

*Write Now!*

**Show, Don't Tell**  
*The Power of a Compelling Story*



*The Author Series from Praeclarus Press*



Storytelling is a powerful technique that can be used in all types of writing. Adding stories will help you connect with audiences and bring your writing to life. According to William Kilpatrick, in his book *Psychological Seduction*, stories are more likely than rational arguments to compel people to right a wrong or change a situation. And history bears this out. Stories, even fictional ones, are often behind social movements. For example, in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe told the story of a fictional slave named Eliza so compellingly that Abraham Lincoln credited Beecher Stowe with ending slavery in the United States. Beecher Stowe drew upon her own experience of losing a

child to write about how a slave woman might feel if her children were sold away from her. Eliza runs away to keep her child from being sold.

Stories help us make sense of the world. We crave them because they are comforting and reassuring. Author Peter Rubie describes how the best attorneys are not the ones that present the most legal facts. They are the ones who take those facts and tell us the most convincing story. Politicians often use stories to great effect. That's why they are always talking about the apocryphal grandmother from Arkansas who said that her prescriptions cost too much. The experience of one person illustrates a broader point and can show the realities of the group he or she represents.

People's stories in nonfiction are helpful because they illuminate sterile theories and numbers, and give faces to statistics. If you can find ways to convey facts in someone's voice, they are always more interesting to read. People love stories because they hold their interest while educating them at the same time. They take us to places we might never go, and introduce us to people we might never meet. Often times, people remember the story you told more clearly than any of your brilliant points. So if you can bring in a story that illustrates your brilliant points, so much the better.

Author Max Lucado is a master storyteller. His books contain tales of the ordinary and extraordinary, and they sell millions of copies. Here's one example from his book, *Cure*

*for the Common Life* (2005). In talking about how little things can make a big difference, he describes the experience of World War II pilot Bohn Fawkes. Even though his gas tank was hit by anti-aircraft guns, Bohn's plane did not explode.

Technicians opened the missiles and found them void of explosive charge. They were clean and harmless and with one exception, empty. The exception contained a carefully rolled piece of paper. On it a message had been scrawled in the Czech language. Translated, the note read: "This is all we can do for you now."

A narrative approach also allows your heart to guide what you write. If you have compassion for the subjects of your narrative, you'll have more compelling prose and it will also help you get closer to the truth of their experience. Emotion can bring facts to life. We tend to learn better when emotion is involved. By dramatically telling a story, we distill a version of real life and present it readers. And this will help us present get our point across to both mothers and professionals in a compelling way.

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