Storytelling Strategies

- Strong writing moves the story with pace and flow and engages the audience
- Writing conversationally—like you speak
- You're already experts at conversing with the audience ad-libbing in front of the green wall….
- …. But good science reporting and story-telling require a strong script as the foundation (and for editors and producers to work from as well)
- Goal is to make your reporting as natural and conversational as your weather hits

Storytelling Strategies

- First step isn't writing, but rather listening
- LOG TAPE before writing! Know exactly what you have to work with first. You can do this in the camera or news vehicle on the way back to the station
- The most effective strategy is:
- Choose the strongest sots (sound bites) to build your story around
- The best sots are "colorful"--that is, they're memorable, provide more than just "facts," often involving emotion, energy and texture. Use the info from the more "factual" sots as paraphrase in your reporter track (RT)

Storytelling Strategies

- To get these colorful sots, remember to ask open-ended questions, especially HOW and WHY more often in your interviews--this allows subjects to elaborate and be expansive in their answers providing much better quotes
- Good sots are NOT full of technical, jargon, “science speak”--always translate unfamiliar terminology into lay language for viewers
- Audience research shows optimal sot length is :08-:15
- Good sots must also be of good technical quality-- good levels, good video, no distractions in background, etc

Storytelling Strategies

Now that you've got good sots, you need to write in and out them seamlessly

Good lead ins (set up sentence) to sots must:

- 1. Continue to tell the story
- 2. Prepare listeners for upcoming voice
- BAD- RT "Professor Johnson was asked how this project contributes to science"—awkward phrasing puts brakes on flow of story-- answer makes clear he was asked, so no need to say that-lead in to his response

Storytelling Strategies

- BETTER-- RT “Professor Johnson says this new skeleton advances science in many ways”
- This lead in continues providing new information as it also prepares audience for the upcoming voice and what the sot will be about

Storytelling Strategies

- Goal is to write “blind lead-in” which:
- 1. Can stand on its own without the sot-- not dependant on the sot to provide answer (see previous BAD example)
- 2. Leads into sot seamlessly-- provides pace to storytelling without stopping the flow and introduces new voice
- 3. Summarizes sot without being redundant
- BAD-- RT “Professor Johnson says this artifact is the most exciting discovery in 30 years”
- SOT (:12) “This is the most exciting discovery in science in the last 30 years” ☹
- That wastes your valuable storytelling time and annoys audience-- remember every second counts!

Storytelling Strategies

- BETTER-- RT “Mastodon experts say the artifacts provide new clues about life 10-thousand years ago”
- SOT (:15) “It’s the most exciting discovery in science in the last 30 years. It was an animal who died in a fight and that’s behavior we’ve only recently begun to understand.”
- This lead-in provides new information that prepares audience for upcoming sot without being repetitive
- Use info from other sots as lead-ins to more colorful sots
- Don’t have to use name of upcoming voice, since CG super will provide that-- gives you the opportunity to help audience understand context of who the sot is from: “Mastodon experts,” “Paleontologists say…”

Storytelling Strategies

- Transition OUT of the sot is equally important …. but rarely treated as such-- this where you can really show off your strong storytelling skills!
- Listen to content of sot and use that as a conversational way to move story forward
- SOT (Physician) (:09)- “it could mean fewer people smoking and reducing the chances that people might get cancer and that’s good.”
- RT-”Good for people trying to stop smoking”
- SOT (Smoker) (:08)- “I think this new tax will finally motivate me to quit the habit”

Storytelling Strategies

- Again, listen to the content of the interviews and use THEIR words as transitions for your copy (in this case "good" from the sot is incorporated into the RT) -- as with any technique don't over do it or get too "cheesy"
- But overall this strategy reduces RT, maximizes sots, creates stronger connections between the various voices and elements and tells a more compelling story
- Note how quick each of the elements are: short "expert" sot, tight RT transition into personalization sot-- three different voices in just :20-- that's pace and flow!
- Check out the writing PDF for more tips!