

# WHY DIGITAL STORYTELLING

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Why digital storytelling matters and what this toolkit offers

## Why Digital Storytelling

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Everyone has the power to tell their own stories and the stories of their community. Stories have the capacity to build relationships and empathy between groups of people. Stories have the ability to compel people to act and stay involved. They hit people in the heart and help take situations beyond a headline or a fact, turning it into something that remains. Especially in the face of the climate crisis, we need storytellers around the world to communicate their realities, their victories, and their hopes. If we can inspire our communities to look, see, hear - really take in and document what's happening around them - then we can engage even more people to continue to call for the change we need.

There is no single story when it comes to climate change. It impacts everyone in the world, but it impacts everyone very differently. We need many storytellers around the world to help communicate about the current realities and the changing climate that we all face.

We need many perspectives and ideas. In order to create meaningful and long-lasting climate action, we must tell complete climate stories. Not just about disasters and mass marches, but also about resilience and everyday acts of courage.





## Kinds of Digital Storytelling

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Digital storytelling comes in many forms.

- 1 **Personal Storytelling:** Sharing your own experiences and learning.
- 2 **Campaign Storytelling:** Sharing the stories behind an issue campaign and why it matters to you.
- 3 **Digital Reporting:** Documenting a specific action or event using digital tools and communicating to an online audience.
- 4 **Community Storytelling:** Helping to share a collective story of a group of people.

Hopefully this toolkit will help you improve your skills with all these kinds. However we'll focus the most on the first 3.

## What This Toolkit Offers

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Through this toolkit, we'll help you:

- Learn how to find your story. What is it you want to say?
- 📱 Decide which digital tools to use and how to use them.  
We'll be focusing on **writing, photo and video**.
- 📺 Learn basic photo and video editing.
- 🔗 Strategically share your story once it's done.

## What You Need

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Thankfully with the growth of digital tools like smart phones, it's easier than ever to be a storyteller.

You don't need a fancy camera or laptop to be a digital storyteller. The tips and tactics we'll share will be useful for anyone with a smartphone and a data plan. Feel free though to use whatever tools that you have access to on a regular basis.



# FIND YOUR STORY

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Before you pick up a digital tool, take time to center your story and what you want to say.

## Your Story Matters

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To build a vibrant climate movement, it's going to take more than just a few big named spokespeople sharing their ideas and sparking change. It's going to take people everywhere, speaking up and

speaking directly to their communities. No one knows your community like you do. YOU can be the one to energize your community and bring them into the movement for climate justice.



## The Structure of a Story

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The model that we'll be following is one that was developed by Marshall Ganz - a professor at Harvard who has worked with many people to help them become stronger organisers for change. He uses the term "Public Narrative" to describe ideas around storytelling and social change.

Ganz says "A good public story is drawn from the series of choice points that have structured the "plot" of your life – the **challenges** you faced, **choices** you made, and **outcomes you experienced**."

### A good public story can be divided up into 3 elements:

**1 A story of self:**

why you were called to what you do.

**2 A story of us:**

what your community, organization has been called to do. Its shared purposes, goals, vision.

**3 A story of now:**

the challenge this community now faces, the choices it must make, and the hope to which "we" can aspire.

By weaving together these different pieces, you can effectively tell a whole number of stories and engage many people.



To get started on putting together your own public narrative, imagine you're standing in front of a crowd, urging people to join you in the important work that you do.



## 1 Story Of Self

Here's an exercise you can walk through. Take time to sit down and think about your own journey.



### Keep in mind:

Creating your story of self, us, and now is an enlightening experience. It is though something that can be an emotionally intense process. Check yourself if you feel like you're ready. It can also be useful to find a friend to support you. One more thing to keep in mind is that it will change throughout your life. It's an ongoing piece of work.

### DRAW

- 1 Get a large sheet of paper and some pens, markers, or pencils.
- 2 Set a timer for 15 minutes
- 3 Draw out on the paper the journey your life has taken to get you to this point in your life.
- 4 Again think about the specific challenges, choices and outcomes that led you to where you are now. Who are the people that have influenced you?

Some people draw it as a river, others like a map. Whatever form you want to take is fine.



### WRITE

- 1 Step back and look at your map. What are some of the patterns and themes that you're seeing?
- 2 Write 3 sentences that give an overview of the key choices you've made that led you to where you are.

## 2

**Story of Us**

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Change happens faster when we do it together. Think about the communities you belong to and what values they hold. Who would you like to get involved with your campaign? Is it your place of worship, your school, your family? What are the things you all care about?

**DRAW**

- 1 Get another sheet of paper.
- 2 Set a timer for 10 minutes.
- 3 Draw an image of your community.
- 4 Then think of all the words that you could use to describe them and write them down. What is the common thread that brings you together?

**WRITE**

- 1 Spend some time looking at your drawing and word cloud. What stands out to you?
- 2 Write 2 sentences about the people who you want to join you in this work. Who are they? What do they value?

## 3

**Story of Now**

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Now take time to think about what is the urgent challenge that you are trying to overcome? And why does it matter at this key moment? What can people do to solve it?

**DRAW**

- 1 Get another sheet of paper.
- 2 Set a timer for 10 minutes.
- 3 Close your eyes and imagine the future. What could it look like if we all work together? What could happen if you win your campaign?
- 4 Now draw it out.

**WRITE**

- 1 Step back and think.
- 2 Write 2 sentences. What is the urgent action you want people to take? And why now?





## Bringing it All Together

You now have an outline for your story of Self, Us and Now.

- Weave your sentences together. Rework anything you need to. Read your paragraph back to yourself and to a friend.
- Find a picture that you feel represents your story. Ideally one that you have drawn or taken yourself.

There you have it - the beginning of your own public narrative.

## What's Next

Using a public narrative and these tools can be useful in many ways. Depending on whatever story you're putting together, remember to take time to think about:

- The choices and challenges that created a moment.
- The values that people hold.
- The actions that can be taken.
- The reason for collective urgency.
- The vision of where you want to go.



# START CREATING

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Exploring the digital storytelling building blocks -  
with a focus on text, photographs and videos.

## Create an Outline

In the last module, you walked through some elements of a good story, and thought about how you personally relate to an issue.

Before you jump in and pick up equipment, take time to put your plans into an outline. Map out your ideas and what you want to say.

### Also think about:

- **Who is it that you want to see your story and why?**
- **What do you want people to do after they see your story?**

## Choose Your Medium

There are many ways to tell a story online, for this training we'll focus on **text, photo and video**. These are the basic building blocks.

### You need to choose which tool to use:

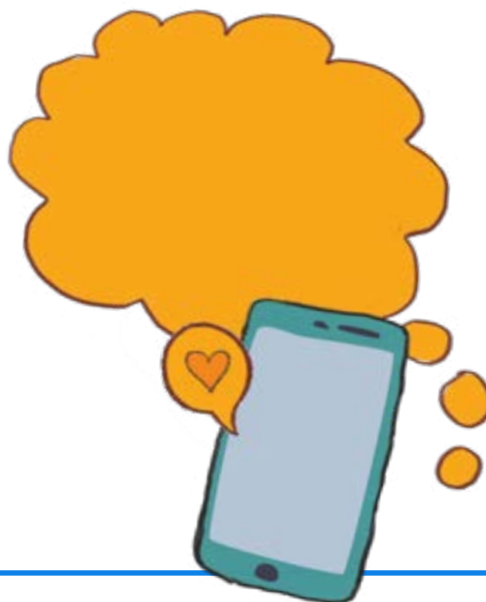
#### Think about your audience:

Who do you want to reach? What will be the most effective way to get their attention? How much internet bandwidth do they have?

#### Think about your own capacity, skills and technology:

What do you have access to? How much time do you have? What do you feel most comfortable using?

**Reminder:**  
You don't need fancy equipment to be effective, just a little creativity.



## Creation Tips



### WRITING

Writing blog posts or articles can be a great way to communicate stories to a wide audience. Here are some suggestions:

- How much does your audience already know about the topic? Think about how you can explain issues so more people can understand. It can help to talk out loud to someone and explain your idea before you start writing.
- Start with a hook: is there a powerful anecdote or fact that can help pull people into the story? The first paragraph is so important.
- Use an 'active' voice. In a sentence written in the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action. In a sentence written in the passive voice the subject just receives the action.
- Be descriptive, but also short and sweet. Sometimes short sentences are the most powerful.





## Creation Tips



### PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEOGRAPHY

#### Photo Tips:

**Lighting:** Be aware of where the light is. Find the best lighting where there is the least amount of shadows.

**Angle:** How does where you are positioned change the feel of the photo? Move around. Get photos from far away, from the middle and close up. Move up high and down low.

**Message:** What is the story you want to tell? How will you showcase that?

Make sure some elements of your message can also be seen. Is there a campaign banner you want to keep in view? What is the energy and feeling people are conveying in the photo?

**Background:** Be aware of what is behind the image. How does it add to the story? Does it distract? What can it also communicate about the story?

**When filming videos, it's good to remember all of this, and include:**

**Stability:** Make sure to stabilize your camera. You can create a tripod or stand from objects around. Try and hold your shots for at least 5 seconds.

**Audio:** Getting good audio is crucial. Move close to the person you are interviewing. Try and move away from distracting noises. Get a microphone if you can. If audio is difficult, you could do a voiceover or add captions later.



## IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Take time to build a relationship with people before you take photos or do interviews. Relationships matter!
- Consent is important. Make sure anyone who is part of your story knows what you will do with your content. Make sure they are comfortable and give their consent.
- For interviews, remember to ask open ended questions (that means questions that you can't answer just using a 'yes' or 'no')



## OTHER CREATIVE IDEAS

### There are other ways to tell stories:

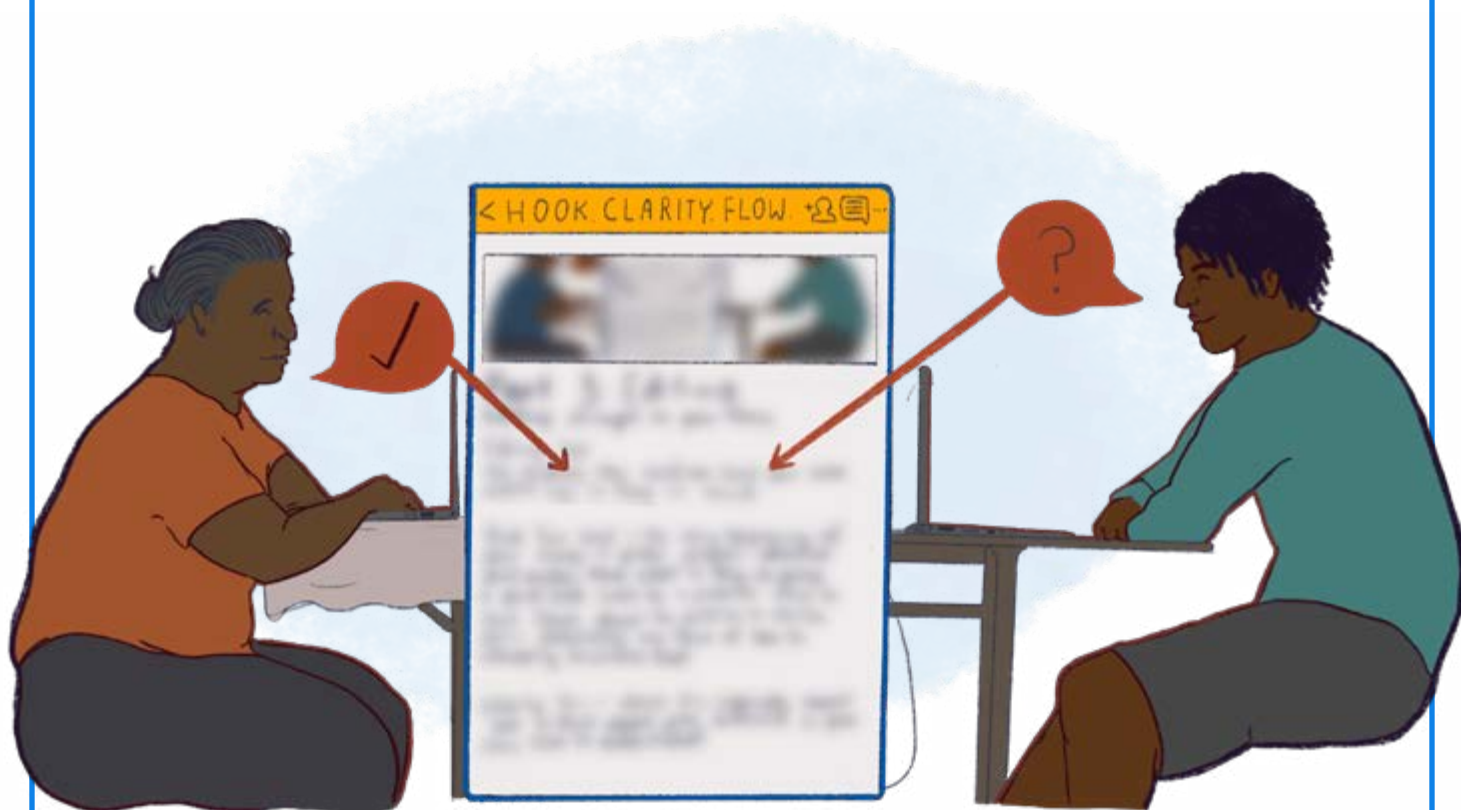
**Use objects:** Objects can be great ways to communicate stories. Choose a theme — it could be as small as a piece of jewelry or clothing or as big as a river. Explain an issue through various items.

**SMS and short form text:** You can engage people through SMS as well. This is also good for communities without advanced mobile phones. You can work with communities to submit via SMS short updates and stories.

**Puppetry or Animations:** You can take stories and turn them into a puppet show or create an animation.

**Plays and Performances:** You can also use oral histories and stories and turn it into plays or public performances. This is a great way to protect people's identities and engage with the public.

**Podcasts or Audio Documentaries:** Audio is a really powerful tool, and if you're creative you can produce some powerful stories with a lot of depth.



# EDITING

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Adding strength to your story  
to make it engaging and clear.

After you've finished the first draft of your story, take time to do some editing to make it even stronger.

## Editing Tips

**No matter your medium, here are some useful things to keep in mind:**

**Hook:** Your hook is the very beginning of your story - it grabs people's attention and makes them want to keep on going. A good hook could be a powerful story or fact. Think about the problem or solution you're showcasing - now think of how to vibrantly showcase that.

**Clarity:** This is where it's especially important to think about your audience. Is your story clear to understand? For example, if you're trying to speak to youth around the world, but you're using very technical or specialized information - will people be able to make sense of what's happening? Be careful of using too many acronyms and technical language.

**Flow:** Does your story flow well into its different parts? Can people easily track the path of the story? Think of the different parts of your story like stepping stones - how can people easily hop from one stone to another?

**Find a friend or coach:** It's really hard to create a powerful story alone. Reach out to a friend or someone who you respect to see if they can give it an extra pair of eyes. Don't be afraid of feedback!





## Writing

**There are so many guidebooks out there about how to become a good writer. Here are just a few easy tips we want to spotlight:**

**Read out loud:** One simple trick is to read your story aloud. This can help you catch any common mistakes.

**Simplify:** Despite common belief, it isn't big fancy words that mark a good writer. Sometimes the best sentences are the short and sweet one. Go through your story and get rid of any words or paragraphs that don't feel necessary. Are any of your sentences too long? Break them up!

**Active Voice:** Good writing is about the active voice (and not the passive voice). With the active voice it is clear who is doing the action. Especially with climate change, we want to make sure to identify who is responsible.

**For example:**

**Active voice:** Fossil fuel companies polluted the atmosphere.

**Passive voice:** The atmosphere became polluted.

**Continuity in Tense and Voice:** Who is telling the story? Are you telling it from your perspective (first person - using I/we) or from a wider perspective (third person - using he/she/it)? Are you telling it in the past, present or future tense? Make sure it's the same throughout all your story.

## Photos

Here are just a few quick tips to help with editing your photos. There are of course many great online courses that go into more detail. But if you're short on time - here's where to start.

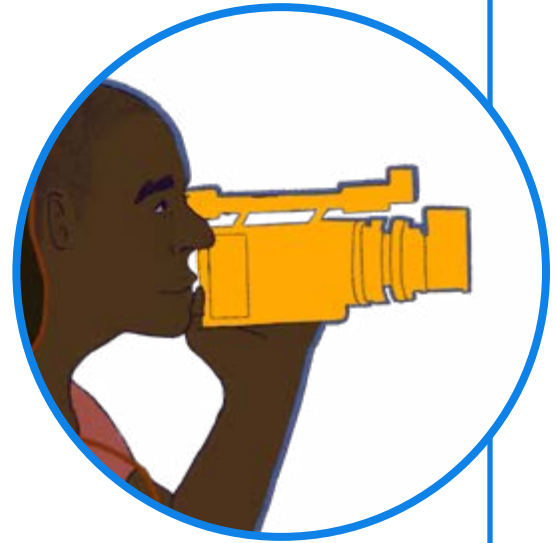
**Brightness:** Changing the brightness or exposure can really change a photo. (But don't make it too bright).

**Contrast/Highlights:** Adjusting contrast and highlights can really help showcase the important parts of your photo.

**Crop:** You don't always need everything in your original photo. It's okay to crop and just choose what is most important.

It is helpful if you start off with a more high resolution photo.





## Videos

Video editing can get pretty complex. It is up to you how advanced you want to get. Do you want to keep your video pretty raw or do you want to have a lot of transitions and effects? Here are some steps to help you out:

**Choose your tool:** There are many different video editing options out there ranging from very simple to very complex. Choose which tool you are comfortable with. We have a list of suggested apps below.

**Storyboard and Video Selection:** At the heart of your video is your story. Chart out the flow of your video before you start editing.

Go through all your footage and decide which sections are the most dynamic and exciting.

**Text and Graphics:** Decide on any text and graphics you want to add. These can be as simple or complex as you want.

**Transitions:** How do you want to move from one scene to another? TikTok is helping people get familiar with creating good video transitions - especially using your body or objects. You can also apply different transition tools in your video editing app.

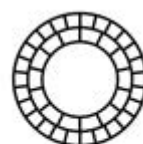
**Music:** Nice music in the background can often help people connect with the emotions of a video. A lot of video editing apps have free music you can use. Choose a nice one that suits the tone of your video, but don't let the music overpower your video.

## Suggested Apps

### Photo



snapseed



VSCO



Adobe Lightroom



### Video



Adobe Spark Video



Animoto



Adobe Premiere Rush



KineMaster



iMovie



Adobe Premiere



# PUBLISH & SHARE

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How to get your story out into the world.

You have now created some powerful stories, but you are not done yet. You have to think of distribution and how you will get it out there to people to see.

## Prepare

Make sure you have had someone look through your story one last time.

### Here are some important things to consider:

- Who do you want to see this story? (Be as specific as possible).
- Where do they go to get their information? For example, if you're trying to reach young people, do they get their information from Instagram or from blogs? Are there specific websites or accounts that they go to?
- What do you want people to do after they see your story? Do you have a call to action?
- Where do you want to host your story? On a blog platform like Medium? On another website? Directly on social media?

## Social Media Tips

Social media is a free way to share our own stories online. No longer do we have to wait for journalists and other new sites to pick up our story.

However, because there is so much content on social media - we also have to be strategic about how we share and post. With social media **you have just a split second to grab people's attention**, so a few things really matter. You need to really hook people from the get go. Give a lot of focus to your:

- Image or Thumbnail
- Headline or Title
- Share Text
- These platforms are always changing, at 350.org we regularly gather learnings about what works and what doesn't work. [You can find the document here](#) ⚡.



## Spread the Word

Posting on social media is the first step.. To ensure your story is shared widely, utilize your network of supporters, allies and friends to help spread the word. You want to make sure your story has impact.

### Here are some tips:

- Who are your partners and allies? Who are the journalists, NGOs, social media influencers, communities, or other news outlets?

*Send them a personal message and ask them to share your story. Your relationships are some of the best ways to help your story get seen.*

- Are there campaign targets you are trying to reach? How can you make sure that the politicians, corporations or other targets will see these stories?

You could share your story with them through an email message or get lots of people involved and do something like a Twitterstorm.

It's also important to keep on trying new things! If something doesn't work out - get creative and think of other ways.

→ Please also share any stories you create with us! You can reach the 350.org team on our social media. Tag us in your content and send us a DM.

# GET INVOLVED

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Find more ways to use storytelling for social change.

If you're not sure how to start getting involved in the climate movement, but know you want to use your skills to support - here are some suggestions:

- 1 Find a local group near you:** We're much stronger when we work together. Research and see what climate networks already exist where you live. You can check the map on [350.org](https://350.org).
- 2 Find more trainings:** If you want to learn more about climate campaigning, climate science or more - there are some great skill-ups and other resources at [trainings.350.org](https://trainings.350.org)
- 3 Make art:** Don't just be digitally focused. If you want to make great art to support the climate movement, there are great kits and guides as [art.350.org](https://art.350.org)