

## Script Writing Guidelines

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### **Guideline 1: *Analyze the audience and develop the digital story script accordingly***

In order to tell a story that will interest others, digital story creators should identify the audience as clearly and specifically as possible. As the script for the story is written, students should keep in mind who they are trying to reach. Creators should consider the age, gender, cultural background and other defining characteristics of the intended audience to make sure that the story is appropriate for those viewers. They should also think about what they want viewers to know from watching their story and what are some ways to get and keep the attention of these particular viewers. One strategy that we have found to be effective is to begin a digital story with by asking an opening question or presenting a compelling introduction to gain the attention of the audience. Our students are encouraged to consider the language they use in their stories to make sure that it will be understandable by viewers who may represent different age groups and come from different cultural backgrounds. We also stress that digital stories should focus on common themes that most viewers can identify with, such as personal reflection, historical narrative or the presentation of instructional content.

### **Guideline 2: *Choose an interesting topic and add a personal connection***

A major challenge for a digital story creator is how to write a script on a topic that will present information in a way that interests viewers unfamiliar with the topic. For example, if a student is writing a script about how computers have become an important part of everyday life, he or she might start by going to the Wikipedia website to get some background information about personal computers that they could use as the beginning of their story. Here is what they would find:

“A personal computer (PC) is any general-purpose computer whose size, capabilities, and original sales price make it useful for individuals, and which is intended to be operated directly by an end-user with no intervening computer operator. In contrast, the batch processing or time-sharing models allowed large expensive mainframe systems to be used by many people, usually at the same time. Large data processing systems require a full-time staff to operate efficiently.”

(from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal\\_computer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Personal_computer))

However, that text is mechanical and dispassionate and would certainly not fit most teachers' description of an engaging script for a digital story. Instead, a student might try writing something more personal, such as this:

“When I wake up every morning, one of the first things I do is turn on my computer. I never have given this much thought, but recently I began wondering about what people at other times in history did when they first woke up each day. For many throughout history, there was no electricity, which meant there were no refrigerators. So, finding food to eat when you first woke up was probably a lot more challenging and necessary than turning on a computer.”

Students should be encouraged to select a topic that they feel passionate about, write a script that reflects that passion, and make the story as interesting as possible for their specific audience.

Digital story creators should add a personal viewpoint to the script so that it sounds more like a story they are telling from their own experience and less like passages from a textbook, a journal article, or a website. Digital stories that focus on significant life events, honor the memory of friends and loved

ones, or recount the process of accomplishment, challenge and recovery gain an extra measure of emotional power and meaning that is felt by both the digital story creator and the viewer. A first person account may be used to highlight recollections from the past, provide an understanding about present day events and look forward to hope and aspirations that may occur in the future. In all of these cases, the personal connection to the story is what makes it compelling since they often revolve around universal themes and questions that we all share.

In the design phase, designers of instruction make decisions about how information should be presented depending on the analysis performed in the first stage (Lohr, 2003). In this phase, digital story creators complete the script and storyboard for the design of the story as well as collect and organize appropriate media such as images, audio and video.

### **Guideline 3: *Recognize the importance of a detailed script***

The script for an educational digital story is one of the most important components that students will create. We stress to our students and workshop participants that a good digital story must first be a good story and that no matter how much expertise a student has with technology, a poorly written story will not be improved by fancy transitions and other digital effects.

Scriptwriting can be difficult for many students and is certainly more taxing and less fun than some of the other tasks associated with creating a digital story, like searching for images or adding music. However, digital storytellers at all levels must understand that a well thought out, well written script is an absolute requirement for a good digital story and we require our students to write a draft version of the script for their story before they begin work on creating the digital story. The script should stand on its own merits, even if there are no visuals, narration, music, animations, or other components that will eventually add interest to the digital version.

### **References**

Lohr, L. (2003). *Creating graphics for learning and performance*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.