

TELLING

stories

THAT MATTER

A guide to digital storytelling for sports organisations

Digital stories are a powerful way to tell stories that matter, especially with people who may often go unheard.

This guide, developed by James Iliffe, provides an introduction to the process of planning, recording, producing and sharing digital stories.

James combines a long-standing passion for personal stories with a background in journalism and community education. Over the past 25 years, he has worked with a range of national and international organisations, recording stories with hundreds of people, from all backgrounds, cultures and ages.



Today, James leads digital storytelling programs for individuals and organisations, here in Australia and overseas, to help them collect and share stories that make a difference.



Credits

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Disclaimer

The material in this guide is necessarily general in nature. It is provided on the understanding that individuals and organisations will develop their own approaches and protocols to digital storytelling, relevant to the context in which they operate and the people with whom they work.

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TELLING STORIES WITH

purpose

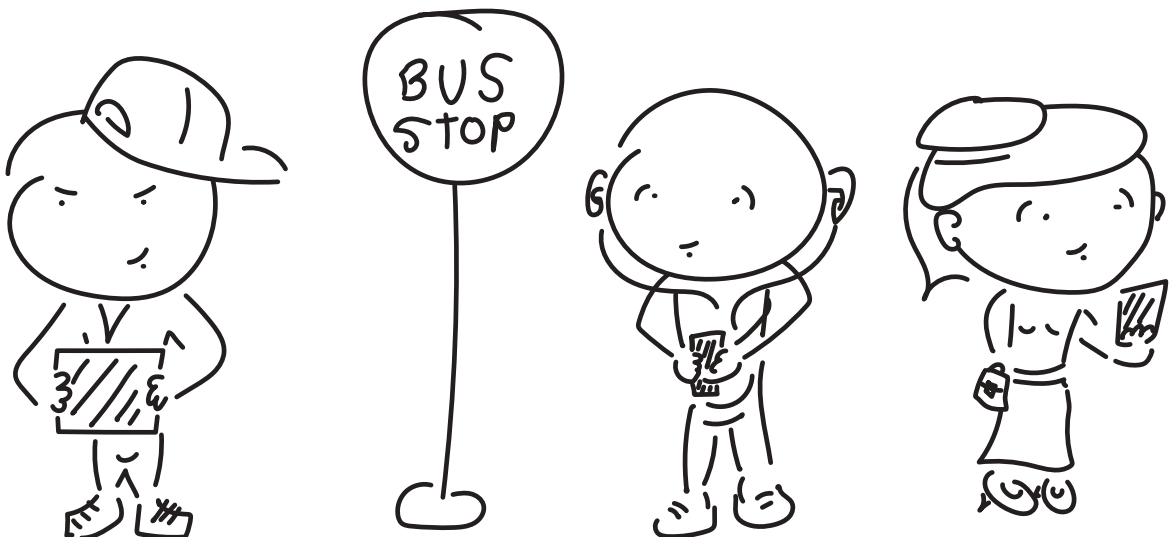
Storytelling is central to our lives. We tell stories to make sense of the world and to connect with others. We tell stories to explain, inform, encourage, warn, motivate, persuade, and entertain; the list goes on. In short, we tell stories for a purpose.

Their strength lies in their ability to communicate complex ideas in simple language, framed by personal experiences and emotions that we can all relate to.

Well crafted stories spark curiosity, foster empathy and build understanding. Unlike opinion pieces or blogs, it is hard to argue with a story.

However, if we are seeking to get people involved in our sport, we need stories to do more than build understanding. We need to tell them in ways that encourage them to take action.

Most importantly, we need to tell stories that connect with people's values and motivations. We need to know our audience.



The value of good storytelling

The rise of social media has changed our lives forever. We are awash in information and constantly pulled in different directions by an ever-growing number of online connections. As a result, strategies for communicating that worked in the past are no longer relevant today.

Digital storytelling is an effective way to communicate in this new era.

There is a rapidly growing demand for video content. People spend more time today watching video online than they do using social media. YouTube alone has over one billion unique users per month.

However, it is not enough to simply create a video and publish it online. With more and more video content available, organisations need to tell stories that capture people's attention and connect with them at an emotional level.

Compelling personal stories have the power to break through the online din.

Be strategic

Digital storytelling is most successful when organisations clearly define their values and their goals; understand who their audiences are and what they looking for; and then set measurable objectives to guide their work.

This strategic framework is essential for designing a plan to reach the right people, with the right stories, delivered in the right way.

Before starting any digital story, make sure you are clear about the purpose of that story and how it fits into your overall plan. For example:

- Are you trying to **share something new**?
- Are you trying to **encourage and inspire**?
- Are you trying to **convince or persuade**?
- Are you **offering a solution to a problem**?
- Are you trying to **start a conversation**?

Most importantly, **what do you want people to do** after they watch the story?

Knowing what sort of story you want to tell, and why you want to tell it, will influence every part of your project, from the people who will be featured, to the images you collect, to the music that you choose, right through to the way you publish and distribute your story.

Setting clear goals also helps you to develop criteria to assess the effectiveness of your story and your organisation's efforts to promote greater community encouragement in your sport.

THE elements OF GREAT STORIES

Identifying the story you want to tell and translating it into a digital form can feel daunting at the start, especially if this is a new way for your organisation to communicate.

Where do you start? What makes a great story?



Compelling stories start with people, people like you and me. We meet them in the story as students, teachers, coaches, players, mums and dads, community members or the like.



Most stories will involve the main character **facing a problem, a question or a new situation**. The body of the story describes what our character does in response to that situation. Great stories **concentrate on action**, told with emotion.



The conclusion sets out how our character **responds to the situation or reaches their goal**, what they learnt and where their story might go in the future.

Simplicity and economy are crucial. **Effective digital stories aim to communicate one key message**. They are told in a way that makes the message relevant to a wide group of people, no matter what their background.

The story should align with your organisation's goals and values. It should demonstrate, in a direct and human way, the benefits that your sport can provide to people, especially young people.

It is a tool to build rapport with your audience, to foster a shared vision for your sport and your community, and to motivate others to contribute to that goal.

What is a digital story?

At its most simple, digital storytelling is about combining spoken words, images, music, sounds, text and other elements to create a short video.

Stories can vary in length, but most are between two and five minutes.

Digital stories can be told in different ways:

- **A narrated story**, written in the first person, where the narrator describes an important event or experience
- **An interview-based story**, where one or more people share their experiences on a particular topic.

Features of compelling digital stories

- Personal
- Authentic
- Action-based
- Concise
- Has one key theme
- Others can relate to it

The most meaningful stories come from people who have unique experiences and insights, even though they may not be skilled storytellers. Your job is to help them tell their stories. This can be a rewarding experience for everyone.

Writing a digital story

A strong digital story will provide a snapshot of an encounter or a moment in time. It should offer a unique and deeply personal perspective, rather than simply recounting an event or offering an opinion.

Aim to write around 250-300 words, and only include what absolutely needs to be included. Remember, there will also be images to help tell the story.

The story should be written in the way it will be narrated. Write in a conversational tone. Use simple, active language and short sentences. Don't worry about grammar.

Start with action - something interesting that happened - so the listener is immediately immersed in the story. Set up the key theme quickly, and only include material that builds on that theme.

Stories can conclude in different ways - such as a question, a reflection or a challenge - depending on the purpose of the story and the impact you seek to have.



GETTING

started

A digital story combines the following elements:

- An audio track (either narrated or edited from interviews)
- Images (photos or video footage)
- Music or sounds.

Depending on the story you want to tell and the way you want to tell it, you can also include text or other visual elements in the video.



It is important to recognise that the story belongs to the person or people who shared their experiences with you. Ensure that they have input - if they choose - in how the story is recorded, produced and shared. They should review the story and give their consent before the story is shared publicly.



Pulling it all together

There are a number of different steps involved in preparing a digital story. Following is a brief summary of those steps, although the order in which you complete different steps may vary from project to project. Each step is described in more detail later in this guide.



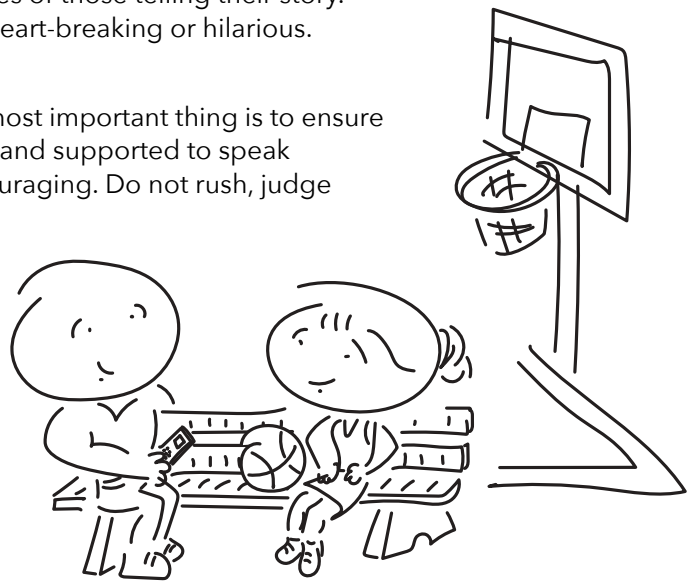
recording

THE STORY

Digital stories are propelled by the voices of those telling their story. These stories can be inspiring, tender, heart-breaking or hilarious. Above all, they must be genuine.

When you are recording the story, the most important thing is to ensure that the other person feels comfortable and supported to speak openly and in their own words. Be encouraging. Do not rush, judge or correct.

If possible, find a quiet, comfortable place to record the narration or interview. A small or medium-sized room, with rugs or carpet to absorb noise, is ideal. Try to avoid recording in public places - where there is noise, traffic or wind - or in big, open rooms with hard surfaces.



Recording a narrated story

Before you begin recording, take some time to discuss the story with the person who will narrate it. Ask them to reflect on the emotions behind the story. It is vital that their narration conveys these feelings through their voice. This is what will engage others in the story.

The idea is to tell the story, not read the story. Encourage the person to vary the pace of their delivery and include pauses, just as they would in a conversation.

Before you start, check the equipment and battery levels on the recording device. Set the recording device around 10-15cm from the person's mouth. If you are using a smart phone to record the narration, switch it to flight mode so that you are not interrupted. Have the script nearby so it can be seen easily.

It's ok if the person makes mistakes or stumbles over a couple of words. Offer to stop the recording and start again, or keep going and remove those parts when you edit the sound track.

Take as much time as you need. Keep going until you get a recording that you both like.

When you have finished, save and name the audio file on your recording device so you can find it easily later on.

Recording an interview-based story

Interviews work best when people feel relaxed. Arrange to do the interview in a place where the other person feels comfortable. Before you begin, take time to put them at ease.

As with recording a narration, check the equipment and battery levels on the recording device. If you are using a smart phone, set it to 'flight mode' to avoid interruptions.

Wear headphones during the recording so you can hear exactly what you are recording. Hold the recording device with a light, steady hand to avoid bumps or other background noise.

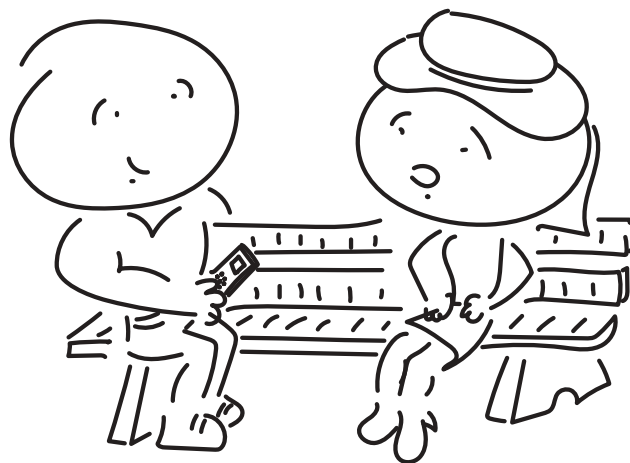
Sit close together and hold the device towards the other person (about 10-15cm away from their mouth). You want to record their answers clearly; your questions will generally not be included in the final digital story.

Ask general, open-ended questions that get to the heart of the story: who, what, when, where and why. How did the person respond to events? How did they feel? What did they learn?

Listen carefully and respond to what people say, rather than just working through a list of questions

Don't rush to fill silence after a person finishes talking. It gives them time to think and, if they want, to go deeper into their answer.

Once the interview is finished, save and name the audio file on your recording device. Check the recording to make sure you are happy with the sound quality.



There may be occasions when you interview someone about a deeply personal or distressing experience. If this is the case, take extra time to ensure they feel safe and ready to tell their story. You may also need to arrange support for the person during or after the interview. Be sensitive in your questions. Don't push someone if they are recounting something painful. Ask them if they want to stop the interview. Depending on the story, some interviews may need to be recorded in stages or over multiple sittings.

COLLECT STRONG

images

Images are central to a compelling digital story.

Strong photographs immediately place the viewer in the story. They introduce the people and the places central to the story. They add to the emotion and impact of the story.

Images should be collected with an understanding of the overall story, not just used as “fillers”.

Depending on the project, the person telling the story may be able to provide you with all the images you need. In many cases, you will need to source some or all of the images.

You will need a range of images to ensure the digital story is visually interesting. The focus should be on collecting shots of people. People like looking at people.

What sort of images to collect?

- Take **close up shots** and **medium shots** of the people who are central to the story.
- Take **action shots** that capture people in their world or interacting with others.
- Take **long shots** of landscapes, places or objects that help “set the scene” for the story.



Keep in mind



- Prepare a shot list. Ask yourself what sort of images you need to help tell your story.
- Take photos using the landscape orientation (rather than portrait orientation). This will give you more flexibility to crop an image when you produce the digital story.
- Take or collect as many photos as possible. You will need around 10-15 strong images for each minute of video.
- Be conscious of lighting. Photos shouldn't be too dark or too bright (unless you have a particular effect in mind).
- Give the camera to another person and see what shots they take. They may see things from a new perspective.
- Photos should be high resolution (more than 1MB, as a minimum)

Using video

Video footage can be an excellent addition to a digital story. You can use video in different ways to add to the atmosphere of a story, such as using slow motion or time lapse footage. Most smartphones take good quality video footage. As with the photos you take, record video using the landscape orientation.

Consent

Make sure you have approval from a person if you take their photo and use it in your digital story. If you intend to use a photograph of a child, you must seek written consent from the child's parent or guardian.

You can ask people to sign a consent form for the use of their image. Your consent form should clearly state how the image will be used and where you intend to publish the story. Sample consent forms are available online which can be adapted for specific projects.

You generally do not need to seek consent for photos taken of groups of people in a public place.

PREPARING THE

audio TRACK

The audio track of your digital story should be clear, compelling and concise. It should also have an intimate quality, like the person is talking directly to you.

While a lot of this will be captured in the recording stage, careful editing of your audio can add a lot of polish to your digital story.



Editing a narration

Editing a narrated track is generally a straight forward process. Working to the script, the main thing is to ensure that you include only those “takes” you want and to remove any mistakes or stumbles.

Clear labeling during the recording phase will help you quickly locate the audio files you should be using.

Other things you can do to improve the audio track of your digital story include:

- Removing any unwanted sounds or “um’s” and “ah’s”
- Adjusting the volume to make sure all parts of the narration are clearly audible
- Adding - or removing - spaces to adjust the pacing of the narration.

You may also want to mix different audio tracks together, such as combining the narration with background music. You can do this in most audio editing tools, including Audacity, or you can add music when you are producing the digital story in the video editor.

Editing your interviews

Editing interview material for a digital story takes more time than editing a narration. In many ways, you have to think and work like a journalist.

Review the interview material that you have recorded. Even better, transcribe the interview word-for-word. Once you have the transcript in front of you, you can decide what parts of the interview are most interesting and authentic.

Select the strongest quotes and then arrange them in the order that best tells the story. Write the script out, then review it and see if you need all the quotes. The goal is to tell the strongest story possible, using the least number of words.

Don't worry if there are gaps between some of the comments. You can use text on the screen to help "link" comments and reinforce the key message of the story.

Step by step

1

Save each individual quote you intend to use as a separate audio file. Give each file a name. Write this file name on the script you have prepared to make it easy to find.

2

Go back and review each separate audio file. Can it be shortened without losing meaning or impact? Remove any unnecessary words or phrases and delete any unwanted "um's" and "ah's".

3

Open a new file. Place all the individual audio files for your story in the order you have scripted. Add small gaps between each clip. Save and name the file. This is the basis for your audio track, which you can refine further when you put the digital story together in the video editor.

Editing audio

Can you cut and paste text in a word processing program? Then you can edit audio in an audio editor.

Instead of using letters, each word or sound is represented on the screen by a wave form. And, just like a text document, you can highlight different words or sounds, cut them, copy them, paste them elsewhere or delete them entirely.

If you are new to audio editing, **Audacity** is a great place to start. It is a free audio recording and editing program that operates on both PC and Mac systems. The interface is also translated into a number of languages.

You can download Audacity at: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>

There is an online guide that can step you through the basics, including how to edit an audio file or mix an audio file with music: <http://manual.audacityteam.org/o/man/tutorials.html>. There are also a number of helpful tutorials that people have posted on YouTube.

organising

THE IMAGES

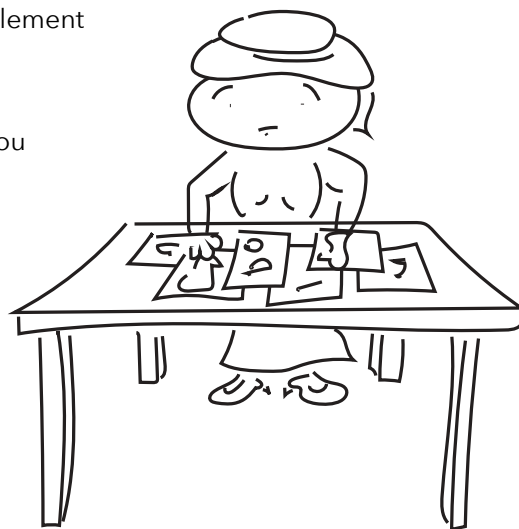
The way you tell the story in words should be reflected in the way you tell the story with images. They should complement each other in order to create something powerful, memorable or moving.

Once you have chosen the photos you want to use, you need to arrange them in a way that will:

- Match the events or description in the story
- Amplify the tempo and emotion of the story

You can do this in different ways.

Some people like to create a 'storyboard', by printing out copies of the photos and moving them around on a table until they are happy with the ordering.



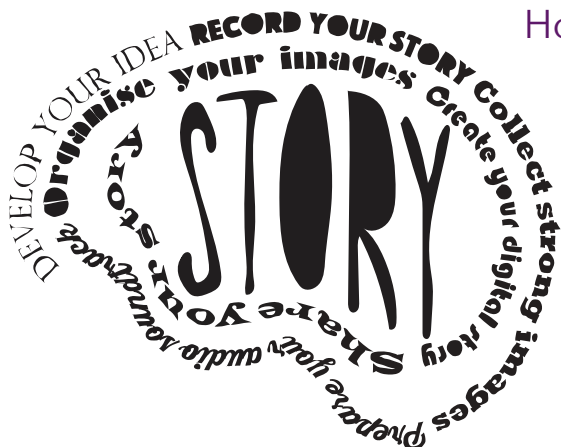
Another option is to review the script and make notes on the script about which image should appear at what time. As you assign an image to a particular part of the story, cross it off your list of available images.

Alternatively, you can play around with the ordering of the images in the video editor. The advantage of this approach is that it allows you to place images alongside the audio track and to see how the different arrangements work.

How many images will I need?

Most digital stories will use between 10 and 15 still images for each minute of the video. An image will generally be on screen for between four and six seconds. However, don't be afraid to feature standout images for longer.

Of course, you can create an excellent digital story with fewer images. A handful of strong images can have more impact than a large number of general "snapshots".



Filling in “gaps”

As you begin to organise your photos, don't be surprised if you find there are “gaps” where you don't have the right image to accompany the script.

It may be possible to go out and take a particular shot to fill that gap. If it isn't possible, ask around. There may be other people who have photos that you can use.

You can also use “creative commons licensed” images. These are images that people have made freely available for others to use in non-commercial settings. You can search for these images on photo sharing sites, such as Flickr and Google Images.

“Creative commons” images can be very useful if you need a general photo of a particular place or object. If you do use an image, it is important that you acknowledge the photographer at the end of your digital story.

Begin your search for “creative commons” images at:

- **Flickr** (<http://www.flickr.com/search>): Search using a keyword in 'Advanced Search' and check the box 'Only search within Creative Commons-licensed content'
- **Google Images** (<http://images.google.com/>): Search using a keyword, click 'Search Tools', click 'Usage Rights' and then select 'Labeled for noncommercial reuse'.



CREATING THE

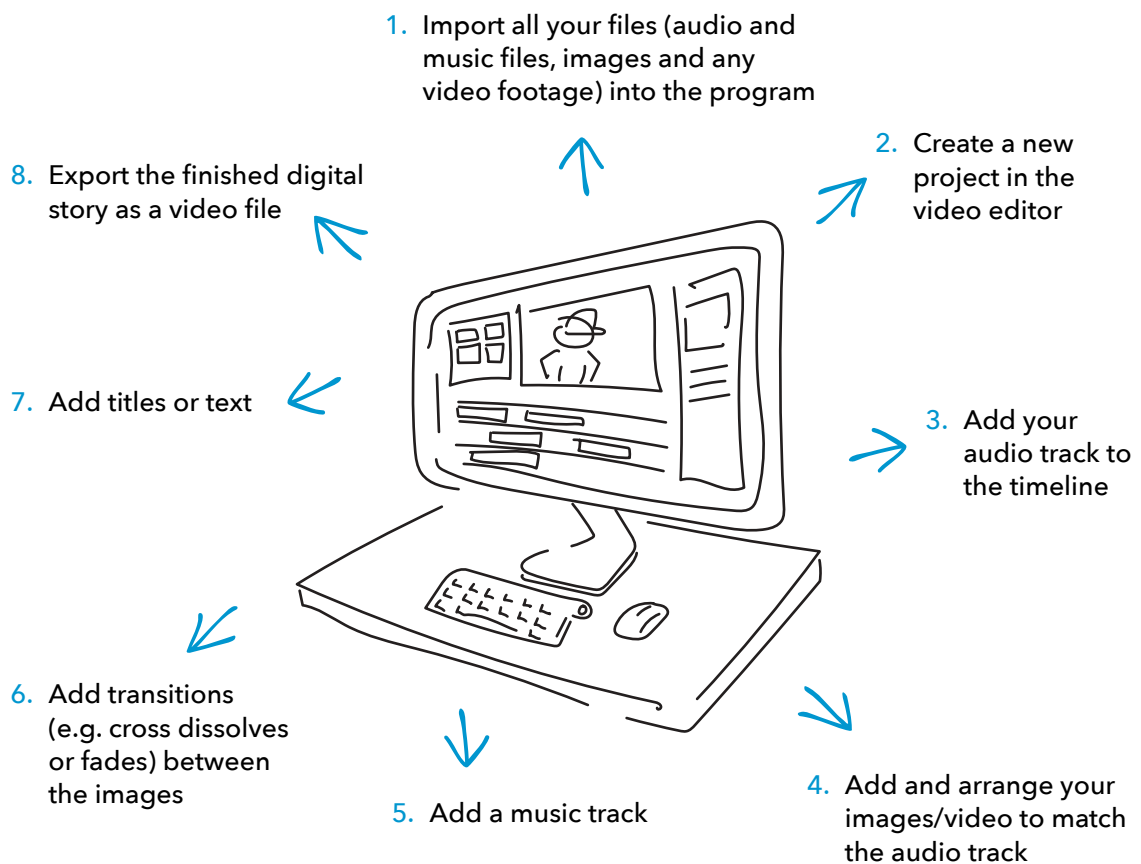
video

Your digital story will come to life when you bring together your audio track and your images. You can also feature music to add to the rhythm of the story and amplify the mood.

There are a number of video editing programs that make it easy for beginners to use straight away. For example, iMovie is an easy-to-use program for Mac, as is Windows MovieMaker or PhotoStory for PC.

Step by step

Here are the key steps for creating your digital story on the video editor:



There are a number of things to consider when you prepare your digital story. For example, you will need to adjust how long each image appears on the screen so it matches the story being told. You might also want to apply a 'Ken Burns' effect (a pan or a zoom) to add movement to certain images, or to insert transitions between images.

If you are adding music, you will need to set it at a level that doesn't overpower the main audio track. Also, when you add a title or text, make sure you select a simple font that is easy to read.

Even the simplest story will likely take a few hours to complete.

Once you have a first draft ready, take a break and then come back and review it. See if there are parts that could be changed or improved. Show it to a friend or colleague and ask for their feedback.

Once you are happy with how it looks and sounds, export the file and get it ready to publish.

Sourcing music

The right background music can turn a good story into a great one. Music can give a story energy, atmosphere and momentum. However, don't be afraid to use no music if you feel the narration or interview material.

Most music produced by commercial artists is protected by copyright. In other words, it cannot be included in works that are shown publicly. However, there is a wide range of royalty-free music available online, including at:

- **Youtube Audio Library:** <https://www.youtube.com/audiolibrary/music> (Choose from any tracks in the 'Free Music' catalogue)
- **Vimeo Music Store:** <http://vimeo.com/musicstore> (Go to 'Advanced Filters', select 'License' and then choose 'Creative Commons License')

As with using "creative commons" images, you must credit the composer for any music track that you use. You can do this at the end of the story or, if you are publishing it online, in the description that accompanies the video. WeVideo (see below) also provides a library of copyright-free music tracks that you can use in your productions.

Another option is to buy a licence to use production music (designed for film, television, presentations and the like), which is available from any number of commercial sites.

Choosing an editing program

There are a wide variety of video editing programs for Mac and PC. The computer you currently use most likely came with one installed.

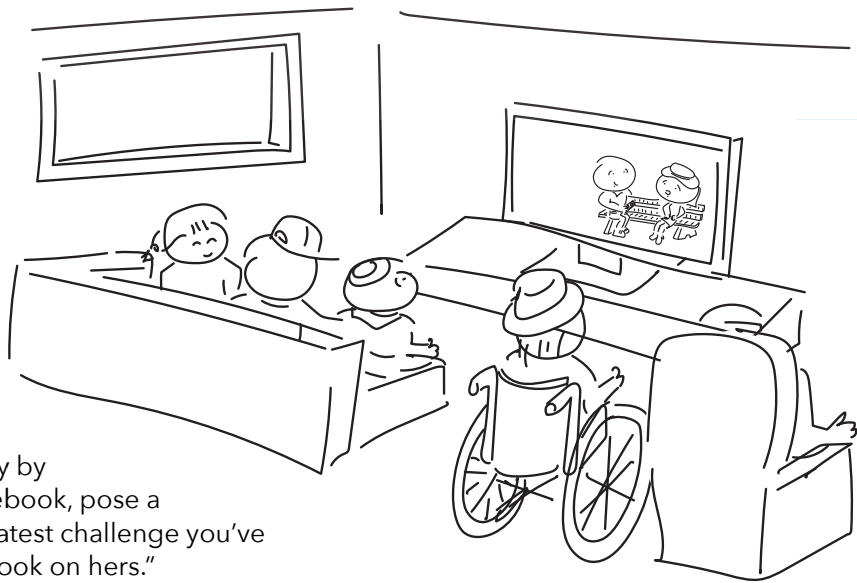
Another option is **WeVideo**, a web-based editing platform that can be used by anyone who has access to a web browser and an Internet connection. WeVideo has a user-friendly interface and a good selection of editing tools. It also allows you to invite others to join your project so you can work together.

More information and easy-to-follow tutorials (look under 'Academy') are available at: www.wevideo.com

sharing THE STORY

You've finished your story and uploaded it to YouTube or Vimeo. Now it's time to get people to watch.

The world is full of interesting stories. That's why it's important to give people a reason to watch yours. Make them curious. Make them care. For example, if you are sharing the story by email or posting it to Facebook, pose a question: "What's the greatest challenge you've ever faced? At 15, Sarah took on hers."



Be creative in how you describe the story - but don't give away too much beforehand. You want people to watch the story with an open mind.

Getting the story out

Develop a strategy to promote the story to the audiences that matter:

- Post it to relevant social media websites, like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Tumblr
- Publish it to the homepage of your organisation's website
- Write a blog about it
- Feature it in your electronic newsletter
- Show it at community meetings, workshops or conferences
- Share it with partner organisations and ask them to promote it
- Promote it in the footer of your emails
- Save the video file on a USB and give it decision makers or leaders in your field.

Measuring impact

There are different ways that you can measure the impact of your story. Look past the simple quantitative tools, such as the number of views and likes that the story receives. These 'vanity metrics' don't properly capture the level of engagement that people have with the story.

Refer back to your original strategy. What did you want to achieve? Who did you want to reach? What did you want them to do? These questions provide the basis for your evaluation criteria.

It is also important to understand if the people who watch your story respond to it in the way you hope they will. Don't be afraid to ask for their feedback. Did the story engage them? Did it hold their interest? Did they learn something new? Did they want to know more?

Asking for their honest feedback and reflecting on their answers will help you make better stories.



The secret to telling great stories

Ira Glass is the founder and presenter of This American Life, an award-winning radio program that has transformed how stories are told and shared. His advice to people embarking on creative work is simple: It can be very hard at the beginning, but keep going.

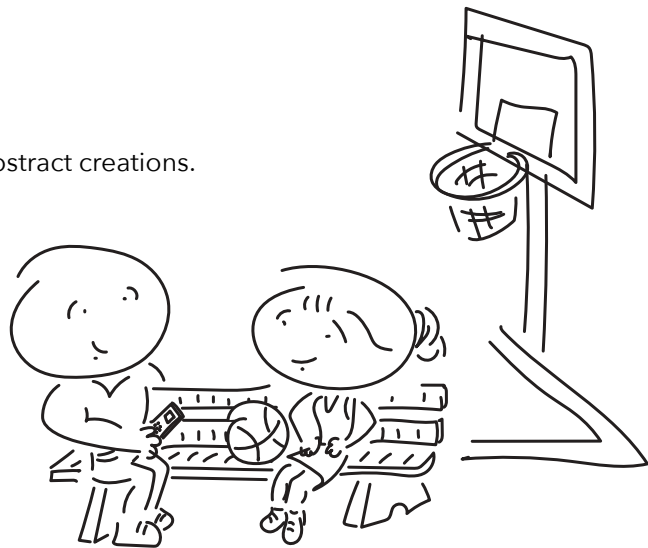
"It is only by going through a volume of work that ... your work will be as good as your ambitions. And I took longer to figure out how to do this than anyone I've ever met. It's going to take a while. It's normal to take a while. You've just got to fight your way through that."

See more at: <https://vimeo.com/24715531>

ethical CONSIDERATIONS

The stories you record and share are not abstract creations. They are made up of the experiences, insights and emotions that people have entrusted to you.

At all times, the needs of the storyteller should take precedence over the story. A person's safety and well-being is always more important than the use of their story.¹



Ensure the well-being and safety of the storyteller

There are occasions when sharing a personal story can leave people feeling exposed and vulnerable. Some stories can bring up extremely painful memories and emotions. If you are recording someone's story, or interviewing them on a sensitive topic, it is vital that you consider what support that person may need, such as access to a support person. Ensuring their safety and emotional well-being is paramount.

You should also consider if you need to take steps to protect the identity of a storyteller. A story about discrimination, harassment or abuse should not lead to that person experiencing further victimisation. A person's identity can be protected by, for example, changing their name (or not attaching a name to the story), blurring identifying photographs or adjusting the sound of their voice.

If you are recording a story that touches on a painful life experience, frame the interview or the story recording process around the person's strengths.

Consent is an ongoing process

Anyone who shares their story should be given the opportunity to view their story when it is finalised and before it is shown in public. They have the right to say whether or not they want their story to be made public. They also have the right to withdraw their story from public circulation at any time, within the limits that are possible. Storytellers should be made aware of this so they can take steps to protect their safety or well-being, should the need arise.

¹ Information in this section draws on 'Ethical Practice', a guide published by StoryCenter. See www.storycenter.org.

Encourage full participation

Storytellers should be encouraged to be active participants in the creative process. For example, they should be encouraged and supported to take images or identify music that will complement their stories. They should also be provided with information to help them make informed decisions about where, why and how their stories will be distributed.

Ethical story distribution

The manner in which stories are shared or distributed should respect the needs of storytellers. They must be provided with copies of their finished stories before those stories are distributed, broadcast or shared in any public setting.

Viewing audiences should be advised in advance when stories contain sensitive material. If you are sharing a story online that includes sensitive content, an appropriate viewer advisory should accompany the video.

Ethical practice requires you to take steps so that storytellers are able to:

- Tell their story, in the way they want to tell it
- Access emotional support, if sharing their story brings up painful memories
- View their finished story before it is shared publicly
- Determine whether sharing their story or providing personally identifying information may place them at risk of harm
- Know how their story will be shared and who may see it
- Withdraw consent for their use of their story at any time (and the limits of that withdrawal)
- Ensure that no one will profit from the use of their story.



