

Visual Storytelling

Understanding Your Story → Crafting Your Story → General Guidelines

Storytelling, while an ancient human communication practice, is not always easy. To visually tell a story can be even more difficult. Selecting the right images to match the moods, emotions, and key messages of your story can be overwhelming. Here's a short primer on how to develop your story, take out the unnecessary parts, craft your story arc, and develop the visuals.

1. Understanding Your Story

Effective storytelling, whether visually or oral, is not as simple as knowing your story. You should also know what *isn't* your story. You should know what emotions and moods you want to convey, as well as the emotions and moods you *don't* want to convey. Use the below boxes to whittle your story down to the absolute essentials.

Write as many key words, phrases, and visuals as possible.

<i>What is your story</i>	<i>What isn't your story</i>
What are the key elements of your story?	What are the parallel elements of your story, that should <i>not</i> be included?
What emotions are you hoping to convey and evoke?	What emotions do you <i>not</i> want to convey and evoke?
When you think about your story, what colors do you see?	When you think about your story, what colors are <i>not</i> present?
What images accurately depict your story?	What images do <i>not</i> quite depict your story?

2. Story Arc

All good stories have a beginning, middle, and end. Use the sections below to craft the arc of your story.

What images and visuals can you use to fill in these boxes?

- **Exposition - (background, historical context, introduction):**

Key words:

Visuals:

- **Rise in action – (leading up to main climax or conflict of your story)**

Key words:

Visuals:

- **Climax – (the main point and the conflict)**

Key words:

Visuals:

- **Falling action – (a transition from main point to conclusion)**

Key words:

Visuals:

- **Resolution – (concluding the key take away, the lesson learned, restating the main point)**

Key words:

Visuals:

3. General Guidelines

Now that you have identified the essential pieces of your story and crafted your narrative arc with visuals in mind, it is time to start building. Below are some general guidelines to follow as you craft your ideal story.

1. **Show, don't tell:** The less text in your visuals, the better. When telling stories visually, text will typically detract from the effect of your story. You want your audience to see and feel your story, not read it.
2. **First impressions matter:** Start strong. While the conflict is in the middle of the story, you must set the tone with the first image. Be certain that your first image can captivate your audience while effectively setting the tone for the story.
3. **Vibrant, but not overwhelming colors:** Use vibrant and exciting colors – to an extent. This is a delicate balance that can quickly go wrong. You should have a balance of contrasting colors that are aligned with the moods and emotions of your story.
4. **Keep it Relatable:** Effective stories are relatable. Keep your audience in mind when selecting your images. We relate to humans more than inanimate objects or abstract ideas.
5. **Keep it Authentic:** Authentic images, portraying a sense of reality, are more relatable than cartoons or digital creations.
6. **Keep it Simple:** Keep your images simple. You do not want to bombard your audience with information and sensory overload. The visuals tell the story, but should never overwhelm the story.
7. **Keep it Proportionate:** The size of your images and the length of time they are shown should match their proportion to the story. A minor detail should not dominate the screen. The visuals that are essential to the key point should have more 'screen time'.
8. **Appeal to the Senses:** Use imagery that appeals to the other senses, aside from sight. If you are seeking to convey coldness, use an image that will help your audience *feel* cold. An image of frigid Antarctica feels colder than an image of a thermometer showing low temperatures.
9. **Use clear images:** Use high-resolution images that will not be blurry when presented. Never use an image that has a watermark or logo. That is a story-killer.
10. **Close strong:** While the first impression is important, what is most memorable is the ending. Your strongest (or one of the strongest) image should be the concluding image.