge statement that engages not only their minds, but hearts as well. Practice this critical time until it flows like water. A good start will also help you through the initial moments of nervousness as you get your bearings with the room and your audience.

#### Smooth topic transitions (Chapter transitions)

All the topics of a presentation should paint a clear path towards the promises made in your opening comments regarding how this presentation relates to them. When there is little connectivity between subtopics, we run the risk of losing momentum in a presentation or even worse, our audience's interest. When rehearsing your presentation, work on how you transition between presentation subtopics so a thread of the storyline is carried through to the next area. Subtopics of a presentation break up a long and lengthy single topic delivery like chapters in a book break up the storyline into more palatable packages of thought.

#### Well-orchestrated and rehearsed conclusion (Strong ending)

Far too often presentations appear to end not because there is a clear conclusion, but rather it seems the presenter ran out of slides, time, or both. A storyteller works hard so their audiences understand the moral of the story. If the whole point of the story is not clearly understood, a good storyteller would be hard pressed to consider the day a success yet many presenters fly through the end of their presentations with little regard for a crisp, well-rehearsed conclusion. Spend 30% of your practice time simply working on the opening and closing 5-8 minutes of your presentation. Pull all the pieces together so the audience understands the main points behind your presentation. If your time is cut short, never compromise the time for your closing comments. Abbreviate the depth of description in the middle of the presentation if necessary, but never the conclusion.

#### **The illustrated storyline**

The pictures in a book are not the story, only a graphical set of supporting images that add greater depth to the spoken word. The pictures create emotion and connection (right-brain imagery) between the audience and storyline. Show them the same old pictures in every story and they will quickly lose their impact and in the same way, using the same stock PowerPoint template and clipart is a fast track to mediocrity. Imagine if the storyteller simply held up the book and expected the audience to squint and read the pages for themselves. Text intensive presentations seem to ask the very same thing from their audiences. Just like a children's book has unique design considerations for the medium, presentation graphics also require unique considerations that center around saying less with more graphically-oriented supporting images. The illustrated story can never upstage the storyteller.

#### **Passion, pacing, eye contact and delivery**

One thing's for sure, a storyteller uses their entire body to communicate a story. Their passion is reflected in how their eyes connect with the audience and "invite" them to participate. Eye contact with a senior staff or potential partner is no less critical. That's why reading off cue cards or turning and reading from a projected presentation screen are usually the kisses of death for making any kind of relational connection. A good presenter, like a good storyteller, orchestrates physical distance to create emphasis and greater relational connections. When you are making a key point or telling a personal story that supports your presentation, a step or two towards your audience will raise their attention level and give those words more impact. Don't overuse that sacred delivery space or it too, will lose its importance.

The anecdotal evidence is in, many presenters today fail to effectively connect in a meaningful way with their hopeful audiences. Their overly structured delivery supported by gratuitous use of text and graphics leave them and their audiences wondering if things could ever change.

I would suggest that we could all benefit from a trip to Jonesborough, even for a day, because our biggest obstacles as presenters are not the technology, software or audience, it's the prevailing paradigms we've associated with presenting that hold back average presenters from being truly great.

*Learn more about [Jim Endicott and Distinction](#) in our Contributors section.*

[Back](#)

---

[Home](#) | [Courses](#) | [Downloads](#) | [Forums](#) | [Bookstore](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Privacy](#)

Copyright © 2007 InFocus Corporation. All rights reserved.