

Nature Narratives

Overview

Nature Narratives is Metro DNA's inaugural collective storytelling project. This collaborative project provides an exciting opportunity for partner organizations to elevate our work and the ways we are promoting healthier people, communities, and natural places in metro Denver. Nature Narratives also will help us define a shared story of our ongoing efforts to make the metro Denver region a thriving place for people and for nature.

Stories

One of the universals across time and human culture is that of story. Whether gathered around the fire of ancient times or the digital television of today, we are drawn to the story. Stories help us remember where we've been, who we are, and where we might go.

Stories were originally shared (and passed along) verbally or through drawn and, later, written records. Today, we have the great luxury (and responsibility) of sharing stories and information through digital technology - including audio and video. Video is literally a story told in pictures. (The original films were, in fact, silent.) With the advent of social media and the current pace of society, video storytelling presents perhaps the greatest opportunity of all time for us to share our stories far and wide.

We're going to begin with an overview of digital video storytelling and how the technical aspects work. Then we'll lead you through a method of creating and telling your organization's story from start to finish.

How a Story Works

We tend to have an inherent understanding of the 'story arc'. When a story ends without closing properly, we feel like something is missing. We know that there should be a beginning, a middle, and an end. An introduction, an adventure, and a climax/resolution. Watch any movie or television episode and you'll see it played out.

While that may seem unrelated to telling your organization's narrative, it's all the same. You'll need to introduce your audience to the 'world' of your organization, involve them in the adventure, and resolve to them how they can help. You're telling them a story.

Crafting Stories for Social Impact Organizations

Three Elements of a Story:

- Characters
- Chronology
- Causality

Things to consider:

- Goals & Objectives
- Key Publics
- Call to action
- Emotion
- Genuinity & Transparency
- Be culturally responsive

“Stories are a type of structured narrative that help an audience of consumers, readers, or listeners process and remember information (Schank 2000).”

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Producing Your Own Nature Narrative Worksheet

1. What's your goal with making a video? (increase summer camp attendance, raise money, advertise your program...)
2. Who is your audience? (parents of campers, potential donors, politicians...)
3. What is your organization's mission?
4. Beyond your mission, what is your organization all about? How do you do what you do?
5. In three sentences, write your story. Consider introducing your organization, telling your audience about it, and what you want from them/what they can do.

Now rewrite your story, thinking about:

- Your audience.
- That they will see/hear your story, not read it on paper. How does your story *sound*? Write it to be heard, not read.
 - Read the script aloud to yourself, then to a friend or coworker. Does it sound how you imagined? What feedback do they have?
- What will your audience see along with this voice-over? Are there specific images that make sense?
- Keep in mind that some social media platforms (Facebook, for example) auto-mute audio, so the visual component is especially important. What if your audience doesn't hear anything - and only sees the images you show. How could you tell your story with only pictures?
- What about your story really 'clicks' with you?
 - **Tip:** Go for the emotions. Grab your audience. Make them laugh. Make them cry. Tug at the heart strings.
- It may help to make a preliminary recording of your written script (don't worry about sounds quality, this is just for you). Experiment with intonation and timing. Play back your recordings. What works? What doesn't?
- How long does the script take to read/hear? Will your audience give you that much time?

Rework your script until you're reasonably happy with it, then move on to storyboarding.

Storyboards

Once you have a working script and timing, brainstorm the images you want to see while hearing the voice-over. What's a powerful opening image? What's the last thing you want to leave with your audience? Consider a balance of moving and still images. Arrange shots so that the focal point on the screen varies shot to shot.

Draw basic representations of what you want to see in each shot (yes, stick figures are fine), with accompanying notes and which portion/time of the script that will be overlaid. You can also make notes about fades/transitions, if you like.

If your goal is to produce a video from footage previously filmed, it may help to build the storyboard first, or in conjunction with writing the script. The footage will likely inform what you say onscreen.

Know the Lingo:

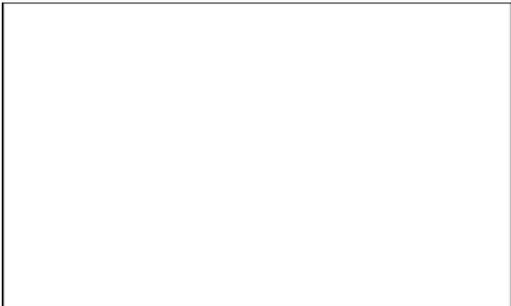
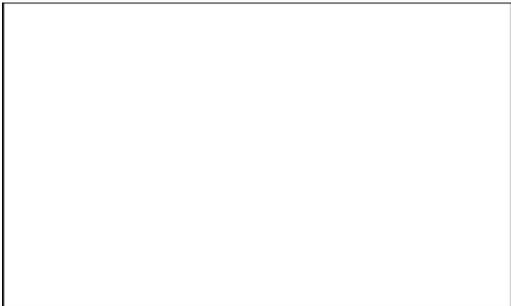
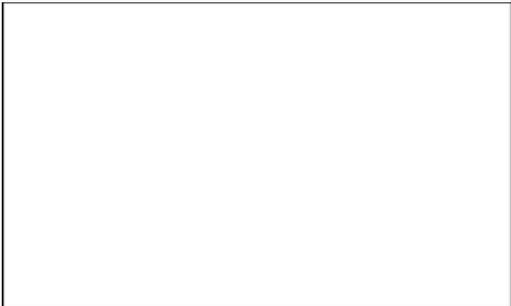
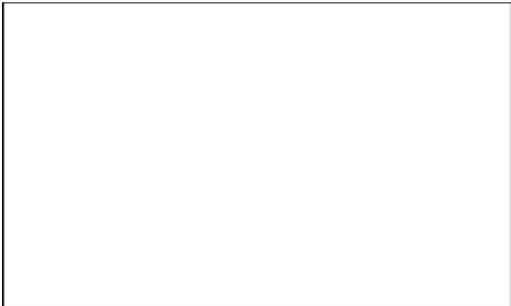
- A Roll - is the primary video track that drives the story, such as the director of your program being interviewed (which provides both the script/narration and a voice-over)
- B Roll - is the footage that you cut away to, in order to illustrate/highlight the narration, break up one long boring shot of your director talking, create dramatic interest, and cover different cuts/takes in the A Roll

For example, when a news reporter is covering a story on-location:

- The footage/audio of the reporter is the A Roll.
- All the shots of the scene and people they interview make up the B Roll.

Nature Narratives - Storyboard Template

Project Title: _____



Nature Narratives - Video Production Tip Sheet

Pre-Production/Planning:

- You are telling a story – and are in control of every single thing your audience sees/hears. They can only look where you point the camera.
- Video is a visual medium. Don't rely on audio to tell your story.
- Storyboards!

Production/Shooting:

- Cloudy days are great for filming!
- Use natural light when possible
- Use a tripod!
- Primarily use still (non-panning/zooming) shots
- Don't forget to shoot B Roll and capture background audio
- Framing a Shot:
 - Headroom and Noseroom
 - Rule of Thirds
 - During interviews, direct the subject to look cross-camera, as if speaking to someone beside the camera.
- Audio:
 - Audiences may forgive lousy video footage, but poor audio will get your program switched off. (Better to create a silent film than have poor audio.)
 - To yield better results:
 - Avoid wind – go inside if necessary
 - Use a windscreen ("dead cat") on any microphone when recording outside
 - Place the microphone as close to your source as possible
- Smartphones: Slow/Fast Motion, Add-on Lenses, Microphones, No vertical footage!

Post-Production/Editing:

- Digital video editing is nonlinear and non-destructive
- Cover mistakes/'jump cuts' in A-Roll by cutting away to B-Roll and back again.
- Use transitions sparingly
- Change the point of focus from one shot to the next
- Never underestimate the power of music. Keep it low enough to not drown out your subject speaking.
- YouTube offers a searchable royalty-free music library at <https://www.youtube.com/audiolibrary/music>

Nature Narratives - Gear Notes

MICROPHONES

Rode VideoMic Me	\$57.99	Small, 'shotgun' mic discussed in the workshop that plugs straight into a smartphone
Rode VideoMic	\$149.95	A more full-size shotgun mic that will still plug directly into a smartphone (1/8" jack) - you'll likely want a 'rig' like the one mentioned below to attach the VideoMic to, if using a smartphone - will also plug into a higher-end camera (with 1/8" jack) and provide great shotgun audio
Audio Technica Pro 88W/R	\$189.00	Wireless Mic & Receiver with Lav/Lapelle Mic - Recommended for recording solo interviews (potentially when you don't mind the mic being visible in the shot - i.e. pinned to the collar)
Audio Technica ATR2100-USB	\$74.10	Great, inexpensive 'studio' mic for recording voice-overs straight into a computer (via USB) - also includes XLR inputs for connection with professional-level audio
Pop Filter (for microphone)	\$14.97	If you plan to do a lot of studio voice-over recording, consider a pop filter to catch spit and prevent the 'pop' of T's, P's, and so on

SMARTPHONE LENSES

Wide-angle + Macro Lens	\$29.99	Similar to the wide-angle lens shown during the workshop - good for getting full-frame shots in tight spaces (like a small office) - and the use of a macro lens for extreme close-up/detail shots (e.g. dew drops on a leaf) - Note: Be sure to read the fine print on any lens description to be sure it will fit your model phone
Telephoto Lens	\$18.99	For shooting footage from farther away (when you don't want to zoom/lose resolution) - Note: Be sure to read the fine print on any lens description to be sure it will fit your model phone - 2nd Note: I have not used this lens

EQUIPMENT / TRIPODS

Ulanzi Smartphone Rig	\$19.95	This is the 'rig' demonstrated during the workshop - it will securely hold a cell phone, mount on a tripod, and provide mounting brackets for lights, microphones, and more. Also makes for better panning/motion shots than a handheld smartphone alone
Smartphone, flexible Tripod	\$17.99	Small tripod for mount a smartphone for video/photography. Has the added benefit of flexible legs that can be wrapped around tree branches, sign posts, table legs, etc. to mount still/securely while getting any angle you like.