Spotting a Narrative Thread: Resources
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Key elements of narrative

- A central question drives the story
- The needs and desires of a character propel the story forward, through a series of scenes that show action

Narrative is not all-or-nothing

You don’t need a complete narrative to do narrative storytelling. In fact, science stories seldom have a complete narrative thru-line.

Questions to ask yourself when sussing out a story’s narrative potential

- What is the central driving question? Can you state it in one sentence?
- Why does this question matter now, for this audience?
- Who are the stakeholders? Who has the most at stake?
- What is the main character’s their central need/want (as it relates to this story)?
- How does your main character drive the story?
- Are they compelling and relatable?
- Do you have the resources—time, money, skill, access—to report and write this story as a narrative?
- What key scenes can you witness or reconstruct?
- How do they relate to the central driving question?
- What action will/did take place in those scenes?
- How will this action move the story forward?
- What will your scenes will reveal about your character(s)?
● What sensory details will convey the appropriate information + mood?

**Narrative in small doses**

● Anecdotes that reveal character through actions, scenic detail  
● Scenes that show how some process unfolds  
● Gestures or behaviors that reveal character  
● Snippets of dialogue that reveal character, advance action, and put readers into the scene  
● Sensory details that establish a mood and immerse readers in a different reality

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**Recommended books and websites for studying narrative**

*Storycraft*, by Jack Hart  
*Writing Tools*, by Roy Peter Clark  
*Telling True Stories*, edited by Mark Kramer and Wendy Call

Nieman Storyboard (Niemanstoryboard.org)  
*The Open Notebook* (Theopennotebook.com)  
Poynter Institute (Poynter.org)