
Story Structure: *Examples & Frameworks*

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For the Head

- **INFORM**: Hans Rosling
- **EDUCATE**: Fei-Fei Li
- **SOLVE PROBLEMS**: Demis Hassabis

For the Heart

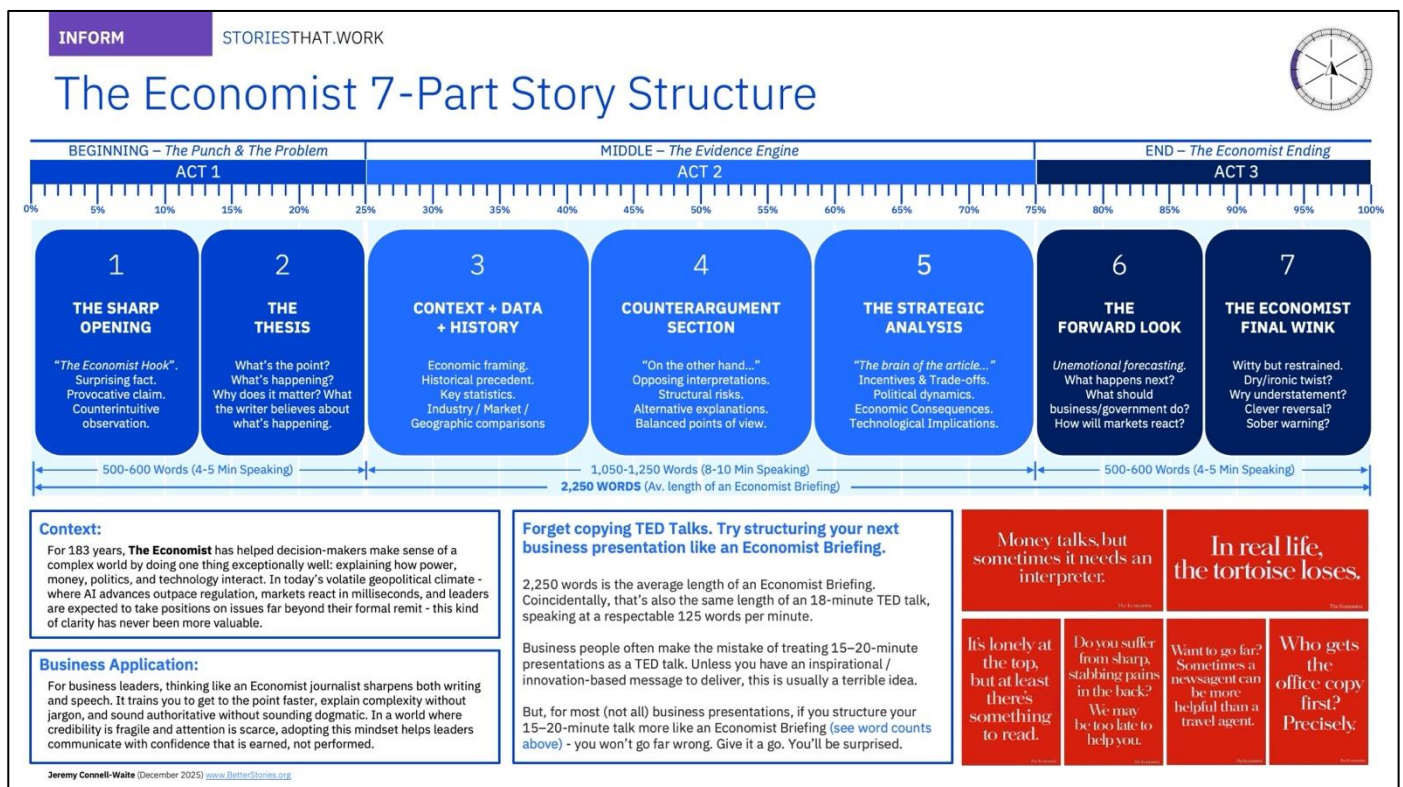
- **INSPIRE**: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
 - **ENTERTAIN**: Cleo Abram
 - **CHALLENGE**: Dan Pallotta
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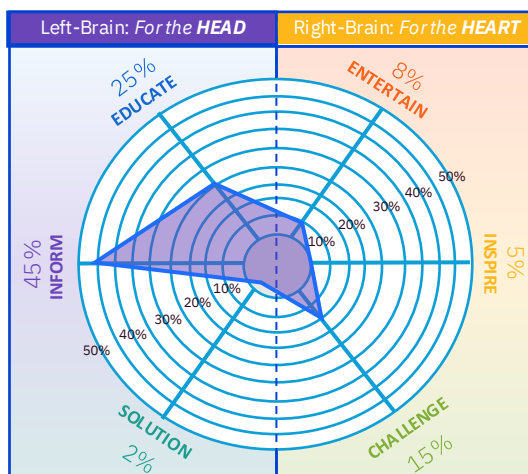
INFORM

Story structure: **The Economist 7-Part Story Structure**

The Economist style briefing is an ideal starting point for stories designed to **INFORM** because it respects the intelligence of the audience while helping them navigate complexity with clarity, structure, and evidence. Rather than relying on emotional spectacle or motivational storytelling, it leads with a sharp hook, quickly establishes a clear thesis, and then systematically builds understanding through context, history, data, comparisons, counterarguments, and strategic analysis. This creates trust. The audience feels informed rather than manipulated. Importantly, the structure mirrors how thoughtful leaders actually make sense of the world: first understanding what is happening, then why it matters, then what the implications may be. In an age of noise, misinformation, and shrinking attention the Economist model gives communicators a disciplined way to explain difficult ideas with precision, balance, and authority — making it one of the most powerful frameworks for business leaders who need to inform audiences intelligently and credibly.



Example: **The Best Stats You've Ever Seen** by Hans Rosling (2006)



Watch Rosling's 20-minute TED talk and follow along with the transcript. It remains the gold standard for informing an audience and turning numbers into narratives. He doesn't just present the data, he creates narrative momentum through evidence, structuring his stories very much like a briefing in *The Economist*. A great example for business leaders who need to tell data-driven stories.

https://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen





INSPIRE

Story structure: **Mission Critical Script**

This simple 3-act storytelling structure (as used in the Mayflower case study) is so effective for inspirational talks because **INSPIRATION** is not created through complexity, it's created through emotional momentum. The Aristotelian structure works because it mirrors how human beings naturally process transformation: first we understand the world as it is, then we experience tension or possibility, and finally we arrive somewhere emotionally different. That journey creates belief. For busy executives under pressure, the structure is especially powerful because it removes the paralysis of overthinking. Instead of trying to sound "visionary," leaders simply focus on three clear jobs: establish the stakes, deepen meaning through evidence and emotion, and end with hope, direction, or possibility. The simplicity creates clarity, and clarity creates confidence. Many inspirational talks fail because they become unfocused collections of ideas. A disciplined 3-act structure gives leaders a reliable narrative arc that audiences instinctively understand and emotionally trust, making it one of the fastest and most effective ways to craft a talk that genuinely inspires action.

INSPIRE

STORIES THAT WORK

Jeremy's Mission Critical Script

BEGINNING

ACT 1

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25%

MIDDLE

ACT 2 – Part 1

30% 35% 40% 45% 50%

END

ACT 3

75% 80% 85% 90% 95% 100%

EXCITE

What problem are you solving, why are you excited about it, and why should we care?

DISTURB

What BIG obstacles and challenges stand in our way (and what would it mean if we overcame them)?

ASSURE

How can we work together to overcome these obstacles, why is this approach unique/differentiated and why we must act with urgency?

Context:

Jeremy Connell-Waite created this simple 3-act structure as part of a "Tactical Communications" project to help business leaders communicate more effectively in mission critical environments. Inspired by military OODA loops and Duarte's Sparkline, the Mission Critical Script is effective in its simplicity because it helps business leaders to construct arguments in his pressure, high risk situations.

Jeremy's Mission Critical Script

Learn More:

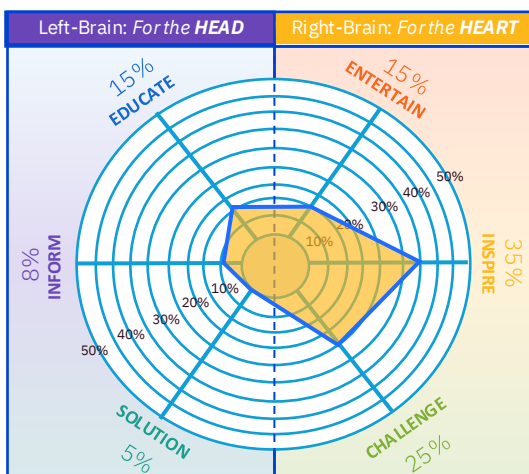
Read [109 Rules of Better Stories](#)

The 9 Principles of Better Stories

www.BetterStories.org

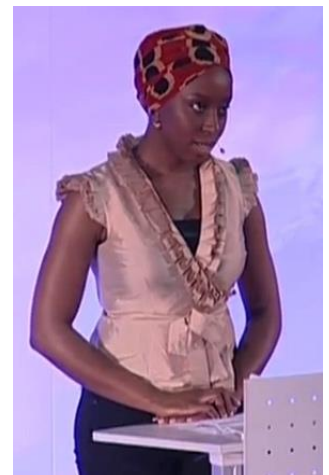
Jeremy Connell-Waite (July 2024)

Example: **The Danger of a Single Story** by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie (2009)



What makes Chimamanda's talk so inspirational is that she never tries to sound inspirational. Instead, she earns trust through vulnerability, humour, honesty, and deeply human stories that expand into universal truths about dignity and identity. Business leaders should study her because she proves audiences are moved not by performance or hype, but by emotional credibility, humility, and authentic human connection.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs24Izeg>





EDUCATE

Story structure: **The Scientific Story Method**

The scientific method is one of the most effective storytelling structures ever created because it mirrors how human beings naturally learn. Great **EDUCATORS** don't overwhelm audiences with conclusions; they guide them through discovery. Scientists begin with a problem, explore the evidence, form a hypothesis, test ideas, analyse results, and then arrive at a conclusion the audience now understands for themselves. That journey creates clarity, credibility, and engagement simultaneously. In business, many leaders make the mistake of presenting only the answer, skipping the intellectual journey that makes the answer meaningful. But audiences trust conclusions more when they understand how they were reached. Structuring business stories like scientists helps leaders simplify complexity, sustain attention, and teach with authority because the audience experiences the logic unfolding step-by-step. The result is not just information transfer, but genuine understanding, and understanding is what drives belief, confidence, and action.

EDUCATE

STORIES.THAT.WORK

The Scientific Method

BEGINNING		MIDDLE			END															
ACT 1		ACT 2 – Part 1	ACT 2 – Part 2	ACT 3																
0%	5%	10%	15%	20%	25%	30%	35%	40%	45%	50%	55%	60%	65%	70%	75%	80%	85%	90%	95%	100%
1 PROBLEM		2 RESEARCH		3 HYPOTHESIS		4 EXPERIMENT		5 ANALYSIS		6 CONCLUSION										

Context:
The **Scientific Method** is an empirical method for acquiring knowledge that has characterised the development of science since the 17th century. It involves careful observation coupled with rigorous scepticism, creating a hypothesis through inductive reasoning, testing it through experiments and statistical analysis (adjusting or discarding the hypothesis based on the results).

Business Application:
Cognitive bias often gets in the way of a good story. We tell the stories we want to tell, which are not always the stories that the audience needs to hear. The scientific method is structured around unbiased testing because cognitive assumptions can distort the interpretation of the observation. While not officially a "story structure" it is a valid method for telling evidence and data-based stories.

Scientific Method of Storytelling

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graph TD; A[Observation / question] --> B[Research topic area]; B --> C[Hypothesis]; C --> D[Test with experiment]; D --> E[Analyze data]; E --> F[Report conclusions]; F --> A; SM[Scientific method] --- A; SM --- B; SM --- C; SM --- D; SM --- E; SM --- F;
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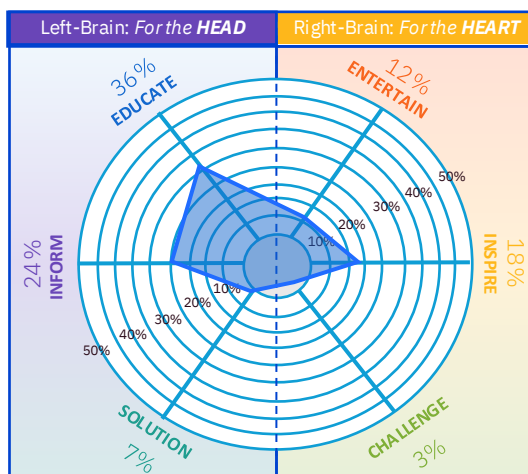
https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Scientific_method

Learn More:

Neil deGrasse Tyson

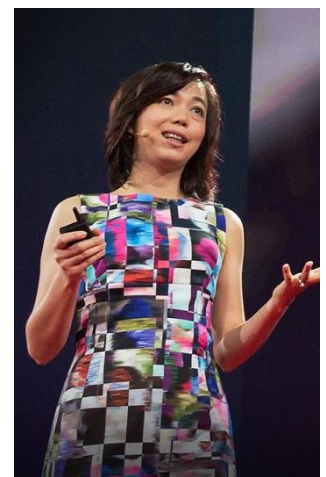
Jeremy Connell-Waite (July 2024)

Example: **How We're Teaching Computers to Understand Pictures** by Fei-Fei Li (2015)



You can listen to any of Stanford Professor Fei-Fei Li's talks, but this one is an excellent example of how to educate and engage an audience. Li explains difficult ideas with clarity, warmth, and intellectual generosity. Her talks should be studied by all technology leaders who need to educate senior audiences, especially around complex issues such as globalization, emerging technology and the environment.

https://www.ted.com/talks/fei_fei_li_how_we_re_teaching_computers_to_understand_pictures





ENTERTAIN

Story structure: **Save the Cat**

I have used this framework to help structure 90-minute workshops or long training sessions, because it's all about keeping an audience engaged and **ENTERTAINED**. Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat* framework was originally created for Hollywood screenwriters, but it contains a powerful lesson for business leaders: audiences stay engaged when information feels like a story. The framework breaks a narrative into memorable "beats" — moments of tension, surprise, conflict, emotion, setback, and resolution — which help sustain attention and create momentum. That is why communicators like Jensen Huang, Sir Ken Robinson, Brian Cox, and David Attenborough are so compelling. They rarely just present information. They take audiences on a journey. They create curiosity, raise questions, introduce obstacles, reveal discoveries, and build toward meaningful conclusions. For business leaders, this can transform a presentation from a static download of information into an experience people actually remember. A strategy update can feel like a mission. A product launch can feel cinematic. *Save the Cat* offers a practical structure to help leaders hold attention, and increase engagement.

ENTERTAIN

STORIESTHAT.WORK

Blake Snyder's Save the Cat

BEGINNING

MIDDLE

END

ACT 1

ACT 2 – Part 1

ACT 2 – Part 2

ACT 3

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45% 50% 55% 60% 65% 70% 75% 80% 85% 90% 95% 100%

SETUP

DEBATE

FUN & GAMES

BAD GUYS CLOSE IN

DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

FINALE CONFRONTATION & AFTERMATH

Opening Image

Theme Stated

Catalyst

Break into Act 2

Subplot / B-Story

Midpoint

All is Lost / Low Point

Break into Act 3

Final Image

Deck: 120 Slides or Film Script: 120 Pages

0-6

7-12

13-18

19-24

25-30

31-36

37-42

43-48

49-54

55-60

61-66

67-72

73-78

79-84

85-90

91-96

97-102

103-108

109-114

115-120

Context:

Save the Cat is a screenwriting term coined by **Blake Snyder** and refers to a particular plot device. The *Save the Cat* method involves having the protagonist do something admirable toward the start of the story in order to establish them as a likable person and get the audience on their side. 15 "beats" provide a framework that most showrunners and screenwriters when writing movies and TV shows.

Business Application:

While this may appear over-engineered for a business story, this is an ideal structure to use for seminars, workshops or training programs. This is because the "beats" are designed to keep an audience's attention for an extended amount of time (at least 1-2 hours); so a 90-minute workshop could be structured like a 90-minute movie (perhaps even treating each page of the script as a PPT slide).

Blake Snyder's Save the Cat "Beat Sheet"

Learn More:

https://save-the-cat.com/beat-sheet

SAVE THE CAT! Blake Snyder's Beat Sheet

Jeremy Connell-Waite (July 2024)

Example: **Quantum Computers, Explained with MKBHD** by **Cleo Abram** (2023)

Left-Brain: For the **HEAD**

Right-Brain: For the **HEART**

Quadrant	Percentage
EDUCATE	24%
ENTERTAIN	38%
INSPIRE	10%
SOLUTION	6%

Cleo Abram combines the curiosity of a science educator with the pacing instincts of a world-class digital storyteller. Her optimism about technology is contagious, but beneath that energy is a deep craft. Creating explainer videos at Netflix, and her *Huge If True* YouTube channel, taught her how to simplify complexity, sustain attention, create narrative tension, and reward curiosity every few seconds, which is exactly how audiences consume and retain information.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3fz3dqH44>

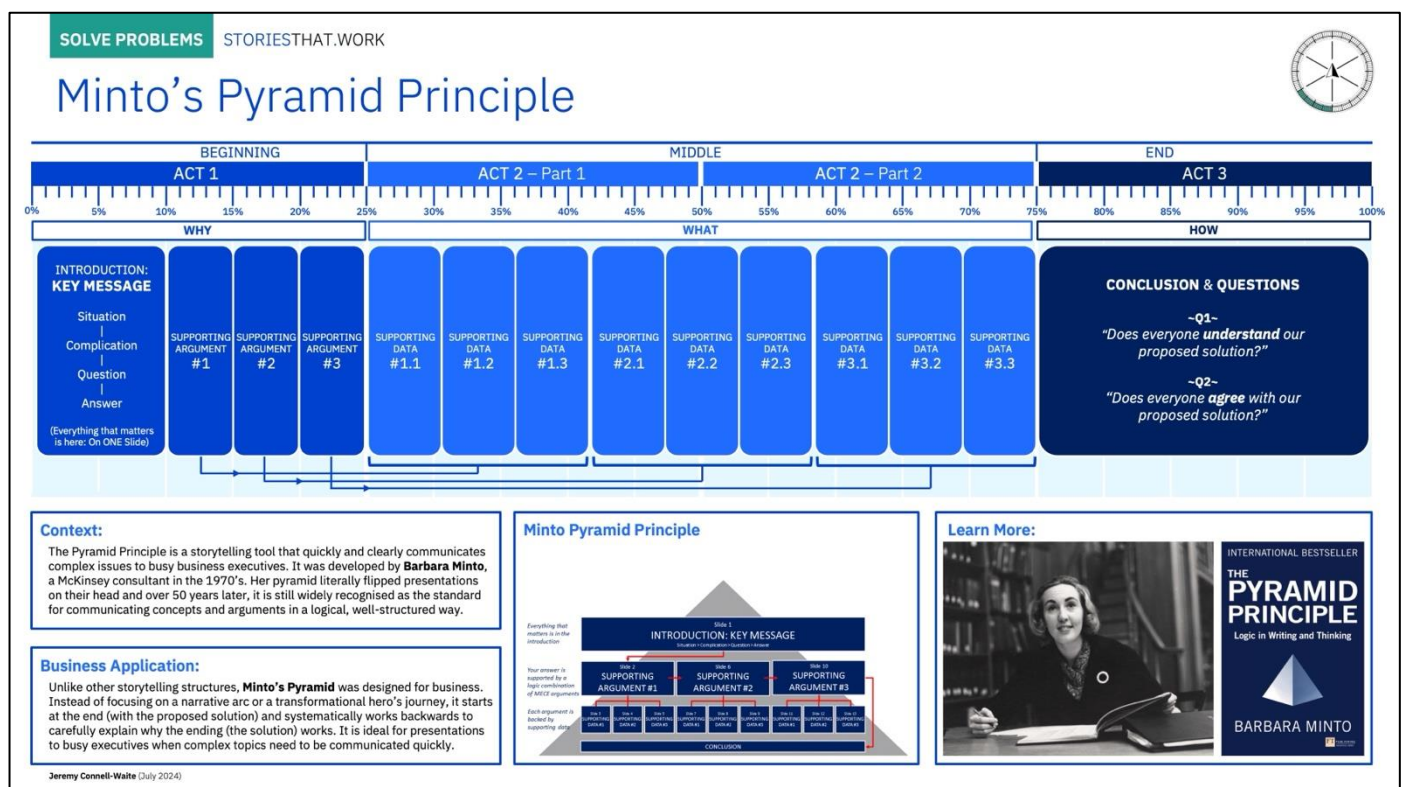
To download these story structures as a PDF (for study or for free-use uploading them into a LLM for coaching advice) visit StoriesThat.Work



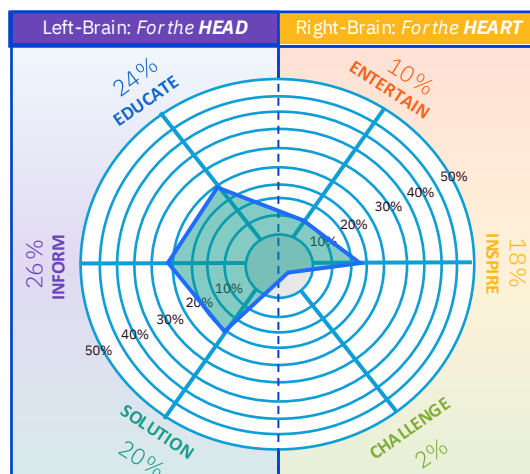
SOLVE PROBLEMS

Story structure: Minto's Pyramid Principle

Barbara Minto's Pyramid Principle became legendary inside McKinsey & Company for one simple reason: busy leaders do not have time to untangle messy thinking. When a business story needs to **SOLVE PROBLEMS**, clarity matters more than theatrics. The Pyramid Principle forces communicators to lead with the answer first, then support it with logically grouped arguments and evidence. It is structured, efficient, and deeply respectful of executive attention spans. Its famous MECE approach (mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive) helps leaders organise complex information without overlap or confusion. The framework's "1, 3, 9" logic also mirrors how humans naturally process information: one core idea, supported by a small number of major themes, each reinforced with clear evidence. In many ways, it is back-to-front storytelling. Instead of building slowly to a conclusion, it starts with direction and then proves why that direction is correct. For leaders navigating complexity, uncertainty, and high-stakes decisions, the Pyramid Principle remains one of the most practical storytelling frameworks ever created.



Example: Nobel Lecture in Chemistry by Sir Demis Hassabis (2024)



If you want to understand how great innovators communicate, study Demis Hassabis. He explains impossibly complex ideas with calm clarity, childlike curiosity, and scientific precision. What makes him special is that he does not just describe problems, he frames them as humanity's next great adventure, making breakthrough science feel understandable, urgent, and deeply inspiring.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtPaZsas mNAdemis>

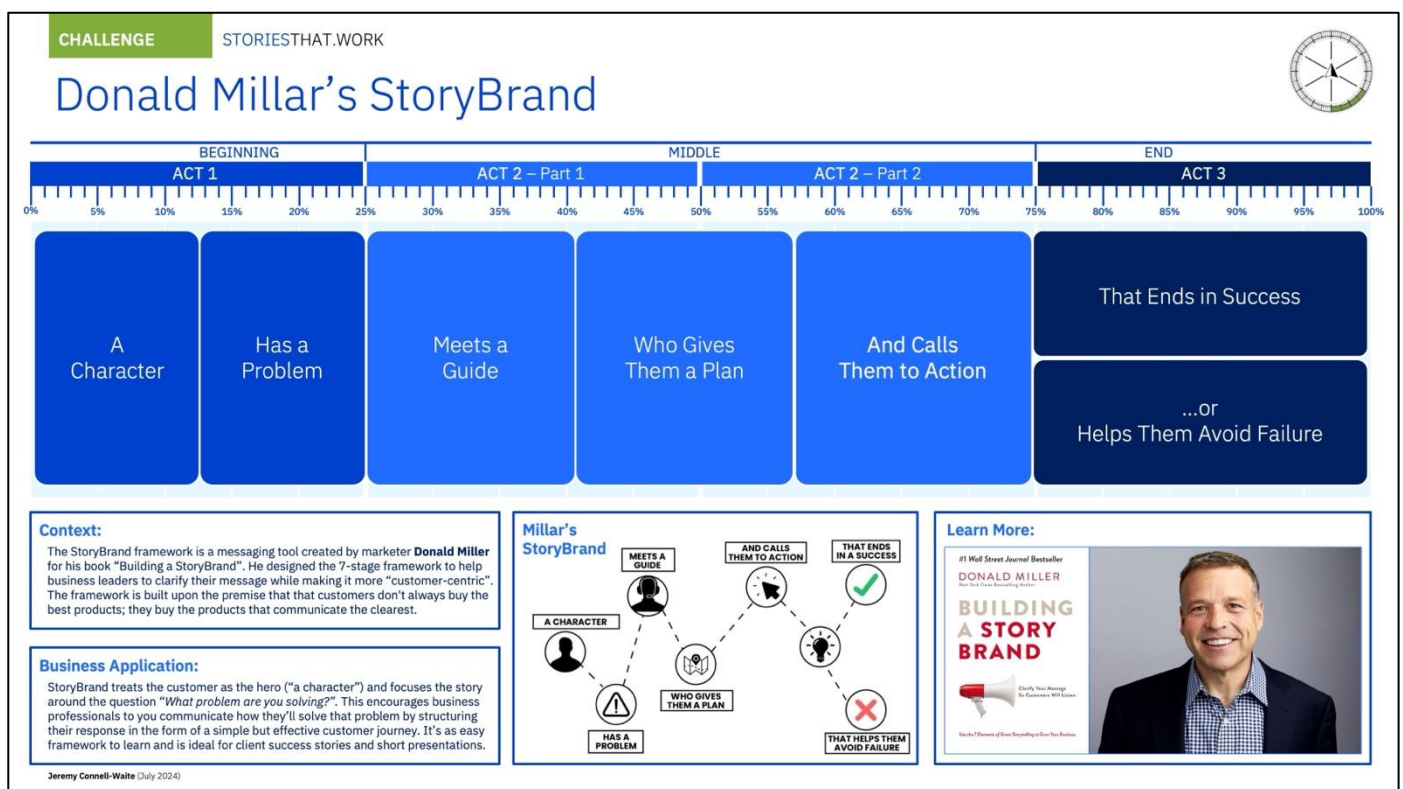




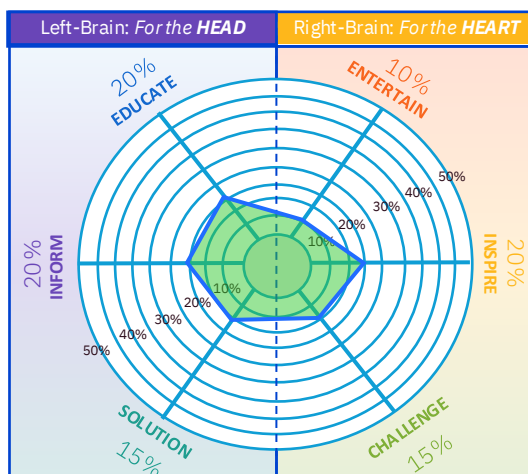
CHALLENGE

Story structure: Donald Miller's StoryBrand Framework

Donald Miller's [StoryBrand framework](#) is one of the most practical storytelling structures a business leader can learn because it recognises a simple truth: people only change when they feel the problem personally. The framework positions the audience as the hero of the story, a character who wants something badly but faces an obstacle too difficult to overcome alone. That is where the storyteller steps in, not as the hero, but as the trusted guide. The guide understands the challenge, offers a clear plan, and calls the audience toward action. This makes *StoryBrand* especially powerful for stories designed to challenge an audience. Great challengers do not simply criticise the status quo. They create tension between where people are and where they could be. They help audiences see the cost of inaction and the possibility of transformation. For business leaders trying to inspire change, create urgency, or rally people around a mission, *StoryBrand* offers a simple but deeply human structure for helping people believe that a better future is possible, and that they can help build it.



Example: The Way We Think About Charity is Dead Wrong by Dan Pallotta (2013)

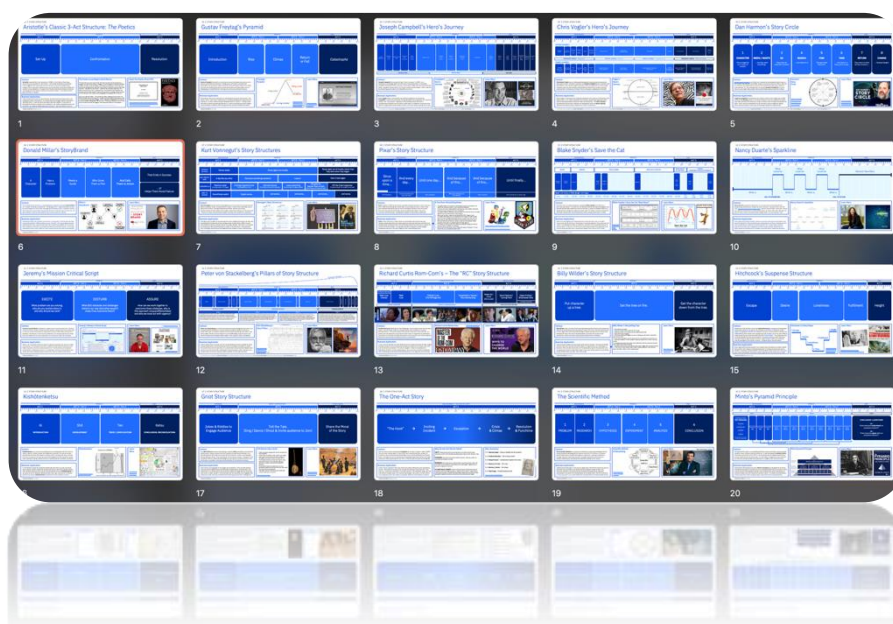


Chris Anderson (curator of TED) called this talk "the most persuasive presentation I have ever heard in my life." And he's heard thousands. The talk is so good it was made into the movie *Uncharitable*. Dan's talk is a masterclass in the "Challenge" bearing because it does not merely share information, it de-stabilises certainty. By the end, the audience is almost forced to re-evaluate its beliefs, values, and assumptions about capitalism, charity, and fairness.

https://www.ted.com/speakers/dan_pallotta



	EXAMPLE	CHARACTER	STRATEGY	KEYWORDS		LANGUAGE	
ANALYST: Inform	ANALYSTS reduce uncertainty through logic. They seek clarity, accuracy, and understanding. They simplify complexity. Confidence built through evidence.	McKinsey partner, Economist columnist, Financial analyst, Hans Rosling Jamie Dimon Satya Nadella Amy Webb Ben Evans Jensen Huang	• Rational • Calm • Structured • Evidence-led • Curious • Precise • Measured • Objective • Credible • Thoughtful	• Breaks down complexity • Uses frameworks and models • Organises information logically • Builds trust through facts & insight • Simplifies difficult concepts • Clarifies cause and effect • Helps audiences “make sense” of uncertainty	Data Insight Evidence Trend Analysis Framework Model Research Findings Metrics Benchmark Drivers Patterns	Variables Forecast Strategic Scenario Context Implications Signal Probability Risk Clarity Perspective	<i>“Let’s look at the data.”</i> <i>“The pattern we’re seeing is...”</i> <i>“There are three key drivers behind this shift.”</i> <i>“What the research suggests...”</i> <i>“To put this into context...”</i> <i>“The evidence points toward...”</i> <i>“Here’s the strategic implication.”</i>
TEACHER: Educate	TEACHER reduce uncertainty through understanding. They facilitate growth. Patient, practical, generous, and empowering. They transform confusion into capability.	Fei-Fei Li Sam Altman Kate Raworth Larry Fink Emma Walmsley Jane Fraser Brian Cox Erica Chenoweth Larry McEnerney Brilliant mentors Trusted coaches	• Patient • Encouraging • Clear • Helpful • Supportive • Wise • Generous • Calm • Empathetic • Practical	• Explains step-by-step • Uses stories and examples • Makes learning feel safe • Builds confidence gradually • Turns knowledge into capability • Uses analogy and demonstration • Reduces intimidation	Learn Understand Practice Example Step-by-step Method Principle Skill Coaching Guidance Development Capability Improvement	Demonstration Habit Training Process Lesson Growth Mastery Experiment Application Feedback Progress	<i>“Let me show you how this works.”</i> <i>“A simple way to think about this is...”</i> <i>“Here’s an example.”</i> <i>“Over time, this becomes a habit.”</i> <i>“The key principle is...”</i> <i>“You don’t need to master everything at once.”</i> <i>“Let’s break this down step-by-step.”</i>
OPERATOR: Solve Problems	OPERATOR’S reduce uncertainty through action. Get things done. Less theory. More execution. Prioritise momentum, outcomes, and practicality application.	COO Military commander Ops Leader TV Showrunners Disney Imagineers Scientists Arvind Krishna Temple Grandin Mark Rober Ellen McArthur Sara Blakely	• Direct • Reliable • Disciplined • Pragmatic • Grounded • Focused • Efficient • Action-oriented • Tough-minded • Decisive	• Removes friction • Focuses on execution • Prioritises action over theory • Simplifies decisions • Creates accountability • Solves immediate problems • Drives progress quickly	Execute Deliver Action Outcome Results Priority Deadline Ownership Accountability Operational Process Efficiency Scale	Implements Focus Workflow Delivery Performance Practical Discipline Resource Solve Momentum Next steps	<i>“Let’s focus on execution.”</i> <i>“What needs to happen next?”</i> <i>“We need a practical solution.”</i> <i>“Let’s simplify this.”</i> <i>“Who owns this?”</i> <i>“How quickly can we move?”</i> <i>“The priority right now is delivery.”</i>
VISIONARY: Inspire	The VISIONARY reduce uncertainty through belief. They inspire, paint possibility. Elevate emotion. Create movement. Purpose-driven	Steve Jobs Jane Fraser Mark Zuckerberg Malala Yousafzai Brene Brown Simon Sinek Dan Pallotta Barack Obama Bryan Stevenson Dario Amodei David Attenborough MLK	• Optimistic • Inspirational • Courageous • Purpose-driven • Imaginative • Emotional • Future-focused • Hopeful • Ambitious • Idealistic	• Paints a compelling future • Creates emotional momentum • Challenges limitation • Connects work to Meaning • Uses metaphor and aspiration • Builds belief in possibility • Creates identity and belonging	Purpose Mission Vision Future Possibility Believe Hope Imagine Change Impact Movement Potential Transformation	Legacy Courage Humanity Together Better world Dream Meaning Inspire Opportunity Next generation Why	<i>“Imagine a world where...”</i> <i>“This is our moment.”</i> <i>“We have an opportunity to...”</i> <i>“The future belongs to...”</i> <i>“This matters because...”</i> <i>“We can build something extraordinary together.”</i> <i>“The best is still ahead of us.”</i>
PERFORMER: Entertain	PERFORMER’S reduce uncertainty through emotion and by capturing attention. They understand rhythm, energy, and timing. They make ideas memorable.	Comedians Walt Disney Cleo Abram Jacob Collier Shonda Rhimes Aaron Sorkin Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie Dan Brown N.K. Jemisin Sam Conniff	• Charismatic • Expressive • Energetic • Entertaining • Warm • Dynamic • Emotional • Playful • Engaging • Confident	• Uses humour and surprise • Creates emotional highs and lows • Maintains attention • Uses storytelling rhythm and timing • Creates memorable moments • Builds audience connection • Makes information feel alive	Story Experience Feel Energy Emotion Surprise Exciting Incredible Imagine this Funny Human Connection Adventure	Drama Curiosity Attention Magic Wonder Unexpected Memorable Wow Delight Emotionally Captivate	<i>“Here’s the crazy part...”</i> <i>“You’re going to love this.”</i> <i>“Imagine being in that room...”</i> <i>“And then something unexpected happened.”</i> <i>“This blew my mind.”</i> <i>“Let me tell you a story.”</i> <i>“That’s where things got interesting...”</i>
PROVOKER: Challenge	PROVOKER’S challenges the status quo & motivate people to think and act differently. They create tension. Disrupt complacency. They force audiences to confront reality.	Thomas Friedman Tarana Burke Richard Branson V. Westwood Anita Roddick Elon Musk Greta Thunberg C. Figueres Al Gore Malcolm Gladwell Yvon Chouinard Howard Schultz Reed Hastings	• Bold • Courageous • Restless • Contrarian • Fearless • Direct • Intense • Emotionally charged • Passionate • Urgent	• Challenges assumptions • Creates productive discomfort • Exposes contradictions • Highlights risk and urgency • Reframes the problem • Questions conventional thinking • Forces audiences to confront consequences • Uses tension to motivate change	Why Challenge Rethink Urgent Risk Contradiction Broken Crisis Truth Change Wake up Status quo Impossible	Accountability Reality Consequences Tension Unacceptable Question Disruption Critical Future Warning Transform	<i>“The real problem nobody wants to talk about is...”</i> <i>“Why are we still doing this?”</i> <i>“If we continue down this path...”</i> <i>“The cost of doing nothing is...”</i> <i>“We need to challenge our assumptions.”</i> <i>“This should concern all of us.”</i> <i>“What if the opposite were true?”</i> <i>“Comfort is becoming our biggest risk.”</i>



Story Structure Download [PDF]

Download over 20 different story structures here.
Experiment with them to find with structure will resonate best with your audience.

https://www.betterstories.org/_files/ugd/9de62c_c420a63cba494750af8244cf1a4be678.pdf

