

Chapter 3: Making a story sticky

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SUCCES: Making a story sticky

- S: Simple
- U: Unexpected
- C: Concrete
- C: Credible
- E: Emotional
- S: stories

Simple

- Find the simple message that captures the essence of your research paper
- Simple \neq Simplistic
- Simplistic messages dumb down or trivialize the issue or dodge the core of the problem

Simple

- Example of a simple idea: Natural selection
- “Fit organisms survive and pass on their genes while unfit ones don’t”

Simple: schemas

- Schemas are how we structure information
- Example schemas:
 - How electricity is transmitted
 - How a motor works
- When we learn, we add to our schemas
- When you write, aim for your potential readers' schemas

Unexpected

- Frame the knowledge gap by using what is known to identify the boundaries of that knowledge

Unexpected

- Find what is novel in your results and highlight the unexpected elements
- Frame new questions and look for new insights
- What is the knowledge gap you are answering in your paper?

Concrete

- Science has both a concrete side: the data
- And an abstract side: the ideas
- Abstract and concrete are a continuum, not a dichotomy: from the concrete data to abstractions of these data to abstractions of these abstractions, and so forth
- Most research is at a middle level of this continuum

Concrete

- To make your paper more readable:
 - Ground and define your specific concepts in widely understood schemas or in the details that explain the abstractions

Credible

- Credibility goes hand in hand with concrete
- Our IDEAS are credible when we ground them in previous work and cite those sources
- Our DATA are credible when we describe our methods, present the data clearly and use appropriate statistics
- Our CONCLUSIONS are credible when we show that they grow from those data

Emotional

- The fundamental emotion in science is CURIOSITY
- You need an engaging question, not just data
- You engage curiosity by shifting your focus from “What information do I have to offer” to “What knowledge do I have to offer”
- Emotion is particularly important for proposals

Stories

- Stories are modular: a single large story is crafted from several smaller story units threaded together
- When writing, think about internal structure and how to integrate these story modules
- As you discuss your data and ideas, find units that you can package into coherent modules

Summary

- Before you start writing, figure out how you are going to weave these six elements into your work
- Figure out the simple story
- Build it around the key questions that engage UNEXPECTED and EMOTIONAL
- This will guide you in selecting the material you need to make the story CONCRETE and CREDIBLE

Exercises

- Analyze a research paper: how did they use each SUCCES element?
 - Did they do a good job?
 - Could they have improved? If so, how?
- What schemas did the authors use in building their story
 - Are these schemas only held by a narrow subdiscipline or by a wider community?

Exercises

- Analyze the article you wrote for chapter 2
 - How well did you use the SUCCES elements?
 - How could you improve it, if not?
 - Rewrite key passages to enhance their SUCCES power