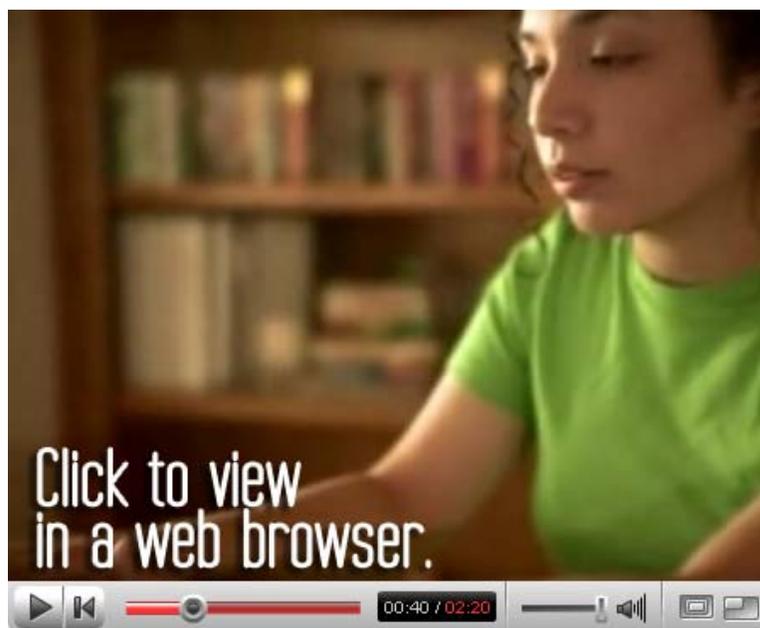




The Writer

I didn't think I had a story. But then I was seriously probed by a group of people I had just met. I wasn't uncomfortable with the probing, not as much as I was with my own perception of lacking a story. Very quickly, however, I found I owned some powerful experiences, which essentially became my stories. Writing one particular story became easy, but only after I went through the exploration for that story.

Ginger Alferos, Mi Casa Resource Center for Women, Inc.



WRITE NOW!

A few things to consider as you get started on your story

Knowing how powerful a digital story can be, it is understandable that you may be eager to grab a video camera and begin filming.

While that enthusiasm to start working is great, it is important to realize that filming and editing only constitute a small portion of what a digital story is. The most critical part of creating a digital story is the actual story itself – the personal and meaningful message you are trying to convey with your project.

For generations, people have used the oral storytelling tradition to impart a wide range of knowledge. From folktales to fables and conversations to anecdotes (including the time your grandpa launched into how things were “in his day”), we have used our own personal histories as a method to teach, to relate, to sympathize and to celebrate. Our own stories are the key tool with which we have come to share and show our learning and our love for one another.

Digital stories have the same impact, and allow us to continue this tradition of storytelling in a rich and exciting format.

Each of us, as a unique person with many singular experiences and perspectives, has a lifetime of stories to share. We each have the ability to impart our side of an event, our own take on the past, or our own feelings about life. From our earliest memory to what happened yesterday, and beyond to the anecdotes we’ve heard from our parents and grandparents, there resides a wealth of knowledge and wisdom within each of us that would make for a great digital story, when we take the time to consider them carefully.

In this section, we want to explore ways for you to take a look at the knowledge and wisdom within you and examine them critically as a way to develop the narrative for your digital story.

What Is Your Story?

Figuring out which story to share can sometimes be a complex and challenging, yet fulfilling task as we search the whole of our experience for something compelling that stands out.

This process can also seem to be overwhelming if we begin to take into account the personal barriers, fears and anxieties that sometimes prevent us from being open to sharing with others. It is important to realize that each of us carries within ourselves a powerful voice and something important to share with the world which not everyone may know about. The time you hit a homerun, struggled to achieve a goal, or helped a close friend each carry emotional weight that is easily translated into digital form.

Consider Ginger's Story:

One hot South Texas summer day at the Llano Grande House, where we hold many of our digital storytelling workshops, a young community organizer claimed that she had no story to tell. Hearing the captivating stories of the other training participants around her who spoke of personal triumphs and histories, she admitted feeling overwhelmed and without anything to share as powerful as what she had just heard.

With a little probing from a workshop facilitator, who approached her with some simple questions to consider, the young lady realized her assumption that she had "no story" may have been incorrect. Thinking back to her exploration of Antarctica and the personal change she went through on that

journey, she began to unfold an amazing tale that she hadn't previously considered.

Before long, she understood that though her story was very different, she nevertheless had experienced interesting things that seemed to be the "stuff" of a deep personal story. Two days later, she produced an evocative personal narrative focused on breaking through the fear that plagued her life. She had overcome the initial sense that her story would not "move" an audience, and in the end her story poignantly conveyed the journey.

Like her, everyone has an amazing story to tell – the key is figuring out what that specific story is.

Critical Questions

In going through the process of developing your story, there are several key questions you can ask yourself as a way to begin thinking deeply about what you want to share. It can often be helpful to go through this process with someone who can ask probing questions as follow up in order to further develop your story. These questions are meant to help you be thoughtful and open to whatever your story may be, and to help you embrace that story.

- What has been a critical moment in your life, and why?
- What is something that is important to you, and why?
- What is something you are proud of?
- What is something you are passionate about?
- What is the story of your family and their history?

These are only a few questions you can ask yourself to begin thinking about your story, but there are many more ways to explore some of the

important and interesting elements and history in your life that could make a digital story.

Activity: Drawing Out Critical Moments

One activity we have used to help people think about the story they want to share digitally involves an activity we call “moment mapping.”

During the moment mapping process, participants are asked to think about critical moments in their lives, and then to “map out” or creatively represent those moments on paper. Afterwards, everyone presents to the group their map and tells the story of their moments.

We find that this activity is helpful because it gives people a chance to think not only critically about a particular story, but orally, as they think of how they will tell the story, and visually, setting them up to think about how they will aesthetically represent their story in digital form.

Moment Map Tools:

- sketch pad paper
- art supplies (pencils, pens, crayons, markers, paints and brushes, construction paper, glue, wire, scissors, magazines [for cutting out images], pipe cleaners, etc.)
- tape (to hang maps on the wall)

As a way to get people thinking about possible story ideas, we use this exercise to focus in on time periods in their life that became defining moments for them. Usually, the events, people involved, or eventual outcomes from these moments end up being part of a larger story that can be developed and turned into a digital story.

This activity starts off in a group setting, where participants are asked: “What have been critical moments in your life?” Follow up questions to emphasize the critical moment aspect of this exercise can include “What moments in your life helped to define who you are?” or “Which moments in your life do you think have been important in forming who you are?”

Participants are given a few minutes to think and reflect about these moments quietly. It is important to emphasize that this question is open for interpretation in any number of ways, since everybody has unique experiences, and that they have the freedom to think about and answer the question however they see fit.

After the quiet reflection time, each participant is presented with their own piece of sketch pad paper which they will use to create their moment map.

Using the art supply materials, the participants are given 20-30 minutes of time alone to artistically represent those moments in whichever way they see fit. Again, openness and creativity are stressed in this process – they can draw, paste images, or use clay and pipe cleaners to give texture to the story of their critical moments.

Once the creative process is complete, participants are asked to tape their moment maps onto the wall of a large room as a way to create a gallery of maps.

When everyone has completed their map, and all the pieces have been placed on the wall, the group travels from piece to piece to listen to each person tell the story of their critical moments. As members of the group listen to each story, they are encouraged to ask questions of the presenter as a way to draw out and develop the story. For a sample moment map, see [Appendix V](#).

Use Your Own Voice

The process of writing out a personal story can be a challenge for people who are not confident in their own writing abilities.

This process becomes a lot easier once you have discovered the story you want to share. When approaching your story, one of the most helpful ways to get it on paper is to write it down using your own voice – you write your story just how you would say it out loud to someone else.

Since the story you are telling is a direct representation of who you are, your own voice is usually the best way to present the story.

It can be helpful not to get too caught up initially with issues of style, grammar or punctuation – this is only your first draft, so just begin by writing down your thoughts on paper on how you would tell someone else the story. The narrative will flow from there.

Editing Help

Remember that once you have most of your first draft completed, it is helpful to go back and read through it again and again as a way to self-edit. During this process you may want to ask yourself questions like:

- Does this story clearly tell the story and message I want to share?
- Will my audience understand the different people, places or events I make reference to, or will they need an explanation?
- Does my story flow well and lead my audience plainly from beginning to end?
- Do I relate the personal significance the story has for me?

Having someone else read through your narrative can also be very helpful in reviewing what you have written from a different perspective. This outsider's

point of view could be useful in determining if the story is clear for the audience and that the message will get across to someone other than you.

At this point, you should have a written narrative that is clear, focused and compelling. This powerful story is now ready to become the script for your digital story.

You can jump to the following sections:

- [Producer](#)
- [Director](#)
- [Editor](#)
- [Back to the Main Menu](#)