Tips on Telling a Story

Effective speaking and writing usually means telling a story.

• Why think in terms of story? Because the human mind seems to best remember stories. Listen to NPR: They don’t just tell a fact (e.g. unemployment is up 2%) and then move to the next. Instead they create a story; often they find a family to represent a fact and build the story about their challenges, and what it means for them. If they didn’t create stories—you would not tune in.

• In a story, something changes over time. The classic way to start a story: *Once upon a time* ... To force yourself to tell a story, start with the word, “When.” If there is no time, and no change, it’s not a story. Lectures, descriptions and arguments are not stories. But most of these could contain stories. A science paper tells a story of what scientists did and what they found.

• Good stories usually are about people you care about in a setting you can visualize. They often have conflict. Something significant hangs in the balance.

• Stories have a beginning, middle and end. What happens in the middle is a turning point that changes the way the main character sees the world.

• Some important classic story elements include:
  - setting out
  - questing
  - facing challenge
  - surviving
  - transforming
  - conveying and bestowing the gift (the thing learned or won).

• Another way of thinking of it:
  1 - once upon a time
  2 - and everyday
  3 - until one day
  4 - and because of this
  5 - and because of this
  6 - until finally
  7 - and ever since that day