## STORY DEVELOPMENT

Now, more than ever, we are asking ourselves what it all means. *What is my story? What does my story look like when everything changes?* During periods of great change, we are provided with the opportunity to define our understanding of ourselves, our goals, and the work that we do. When we take the time to write our stories, we develop our ability to be resilient and navigate our current moment more effectively.

The following Story Development guide is based on a UF IFAS Extension EDIS Publication written by Brandon Telg, Jaron Jones, and Ricky Telg. Story Development is a valuable tool at all times, but especially now. We would encourage you to take the methods described below and apply them to your personal story as well because all of the tools described can work equally well when applied to your life.

### INTRODUCTION

Whether for personal growth, relationship building, or team leadership, knowing your story and how to share it will change the way you interact with the world. Through creating your story, you develop emotional awareness, self-reflection, and personal growth. You discover how events in your life have impacted you, then you decide how those impacts will continue to affect you. As you share these stories, you help others learn from your experiences and establish meaningful human connections. By learning how to reflect on your past, you are better equipped to engage your future. It is important to craft your story in a way that lets you share it effectively because, as the late poet Maya Angelou said, **"People will forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel."** If your story can invoke emotion within your audience, audience members will connect with you.

### WHAT IS A STORY?

A story, at its basic level, is told as a series of connected events that are either written or spoken. When you look at your life as a story, those connected events are the important moments in your life. When leveraged effectively, **stories can connect, move, and inspire people**.

### WHAT IS THE STORY PROCESS?

As you begin to craft your story, you want to answer three questions:

1. Who is the lead character (protagonist)?
2. What is the goal? What does the lead character want?
3. What conflicts or barriers did the lead character overcome to achieve that goal?

Here is short example of a story that shows a lead character trying to overcome a barrier:

"I am an IT professional, and I want to pursue my passion of directly helping people, but my work does not fulfill this passion. To do this, I must pursue a new direction in my life, but I have not come up with what solution that is yet." In this case:

1. I am the protagonist (lead character);

2. my goal is to help people live their lives to the fullest; and

3. my conflict or barrier is that I do not know how I should go about pursuing that goal.


Once you have determined these three elements, then you have essentially created the beginning of a story. A story usually includes

- descriptive detail;
- more than one obstacle, because having more than one obstacle builds tension and draws people in to the story;
- the story progressing in a logical manner; and
- a relatable goal.

## DELIVERING YOUR STORY

You can deliver your story in many ways. One simple method you can utilize to help you deliver your story is the use of **AABT: And, And, But, Therefore**. This method helps structuring the details of your story for your audience

- The use of **And** connects details that paint the picture of your story, the way in which you choose to pursue your goal. Two And's are used to encourage you, as the storyteller, to provide your audience with more supporting details about your story.
- The use of **But** shows that you encountered a conflict.
- The use of **Therefore** signifies how you overcame the conflict and what the result was.

The And, And, But, Therefore method can be used to enhance any story. For example, to continue the story from before, if you use And, And, But, Therefore, your story could sound like this:

I am an IT Professional **and** I spend the majority of my days coding in front of a computer. Over time I have come to see that my heart is in helping other people directly **and** if I am to live a meaningful life, I must have more interaction with those I am helping. **But** in my current workplace, there are no positions I can transition to that would allow me to interact with others and help them. Interestingly, I recently met someone who works at the UF Computing Help Desk, and they told me that they get to help people resolve their computer problems all day every day. This UF employee said that the work is meaningful to them. **Therefore**, I am going to research what it takes to get a job at the UF Computing Help Desk so that I can directly help people, using a specialized skillset that I have.

## MOVING FORWARD

There are many ways in which understanding your story benefits you, including how you invest in your future. After you've written your story, consider reading the Keep Growing: Identity Capital document to explore ways that you can apply what you have written to achieve your personal and professional goals.

## SUMMARY

Storytelling is a powerful way to understand your story and make sense of situations that arise in your life. The aforementioned framework is a powerful tool to help you craft your story.