

The Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling

The Center for Digital Storytelling has defined seven elements for creating effective and interesting multimedia stories. Constructing a story is not a simple process that follows a recipe or prescribed formula. These elements require consideration for every story and determining the balance each element occupies in the story can take a lot of thinking and re-thinking.

A Point of View

Stories are told to make a point and should not be presented as a recitation of mere facts. Define the premise of your story so that all parts can serve to make the point. Consider your audience and direct the point to them.

A Dramatic Question

You want to capture your audience's attention at the beginning of the piece and hold their interest throughout. Typically you want to pose the dramatic question in the opening lines and resolve it in the closing lines.

Emotional Content

Emotional content can help hold your audiences attention. The images, effects, music and tone of voice all lend to contributing emotion to the piece. Try to keep the elements consistent with the emotion of the moment.

Voice

Most likely the first time you heard your recorded voice you couldn't stand the way it sounded. And you still can't. Suggestion...get over it! Your voice is a great gift and even though you don't like to hear it, others do. If you "read" your script your audience will not know how to react. Take time to learn and practice your script so you can speak in a conversational voice. Record several takes and select the best one. Trust that your audience will think it is perfect.

The Soundtrack

Music is a big plus to a digital story. The right music can set the story in time and can convey emotion. Play music behind an image and a specific emotion is generated. Change the music behind the same image and an entirely different emotion is experienced. Sound effects can add tension and excitement to a piece, but be careful, they can be a distraction too.

Economy

Plan to leave some of your work on the "cutting room floor". A compact, fast moving digital story will contain only those elements necessary to move the audience from beginning to end. We know that our brains are constantly filling in (from our own experiences) details from suggestions made by sights and sounds. Don't give every minute detail to clarify your story, let your audience fill in some of the blanks.

Pacing

The rhythm of the piece is what keeps your audience's interest in the story. Changing pace within the story can facilitate moving the audience from one emotion to another. Music tempo, speech rate, image duration, and panning and zooming speed all work to establish pace. Generally pace will be consistent, but one in a while it will pause, accelerate, decelerate, stop or blast-off. Trust your own senses, we all move at our own pace.