This TRAINING GUIDE provides a broad overview of the digital storytelling process along with key steps and resources to help you create digital stories for your education, community development, and cultural conservation efforts.

What are digital stories?

Digital stories are short multi-media pieces that combine a narrated script, images, text, and a musical soundtrack. The script is generated by the storyteller and the images usually come from his/her family photo album and what can be found around the home, office, and internet. Digital stories are typically 2-3 minutes long with a focused theme.

Here are examples of digital stories used to promote rural community development and share ideas:

- **Passion for the Land** – Stories from Sierra Valley
- **Cows & Fish** – Alberta, Canada collaborative
- **Stewards of the Land** - Forestry, Grazing, Agtourism
- **Water Stewards** - Livestock, Vineyards, Groundwater
- **Up from the Understory** – Calaveras County stories
- **Youth Voices for Change** – West Sacramento
What Makes a Great Digital Story?

There are many ways to tell a story. Here are some elements that produce powerful digital stories.

**PERSONAL VOICE:** We all have different ways of talking and putting ideas across. Your unique rhythm, inflections, and word choices convey an authenticity that engages viewers since it is usually so different from the slick sounding reporters we see in the commercial media. People are also more drawn into stories when they are told from a personal point of view and convey first-hand experiences. That’s why we recommend storytellers write their scripts in the first person and record their own narration. Here is an example:

> “My dad was the most important person in my life. He was my hero and the one person who influenced me into believing that agriculture is a way of life. It’s not just what you do, but who you are. It defines you as a person.”

— Lacey Maddalena, The Next Hundred Years, PFL

**EMOTIONAL CONTENT:** Passion, frustration, hope, loss, dreams—this is the stuff that makes our lives rich and meaningful. Stories that tap into these experiences are incredibly moving, especially when the storyteller expresses her/his sentiments on the topic. We encourage storytellers to include powerful personal experiences and share strong feelings in their stories. Here is an example:

> “As it turns out, my brothers thought they could do a better job without me. And because of how my father’s estate was drawn up and passed down, they were well within the law when they forced me out of the family partnership.”

— Cindy Noble, Unforeseen Consequences, PFL

**Resources**

- Center for Digital Storytelling
  [http://www.storycenter.org/whatis.html](http://www.storycenter.org/whatis.html)
- University of Houston
  [http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/index.html](http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/index.html)
CREATE A SCENE: Stories are especially appealing when they transport us away from where we are or what we are thinking about. Stories do this through “scenes” that describe a key moment with such detail that you get a real sense of that moment, place, or experience and its impact. We recommend that digital stories include at least one scene. Here is an example:

“Memories pull me back standing atop a mountain peak overlooking the valley below. I close my eyes and imagine that massive wetland amongst the fields of cotton, alfalfa, corn, orange groves, dairies, and relic oaks that currently cover the valley floor. Open fields and suburbs are now bound and woven together by canals and irrigation ditches. The water that once fed the giant wetland, now feeds a tapestry of agricultural, industrial, and municipal developments.”

Gia Martynn, Blue Gold, PFL

USE SOUND: Music sets the mood for a story, adds texture to it, and provides pacing for the images and narration. Sound effects (bird songs, babbling brook, wind in the trees, traffic) add texture, detail, or give a feeling of the place where the story occurs. We ask storytellers to consider what music and sounds they might include to enhance their story. Here is an example:

Cindy Maddalena, Water Worries, PFL includes sounds of running water and cattle mooing.
George Goodwin’s, Preserving for the Future, PFL uses lively accordion music to balance his soft voice.
**INCLUDE TEXT:** Words are usually seen on screen at the beginning (title) and end (credits) of a film. But text can also be used creatively to convey additional information—think facts and figures—or to repeat and reinforce key points in the narration. We work with storytellers to identify what text they might include, including a title, credits, and any other words and phrases that they might want to appear during their story. Here is an example:

- **Kelsey Spicer-Rawe, Ribstone Revelations, Cows and Fish Website**

> “Digital stories can be a powerful tool to share your story through pictures and words in a very short time period”

**KEEP IT FOCUSED:** Digital stories are short! The scripts focus on one or two key points and the productions include 20 – 30 images. It takes time and patience to distill our detailed experiences, feelings, and observations down to 300 – 400 words and a folder of photos.

We remind storytellers that you can’t cram your whole life into a three-minute multimedia piece and help them pick one experience to tell a bigger story and to select their most compelling pictures. Here is an example:

- **Sharon Doughty/Jane Ellen Stevens, Water Stewards, RREA website**
Why create digital stories?

Digital stories are used to help us educate, motivate, and activate diverse audiences to engage in conversations they might not otherwise have. They can be used to inform audiences on a wide-array of topics. The stories allow us to learn about ourselves and our communities and “create conditions for change”. Powerful personal stories may encourage people to think differently, create dialogue, promote participation, or lead an individual/group to take action. The format of digital stories makes them great communication tools because they can be easily shared and distributed for low or not cost via website links, email, social networks, DVDs, etc.

“Stories will help ensure that the future of ranch heritage and all the benefits that ranch lands provide to our region are protected for years to come.”

--Carol Dobbas, Storyteller, Rancher and Upper Feather River Watershed Coordinator

“Encouraging people to experience the stories on Passion for the Land is a much better way to convey a more meaningful understanding of a portion of what the Conservancy is trying to conserve.”

--Bob Kingman, Sierra Nevada Conservancy

“Being able to succinctly tell a story in a manner than can capture the audience’s attention is important in having your unique story heard.

Personal touch can transcend the differences and allow the person viewing the story to relate and really listen with an open mind to the story being told, irrespective of the subject matter.”

–Theresa Becchetti, UC Cooperative Extension Stanislaus County
In today’s fast-paced world of technology and digital devices, digital storytelling is a great way to engage all types of audiences, from ranchers and birders to 4-H members and restoration ecologists, by integrating technology into community and organizational outreach. For young people, “digital” is their language and they know and understand the technology, making digital storytelling an especially attractive means of communicating ideas and experiences.

**TIP**

Digital stories are an innovative way to apply National Educational Technology Standards for Students (NETS S) in the classroom. Digital stories can engage students, improve learning, and integrate technology across all disciplines.

“I think digital storytelling technology has great potential to share information, especially in an electronic media driven society. The technology offers a simple yet effective means for personalizing and relaying essential information on current issues.”

--Gia Martynn, Feather River Watershed Coordinator

“I assigned Passion for the Land videos for my students to view because they help to personalize and ground the often abstract concepts in academic writing. The videos present perspectives that are not commonly represented in the classroom. As a target audience, my students have enjoyed the pairing of the videos with readings on the same themes, often commenting on the videos and reading together in their blog assignment.”

--Ryan Galt, UC Davis Professor

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**Resources**

Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling – University of Houston
http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/powerpoint.html

Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling Survey (October 2010)
http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/survey/index.html
How do I create a story?

**Digital Story Production Steps**

The digital story production process is designed to be user friendly so individuals who are not professional media makers can use new technologies to share their experiences, concerns, and hopes with the larger public. The process does not have to happen in this exact order, but it generally goes something like this……

- **Generate Script:** 300 – 400 words or 1.5 pages double-spaced written from a first-person perspective.

- **Gather Images:** Select or create images to visualize the ideas and feelings in the script. These can be photos, newspaper clippings, postcards, maps or drawings you have around your home.

- **Select Soundtrack:** Find local musicians, friends or family members who can create a musical composition for you. Avoid using copyrighted work.

- **Decide on Text:** Come up with a story title, credits, and any other text you want to appear during your story. Add the title to the beginning of your script and put the credits at the end. Add other text you want to include in the margin of your script close to where you want it to appear in the story.

- **Record Narration:** Team up with someone to audio record your story. Although you will be reading your script, try to “perform it” by having someone in mind you want to communicate it to.

Resource:

Podcast Hardware & Software, Tips to Record Narration Like Pros

**Handout 3**

“Digital Story Production” (Appendix C)
Setting up Recording Studio
Find a quiet place with soft surfaces (carpeting, curtains, ceiling tiles). Background noises will affect the quality of recording such as sounds from an air conditioner, refrigerator, people’s voices, phones, alarms, ticking clocks, rustling of script, tapping hands or feet, fire crackling, etc.

**Import Images:** Bring photos or other still images into a computer using a scanner or a portable hard drive. Make any desired adjustments in brightness, contrast, color, or cropping to each image. You can also import home movies or video clips. (Resource: Photo Processing Steps, Resize Photos Online for Free)

**Import Soundtrack:** Bring your music selection or other additional sounds (running water, city traffic, barking dogs) you may have recorded into the computer via a CD or portable hard drive.

**Edit:** Weave together the narration, images, text and soundtrack via a variety of inexpensive software and voila! You have a movie…aka digital story….ready for YouTube, Facebook, or the big screen at your local school, planning commission, or Community Theater. (Resource: Video Editing Basics, Movie Maker Video Editing)

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**Resources**

The 7 Elements of Storytelling – University of Houston
http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/7elements.html

Eight Tips for Telling Your Story Digitally – Tech Soup
http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/training/page6738.cfm


Digital Storytelling Toolkit - Llano Grande Center
http://captura.llanogrande.org/
**Generating a Script**

Scripts are the foundation of the digital storytelling format. The digital story production process begins with producing a script and then finding images that support the ideas and emotions in the written story. Usually, the hardest part of scriptwriting is just getting started. It’s hard to stare at a blank page! Below are some quick, fun, and collaborative ways to generate script ideas.

😊 **Free writing**

Come up with a topic or experience you are interested in making a digital story about. Sit yourself down and write about this topic/experience for a given period of time, say 5 – 10 minutes, without stopping. Don’t worry about grammar, spelling, or writing complete sentences. Let your mind go wherever it wants and be open to shifting directions. The idea here is to keep writing and get down on paper whatever comes up—brilliant, loony, stream-of-conscious, or all of the above!

*If you are working alone*, when your time is up, re-read what you’ve written and 1) Circle ideas and phrases stand out to you, 2) Consider where your interests went, and 3) Make an outline of the story based on ideas or phrases you’ve noted, your observations and feelings about the content, and whatever else you’ve discovered in this process.

*If you are in a group setting*, team up with someone and read them your writing, asking your partner to note ideas and phrases that were most vivid or compelling. When you are done, talk with your team member about what they noted and together discuss where you might take this story and how. Then switch roles and give your partner feedback.

Handout 4 – “Generating Script” (Appendix C)
**Letter Writing**

It’s often easier to write to others than to write for ourselves. Think of a friend or family member who you’d like to communicate with and identify a topic you’d like to write a story about. Then write to that friend or family member about your topic. Write for as long as you want, aiming for a couple of pages. Don’t worry about making an outline for your letter or paying attention to grammar or spelling—just let your ideas flow and allow different paragraphs to discuss or describe different points of your topic.

*If you are working alone,* when you are done get up and do something else for a few minutes—get a drink of water, take a walk, return a phone call. Then come back with fresh eyes and reread your letter, paying attention to the parts that you really like or that move you in some way. From this first, longer draft, make an outline of how you might rework it—what you’d add and what you’d cut!

*If you are in a group setting,* team up with someone and read them your letter, asking your partner to note ideas, phrases, or sections that were most vivid or compelling. When you are done, talk with your team member about what they noted and together discuss where you might take this story and how. Then switch roles and give your partner feedback.

“Letter to the Editor” Method

Writing letters to the editor is an effective way of sharing views and inspiring others to take action on issues that are of concern. Unlike news stories, letters to the editor can state an opinion, offer an alternative viewpoint, and share personal experiences to raise awareness about larger issues, all in an individual’s own words. You can think of your digital story like a letter to the editor and write it in a very similar fashion.

See 🍁 Handout 5 (Appendix C)


**Index Cards & Writing Prompts**

A 4 x 6 Index Card might be less intimidating than the sheets of paper or blank computer screen used in the above exercises. And it also might be easier to be given something to write about than to come up with a topic. In that case, grab a blank index card, sit down, and spend 10 minutes filling the card with whatever ideas come up in response to a ‘writing prompt’. Here are a few you might try:

- I come from a place where…
- The place I live is…
- What I love and can’t stand about…
- There are decisive moments when the direction of our lives change. For me that moment was when…
- When I drive through (name of your hometown, special place, or work area)…
- Agriculture (or your field of work) means…
- When I look back at my life, I’m surprised that…

If you are doing a digital storytelling project with a group focused on a particular topic—sustainability, water policy, resource management, rural culture—you might try brainstorming prompts as a group to make the writing exercise more relevant and provocative.

After writing and **if you are working alone**, when you are done review what you’ve written on the index card and 1) Circle ideas and phrases that stand out to you, 2) Consider what parts of your writing you might keep and develop a story about, and 3) Make an outline of a story topic based on your observations and whatever else you’ve discovered in this process.

**If you are in a group setting**, team up with someone and read them index card writings, asking your partner to note ideas, phrases, or sections that were most vivid or compelling. When you are done, talk with your team member about what they noted and together discuss what ideas might go into your story script and brainstorm an order for your ideas. Then switch roles and give your partner feedback.
**Story Circle**

Story circles use the age-old tradition of storytelling as a way to bring people together to build relationships and help one another. Story circles help participants develop, clarify, or structure the digital story they want to create in a supportive group environment. Usually people sit in a circle and present their story ideas, including their script and images. Having individuals share personal stories within a group process gives everyone the opportunity to explore a range of ideas, learn from each other, and polish their own pieces. See 📚 [Handout 6: Facilitating a Story Circle (Appendix C)]!
Working with Images

Generating Images

Begin by printing out your script and in the margins start jotting down the kinds of images you imagine accompanying every two or three sentences. Do this first as a brainstorm, just to have fun and get ideas rolling. What you are aiming for is to have an image to go with each main idea, which is usually one image for each couple of sentences.

Remember, images don’t have to be literal (“I work hard” = images of a person at work or dirty boots) and sometimes using more symbolic images (“I love this place” = county seal or sign of your hometown) is really effective. There is a wide variety of images you can work with to illustrate stories: family photos, home video, newspaper clippings, images from your business (logo, photos, and original artwork), pages from books and flyers. It’s better not to use images from the web since many are low resolution or copyrighted and won’t reproduce well in a digital story.

Once you have brainstormed ideas without looking for or at specific images, grab your family photo albums, business photos, favorite artwork and newspaper clippings and start looking for images that match up with the ideas you noted in the margins of your script. It’s ok to have more than one image to go with each main idea…you will just have more options to work with!

TIP

Type up your story leaving a 1.5 - 2 inch margin so you can note what images go with which part of your story.
**Sequencing Images**

Next you will need to come up with a system, to indicate where pictures should go in your story. An easy way to do this is:

1. Decide which images you want to include in your digital story
   - Give each image a 1-2 word title that describes the image (e.g. red barn, dirty boots, grasslands, ranch logo)
   - If you have a printed image, write that title on a post-it and stick it to the back of the image. Then scan the image into your computer and give the image file the 1-2 word title.
   - If you have an electronic version of the image then make a copy and save it with the new 1-2 word title.
   - Put all your images into a folder on your computer titled “Digital Story Images”.

2. Print out a new script

3. Write the 1-2 word image title in the margin close to where you envision the image appearing throughout the whole script (20-30 images is a good amount to shoot for)

4. Number the images in the order you want them to appear in the story script
   - **In the margin of the script**, place the number next to the 1-2 word image titles where you want them to appear (See image next page)
   - **In the computer**, place the number in the front of the image file name (1redbull.jpg, 2flower.jpg, 3kidfishing).
You have just created a basic **storyboard** that shows which images will go with what part of the script. Below are examples from Cindy Maddalena’s story, Water Worries, PFL. Check out our [Handout 7: Working with Images (Appendix C)]! 

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**TIP for Photo Contact Sheet**

*If using Windows open file with photos, select print pictures from Photo Tasks pane, Photo Printing Wizard opens. Follow steps, select photos you want, click NEXT twice. In Available Layout, select contact sheet; print this out to review your photo collection.*

*If needed, change the order of images. You’ll end up with a single page with picture thumbnails and file names displayed.*
Make sure to adjust volume of music and sounds throughout your story so it does not compete with narration.

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**Music Selection**

Music sets the mood for a story, adds texture to it, and provides pacing for the images and narration. We ask that storytellers select music that will enhance their story and not compete or overwhelm the narration.

We do not recommend using copyrighted work. *Try to use public domain stuff like [http://www.freeplaymusic.com/](http://www.freeplaymusic.com/)* or have friends/family make a musical composition for you. Stories do not need to have music, so don’t worry if you don’t have a composer in the house!

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**What hardware & software do I need?**

There is a variety of software and hardware programs available to create digital stories. The tools that you decide to use will depend on your budget. In reality, there is no need to purchase expensive hardware and software, as many of the tools you need may already be on your computer or can be downloaded online for little if any cost. Basically, you will need tools that will:

- Organize and edit images (software)
- Record audio (hardware)
- Assemble and edit together story elements -- audio, images, video, effects, motion, music -- (software & hardware)
TIP

Consider using ‘Podcast Studio’, an audio recording kit that includes microphone, headphone and mixer. It has quality playback when recording and blocks out ambient noise.

See resources below

Hardware Options

- Computer (for storage & editing)
- Unidirectional Microphone (to record script narration)
- Podcast studio (a kit to record script narration directly onto your computer)
- Digital Voice Recorder (to record narration, interviews, Q & A sessions)
- Digital Camera (to take the photos and short video clips you need)
- Color Scanner (to scan old photos, slides, newspaper clippings, artwork)
- Video Camera (to take footage you want)
- Portable Hard Drive (to back-up files and to store images)

Resources

Podcast Hardware and Software Blog
http://ucanr.org/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=3569

Setting up Podcast Studio with your PC
http://ucanr.org/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=3570
Software Options:

- **Audio**: Audacity is a free audio recording and editing software that can be used on both Mac and PC. [More audio editing options]

- **Image**: All Mac and many PCs come with free image editing software. Mac software, iPhoto, does all basic image manipulation. A popular image editing software to purchase that works on both Macs and PCs is Adobe Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. [More image editing options]

- **Video**: Free video editing software that comes with operating system or cameras, may include Windows Movie Makers, iMovie (Mac), Flip video editor, Microsoft Photostory 3, and Powerpoint. Software that can be purchased for PCs is Adobe Premiere Elements. [More video editing options]

- **Players**: Depending on the video format, you will need a program to play your videos. Some players are a part of a computer’s operating system such as Window Media Player or QuickTime Player. Others like Adobe Flash Player, may be needed to view videos on the web. [More video player options]

**TIP**

Audacity was one of the software programs utilized in recording and editing Passion for Land narration.
Sharing Your Digital Stories

WHERE do I share my story?
There are a variety of places that you can share your story: schools, colleges, special community events, community organizations, meetings, businesses, websites, social media, Facebook, iTunesU, YouTube. Refer to the Facilitation Guide portion of this TOOLKIT for ideas.

When sharing personal stories with others, it is important to get the written permission from the storyteller. Release forms spell out your purpose in sharing the story (educational, non-commercial), where you might share it (web, DVDs, radio, TV, organizational meetings), and who benefits from it (e.g. if you will charge or not and if so how that money is allocated). Please see Sample Release Form that can be adapted for your specific use (Appendix D).

Concluding things to consider

Think of ways that this type of collaborative multi-media process could advance your organization’s objectives and enhance outreach efforts.

What are some of the special places, people or events that you’d like to highlight? What stories do you have to share?

WHAT local RESOURCES can help create digital stories?

- Is there a Public Radio Station?
- How about a Community TV Station?
- Local Museum and/or Historical Society?
- Talented Local Musicians and/or Photographers?
- UC Cooperative Extension, Community College, or High School with staff interested in digital movie making?
- Sources of funds to help coordinate and pull all the pieces together?
Glossary

Digital story: Short multi-media pieces that combine a narrated script, photos, moving/still images, text, and musical soundtrack.

Facilitators guide: Provides resources and information to assist individuals or groups to engage others in meaningful discussions using existing Passion for the Land digital stories.

Podcast studio: Hardware used to record script narration that includes microphone, headphone, cables and audio mixer. It has quality playback when recording and blocks out ambient noise.

Release Form: Provides written permission from storyteller to share their story. Spells out the purpose for sharing the story, where you might share it, and who benefits from it.

Script: The digital story production process begins with producing a script and then finding images that support the ideas and emotions in the written story. It is the foundation for the digital storytelling format.

Storyboard: Shows where images will go with what part of the script

Story circle: A group process activity that helps participants to develop, clarify, or structure the digital story they want to create in a supportive group environment.

Training guide: Provides a broad overview of the digital storytelling process, plus key steps and resources to assist individuals and groups in creating your own digital stories
References

Art of Regional Change
http://artofregionalchange.ucdavis.edu/?page_id=37

Center for Digital Storytelling
http://www.storycenter.org/index1.html


APPENDICES

Appendix A – “Contributing to Change”
- Extension/Resource Professional
  - Theresa Becchetti
  - Bob Kingman
- Community Groups
  - Carol Dobbas
  - Dave Goicoechea
  - Darrel Sweet
  - Karen Sweet
- Teacher/Educator
  - Gia Martynn
  - Ryan Galt

Appendix B – Passion for the Land Written Scripts
- Is Sustainable Attainable
- Water Worries
- Passing It On
- Keeping People on the Land
- Chasing Water
- Future Farmers of America
- Just A Farmer
- Unforeseen Consequences
- Blue Gold
- Preserving for the Future
- The Next Hundred Years
- A View for the Barn
Appendix C – Handouts
1. Discussion Questions
2. Digital Storytelling Strategies
3. Digital Story Production
4. Generating a Script
5. Telling Your Story – Video Letters to the Editor
6. Facilitating Story Circle
7. Working with Images

Appendix D
- Sample Release Form

Appendix E – Additional Resources
- Additional Resources