Crafting a Research Story

Erica Bender, Ph.D.
Associate Director, Writing + Critical Expression Hub
WAYS TO THINK ABOUT GRADSLAM:

- Something different
- Something fun
- Something that can get you $$$

BETTER WAYS TO THINK ABOUT GRADSLAM:

- Strategic communication
- A lesson in persuasion
- Rediscovering a passion for your project

The power of story.
First things first.

Don’t equate your “research” with your “talk”
Your Research vs. Your Talk
Tell a story.

Another way to put it:
Reveal the stakes
Create tension
Resolve it
Tell a story

Reveal the Stakes,

Connect to the audience
Engage them with something they already know.
Relatability vs. “pressing problem”

Create Tension,

What’s the unknown?
Why should it be known?
What do you know that can help us?

And Resolve It.

Close the circle, settle the stakes
Show us what is to be continued
Foreshadow the sequel
Reveal the Stakes

- Consider your audience
  - Who are they?
  - What do they want?
  - What do they need?
Reveal the Stakes

- Connecting = something that *they* can relate to
  - A pressing problem
  - A memory most of us share
  - A cultural phenomenon
  - A shared fear
The stakes of your research become clear because you’ve connected to your audience on THEIR turf.

Your connection becomes...

- A **backdrop** for your work (the scene)
- A **metaphor** for your work (the actors)

**Reveal the Stakes**

**Understanding reputation in the Donald Trump era.**

**Brain cells as drops of paint in a cup.**
Create Tension

- The engine behind every plot
- Something needs to happen, but it will not happen automatically
- Someone needs to do something
Create Tension

- Research tension
  - We need to know something
  - There's a reason why we don't know it already
  - You are doing something that helps us know it
Create Tension

- CAUTION!
  - Creating research tension is not the same as justifying your study within your field
  - Remember your **audience**
- The end of every story
- Did the thing that needed to happen, happen?
- What happened to the characters, to the scene?
Resolve the Tension

- How does this research story end?
  - What you know that helps resolve the tension
  - What that knowledge gets us, how it moves us
  - What comes next
THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

Being mindful of your audience, what they know/don’t know, and what they want.
One approach

- Connect to the audience: 25%
- Build up the plot: 25%
- Move the story to a conclusion: 50%

Reveal the stakes
Create Tension
Resolve it
How to start?
Narrow down the key ideas

- Make a list of the key ideas your research is working with/toward
- Cut it in half
  - By *removing* things this audience doesn’t want/need
  - By “*lumping*” details into a bigger concept
Practice Audience Flexibility

- Take an abstract and turn it into a tweet, for different audiences.
  - @yourAdvisor
  - @yourDepartmentFriend
  - @yourGrandma
  - @yourGSAfriend
  - @GradSLAMJudge#3
Actors
The “players” in your research

Setting
The context of your research

Scene
What the actors are doing in that context.
Grad Writing Consultants at the Writing Hub

One-on-One Consultations with other grad students.

Help you craft a clear story.

Not as helpful for: practicing your speech, adjusting presentation slides.
How To Make an Appointment

Go to:
writinghub.ucsd.edu

Make a 30- or 60-minute appointment by clicking on a white square.

Be sure to specify “GradSlam Entry” on your Appointment Form!
THANKS!

You can connect with me at
writinghub@ucsd.edu