



Think Tank  
Initiative

# Storytelling & Power of influence

Hundreds of research publications are produced everyday by think tanks and research institutes. The purpose of these publications is to disseminate research findings to target audiences, influence policy making and bring about change.

Research findings should be broadly disseminated as information or advocacy materials through success stories which are easy to understand and accessible for different policy actors or target audiences.

Such products allow think tanks to:

- Increase their credibility with donors and target policy actors.
- Communicate their research outcomes and the change they fostered.
- Position their organizations as entities capable to bring change.

Popularly known as stories of influence, these products are often disseminated by think tanks to showcase their policy research and advocacy activities.

The purpose of this guide is to help think tanks in developing success stories.

This guide will help them:

- Identify research and advocacy outcomes which will make the best stories of influence
- Map out the processes through which these activities had influence
- Write compelling stories that reach target audiences



**H**ow to write your story in a way that attracts attention?

3 elements are important:

- Structure: Sequencing.
- Elements of style.
- Elements of content.



# A. Structure: sequencing

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- Before the drafting stage, think about the story you want to tell.
- Never lose sight of the story you want to share; this is of utmost importance.
- Keep your facts accurate.
- Once you know what you want to write about, make sure you identify the significant moments and key events which contributed to the progress of the story.

Sequencing is important as it helps you to track the significant moments which fostered your influence on a specific policy issue. Here are few elements that could help your thought process:

- > *Identification of the trigger that generated the policy influencing process:*  
This trigger can be a problem, event or situation that troubled an otherwise calm situation or shed light on a problem.
- > *Involvement in the policy influencing process:* how did your organization work with other stakeholders and the public to find a solution to the problem? Who did you work with? Which strategies and actions did you put in place to influence policy makers?
- > *Policy influencing results:* How did your work and actions lead to the resolution of the problem? What weaknesses, limitations and strengths were identified? What were the consequences? What policy changes were achieved?



## B. Elements of style

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**T**here are a number of writing styles you can use based on the sequences and elements highlighted in your story. They include creative, descriptive, relatable and suspense.



## 1. Creative

**B**e as creative as possible. Your creativity will reveal itself in the way you tell your story. The pun, irony, intrigue, all these aspects will bring a creative dimension to your story.

- Be original when narrating your negotiations with ministries or directorates.
- Be original when illustrating a conflict that has taken place or when describing the public state of mind in regards to the issue you're trying to resolve.



## 2. Descriptive

Describe your story using many details as possible taking into account the stages, sequences and flow of your story. By providing details, you will be in a better position to truly convey the essence of your story.



### 3. Relatable

Can you make people feel concerned by your story? Focusing on the major sequences of your story, choose significant moments where you can link your characters to real-life situations and/or feelings experienced by average people. As such, your audience will be better able to relate to the characters of your story.



### 4. Suspense

Using suspense will keep your audience interested as your story unravels. It can be achieved in two ways:

- Create suspense at the very beginning of your story by beating around the bush, without divulging the problem, or
- You can also present sequences in a descriptive manner.

Your success in conveying strong suspense is in your ability to keep your audience guessing until the last minute.





# C. Elements of content

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**After** identifying and organizing the sequences in your story as well as defining its style, the next step is to look at the various components to be included in your story.

Depending on your story, some of the following elements will provide a sense of rhythm.

## 1. The powerful, rich and famous

Was a power relation observed during your influencing process? Is it a recurring element in your issue? Remember to highlight it in your story. These different angles need to stand out as you draft your story. They help you to highlight relations of strengths, weaknesses or others that intervened during your influencing process.



## 2. Accidents & catastrophes

Nobody is safe from accident and disasters. They are certainly not desirable, but they allow the audience to understand the seriousness of an issue. If during your influencing process, or while conducting your research, accidents or disasters happened, do not omit them. They ought to be mentioned to help the audience understand whether they resulted from a poorly targeted approach or if they came into the influencing process naturally.



## 3. New discoveries or data

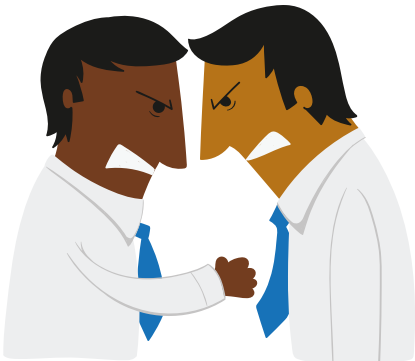
New discoveries and data are what drives a think tank. It is necessary to bring them into the story and highlight relevant data and findings accordingly.



## 4. The hero

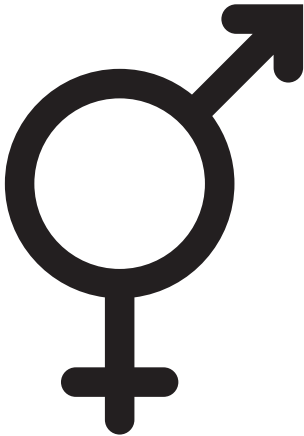
The hero is the key character which made the achievement of results possible. It is around this character that events are taking place. It is important to choose your hero based on the most relevant elements of your story which need to be coherent throughout the story.

*NB: The hero title doesn't solely rest on succeeding in bringing about change. Managing the influencing process has already positioned you as a hero.*



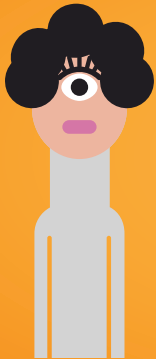
## 5. Conflict

**W**hile conducting your research or during the policy influencing process, were there moments of conflict, heated debates or strikes that were directly related to your institution?



## 6. Gender

This will add value and more weight to your story. Although it should have been tackled during the influencing process, it crosscuts other fields (political, social, environmental, etc.). Consider highlighting it both in your influencing process and when drafting your story.



## 7. Weird and abnormal

Did something inexplicable occur during your research or influencing process? Mention it. The inexplicable, weird or abnormal "thing" can very well be the trigger that sustains your influencing process.

# Remember

- ✓ **Y**our story should not be more than 1500 words.
  - ✓ **Y**our language should be simple, clear and easy to understand.
  - ✓ **M**ake sure you review your document to avoid spelling and grammar mistakes.
  - ✓ **S**tick to the scenario and/or the character that you have chosen.
  - ✓ **T**he frame of your document should be articulated on the following three stages:
    - Introduction: Introduction of the problem.
    - Development: Management and resolution of the problem.
    - Conclusion: End of the problem and/or lessons learnt.
  - ✓ **F**ollow the thread of your story. Make sure the reader can see, feel and own your story.
  - ✓ **Y**our story will be successful if you tell it in a way that is widely understandable by all and provokes emotions and reflection.
- Last advice to researchers:** Involve your communications teams early in your research work. This will help them tell your story the right way and with enough details to ensure accuracy.





Remember that your only flexibility in writing your story is facts.

**Ready? Write!**

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*Change Creators*

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