



A GUIDE TO **NARRATIVA**

The Art of Storytelling

Move Hearts. Spread Ideas. Inspire Change.

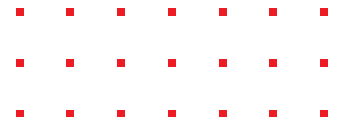
For : Students, educators, and anyone building their communication skills

Level : Suitable for learners aged 13 and up, and their coaches

Format : A self-study training & practice guide

WELCOME

A Message from the Author



Every great leader begins as a communicator.

The ability to speak clearly, tell compelling stories, and defend ideas with logic is one of the most valuable skills in the AI-native world we are all now living in.

Communication is not a fixed talent you are born with — it is a craft anyone can learn. This guide is a journey toward becoming an influential communicator: someone who can move a room not just with facts, but with a story that lodges in the memory and changes how people think.

This manual has been designed as your self-learning guide. It will not simply tell you what a great talk looks like; it will walk you through the frameworks that produce one, one step at a time.

Read it carefully. Practise every exercise. Then put these skills to work — in the classroom, on stage, or anywhere you need to be heard.

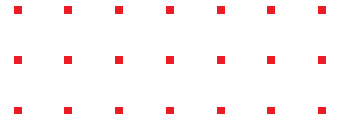
We look forward to hearing your story.

— The Author

Prof. Satya Kiran Sastry
Vice President, Strategic Initiatives
EThames Business School

HOW TO USE

This Guide



The best speakers I have ever watched were not the ones with the most facts. They were the ones who could make me feel something — who took an idea and wrapped it in a story I could not forget.

Narrativa is the art of that craft. Every framework inside this manual — the single big idea, the Hero's Journey, the Pixar Story Spine, the Sparkline, StoryBrand, and the What/So What/Now What close — has been chosen because it turns a vague, sprawling talk into one clear, moving arc.

You will notice each chapter follows the same pattern: what the idea means, why it works, an example of it done well and done poorly, practice exercises you can do today, and a short summary you can revisit whenever you need it.

Do not skim this book. Tell your story out loud, to a friend, into a camera, to an empty room. Storytelling is not learned by reading — it is learned by telling. This manual simply tells you what to practise, and why.

I wish you a story worth spreading.

— The Author

Prof. Satya Kiran Sastry
Vice President, Strategic Initiatives
EThames Business School

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a complete, self-study guide to storytelling. It takes the frameworks that professional communicators rely on and turns them into a clear, self-paced learning path that anyone — a student, a teacher, or a self-learner — can work through independently to build real, lasting skill.

6

CORE
FRAMEWORKS

18

PRACTICE
EXERCISES

5

REAL-WORLD
MODELS

20

GLOSSARY
TERMS

What This Booklet Delivers

- A structured route from foundational theory to stage-ready delivery, organized into three parts: *Orientation*, the *Narrativa Framework*, and *Application & Practice*.
- Six proven storytelling frameworks — the Single Big Idea, the Hero's Journey, the Pixar Story Spine, the Sparkline, StoryBrand, and What/So What/Now What — each taught through a consistent meaning-example-practice-summary sequence.
- Practice exercises, real-world models, and a self-assessment summary of how work is judged, so students can rehearse against the real standard.
- A timeless training resource: this booklet stays the same, year to year. It focuses purely on the subject, preparation, and practice — all competition Rules live in the separate Rules & Regulations document known as the Rulebook.

How to Use This Document

Part I orients you to the Challenge and this track.

Part II is the instructional core — study it framework by framework, completing every practice exercise.

Part III helps you apply the frameworks and self-assess. When you are ready to compete, turn to the shared Rulebook.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I - ORIENTATION

Page No

1 About This Guide	8
2 Who Narrativa Is For	9
3 Learning Objectives	10
4 How to Study This Manual	11

PART II - THE NARRATIVA FRAMEWORK

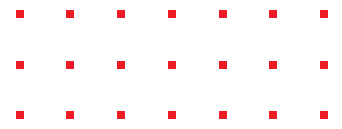
5 Framework 1 — The Single Big Idea	13
6 Framework 2 — The Hero's Journey	15
7 Framework 3 — The Pixar Story Spine	17
8 Framework 4 — The Sparkline	19
9 Framework 5 — StoryBrand (Audience as Hero)	21
10 Framework 6 — What? So What? Now What?	23

PART III - APPLICATION & PRACTICE

11 Voices That Inspire: Real-World Examples	26
12 Narrativa Checklist	27
13 Common Mistakes to Avoid	28
14 Glossary	29

PART I

Orientation



What this guide covers, who it is for, what you will learn, and how to work through it.



1 About This Guide

This guide is built around one belief: in an age where routine analytical work is increasingly automated, the ability to think clearly and communicate persuasively is one of the most valuable skills a person can develop. It is a craft, and like any craft it can be learned, practised, and mastered.

Purpose

To identify, train, and certify young communicators across three distinct disciplines – public speaking, storytelling, and debate – through a structured, self-paced learning journey rather than a single high-pressure audition.

Objectives

- Build skill and stage confidence in students from a wide range of schools and backgrounds.
- Teach transferable frameworks – not just performance tips – that remain useful well beyond the competition.
- Ensure every competitor arrives on stage prepared, through a mandatory certification standard rather than open entry.

COMPANION DOCUMENT

This booklet covers the Narrativa subject, preparation, and practice only. All event details – eligibility, rules, and judging – live in the separate 'Rules & Regulations' document, known as the Rulebook, that applies to all three tracks.



2 Who Narrativa Is For

Narrativa is the Challenge's storytelling discipline, inspired by the modern TED-talk tradition. It rewards speakers who can take a single meaningful idea and wrap it in a personal, emotionally resonant story that an audience remembers long after the applause.



Future founders and changemakers who will need to make people care about an idea.



Aspiring TED-style speakers, content creators, and communicators.



Anyone who has a story worth telling and wants to learn how to tell it well.



3 Learning Objectives

By the end of this manual, you will be able to:

- ✓ Distil any experience into a single, sharp big idea that a whole talk can be built around.
- ✓ Shape a true personal experience into a Hero's Journey arc an audience can follow and feel.
- ✓ Structure a talk using the Pixar Story Spine so every beat leads naturally to the next.
- ✓ Use the Sparkline to move an audience between what is and what could be, ending on a call to action.
- ✓ Cast the audience — not yourself — as the hero of the story, with you as the guide.
- ✓ Close any talk with a clear What / So What / Now What structure that drives action.
- ✓ Rehearse against the same five criteria the judges use, so you always know what to improve next.

4 How to Study This Manual

This is a self-study manual. It is designed to be worked through in order, not skimmed. Follow this loop for every framework chapter:

- 1** *Read the framework and its meaning.*
- 2** *Study the Strong Storyteller / Weak Storyteller example.*
- 3** *Complete the practice exercises – out loud, not just in your head.*
- 4** *Review the Key Takeaways and Quick Summary box.*
- 5** *Move to the next framework only once you can explain the previous one to someone else.*

PART II

The Narrativa Framework

Six core frameworks, each taught through a consistent sequence: meaning, example, practice, and summary.

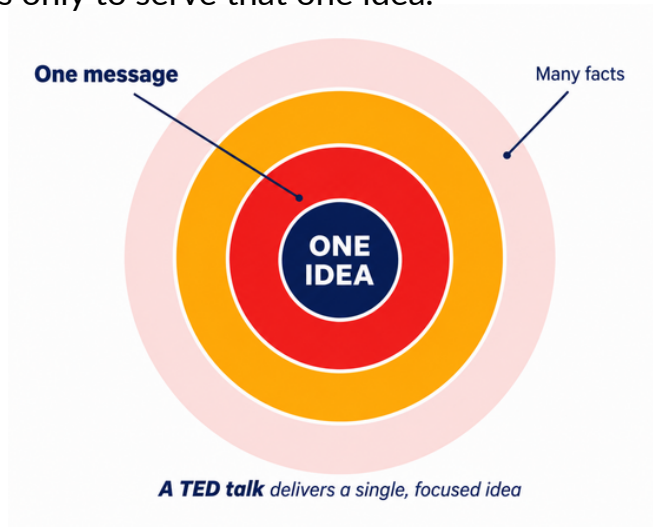


5 Framework 1 :

The Single Big Idea

Meaning

A great talk is built around one idea, not many. The single big idea is the one sentence you want your audience to remember and act on. Everything else in the talk — every scene, every fact, every emotion — exists only to serve that one idea.



Simple Explanation

Most weak talks fail because they try to say too much. When you try to deliver five ideas, the audience remembers none. When you deliver one idea beautifully, they remember it for years. Pick the one thing that matters most, and cut everything that does not serve it.

WHY IT WORKS

Why it works: an audience can hold exactly one idea in memory after a talk — so if you choose it for them, you control what they walk away with. When every scene and line serves one clear idea, the whole talk gains a gravity that a collection of loosely related points can never have.

Example

Strong storyteller: "The one thing I want you to leave with tonight is this: failure is not the opposite of success — it is part of it." Every story that follows reinforces that single line.

Weak storyteller: Tries to cover failure, hard work, teamwork, and luck all in one talk — and the audience walks out unable to say what the talk was actually about.

5 Framework 1: The Single Big Idea

Practice Exercises

- 1. One-sentence test:** Write the idea of your talk in a single sentence. If it needs an 'and' joining two ideas, split it and pick one.
- 2. The cut test:** List every story and fact you plan to include. Beside each, write which single idea it serves. Cut anything that does not serve it.
- 3. Friend recall:** Tell your talk to a friend. An hour later, ask them what the one idea was. If they cannot say it clearly, your idea is not sharp enough yet.

Key Takeaways

- A talk is one idea, delivered well — not many ideas delivered quickly.
- If a scene or fact does not serve your one idea, it weakens the talk, however good it is on its own.
- You should be able to state your idea in a single sentence a child could repeat.

Remember

If they remember only one sentence, which sentence do you want it to be?
Build the whole talk around that.



Watch & Learn

The Clues to a Great Story

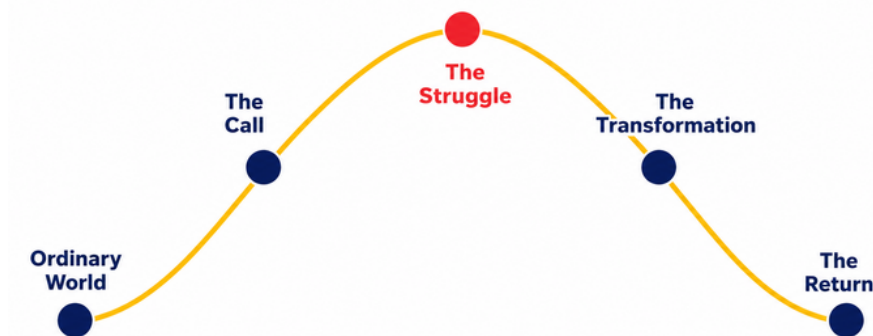
Amy Cuddy, TED — scan the QR code or visit
ted.com/talks/andrew_stanton_the_clues_to_a_great_story

6 Framework 2 :

The Hero's Journey

Meaning

The Hero's Journey is the oldest story structure we know: an ordinary person receives a call, faces a struggle, is transformed by it, and returns changed. Almost every memorable film, myth, and personal story follows this arc.



Simple Explanation

Your talk should not be a flat report of what happened. It should move: a starting point, a challenge that raises the stakes, a turning point, and a resolution where you – and the audience – end up somewhere new. The struggle is the most important part; skip it and the story loses its stakes.

WHY IT WORKS

Why it works: the Hero's Journey mirrors how we actually experience change in real life – comfort, disruption, struggle, and growth. Audiences recognise this shape instinctively, so a story built on it feels true and satisfying even when the details are unfamiliar. The struggle is what earns the audience's emotional investment.

Example

Strong storyteller: Opens in an ordinary moment, names one specific obstacle ('the day I was told I would never speak on a stage'), shows the turning point, and returns with a lesson the audience can use.

Weak storyteller: Jumps straight to the happy ending – 'and then everything worked out' – with no struggle, so the audience feels nothing.

6 Framework 2 :

The Hero's Journey

Practice Exercises

- 1. Map your arc :** Take a true story from your life and plot it onto the four beats — ordinary world, the call, the struggle, the return. If a beat is missing, that is where your story needs work.
- 2. Name the struggle:** Write the single hardest moment of your story in one concrete sentence. Specificity ('my hands shook so badly I dropped my notes') beats vague hardship every time.
- 3. The transformation line:** Write one sentence describing what changed in your understanding, not just your circumstances. That line is the heart of your talk.

Key Takeaways

- A story moves through change; a report just lists events.
- The struggle creates the emotional stakes — never skip it.
- The transformation should connect to something the audience can use in their own life.

Remember

**No struggle, no story. The obstacle is not in the way of your talk
— it is your talk.**



Watch & Learn

The Clues to a Great Story

Andrew Stanton, TED — scan the QR code or visit

ted.com/talks/andrew_stanton_the_clues_to_a_great_storylks

7 Framework 3 :

The Pixar Story Spine

Meaning

The **Pixar Story Spine** is a simple template that Pixar's writers use to structure their films: 'Once upon a time... Every day... Until one day... Because of that... Because of that... Until finally... And ever since then...' It turns a jumble of events into a clean cause-and-effect chain.



Simple Explanation

Each line of the spine forces the next. 'Until one day' introduces the disruption; every 'because of that' is a consequence that follows logically; 'until finally' is the climax; 'and ever since then' is the new normal. Fill in the blanks and you have a story that flows.

WHY IT WORKS

Why it works: the spine turns a pile of events into cause and effect. Each 'because of that' forces the next beat to follow logically, which is what makes a story feel inevitable rather than random. If any beat can be removed without breaking the chain, the audience senses the slack — the spine helps you find and cut it.

Example

Strong storyteller: Every day I stayed silent in class. Until one day a teacher asked me to read aloud. Because of that, I stumbled — and because of that, I practised every night. Until finally I entered a speech contest.

Weak storyteller: Lists events with no causal link — 'I was shy. I read aloud. I joined a contest.' — so the story feels like a list, not a journey.

7 Framework 3 :

The Pixar Story Spine

Practice Exercises

- 1. Fill the spine:** Write your story using the exact Pixar template, one sentence per line. Do not move on until each line clearly forces the next..
- 2. Break the chain test:** Remove one 'because of that' line and read it aloud. If the story still makes sense, that beat was not doing enough work — strengthen it.
- 3. Spine a film:** Take a favourite film and write its Pixar spine in seven lines. Doing it with a known story trains you to spot the structure in your own.

Key Takeaways

- Great stories are cause-and-effect chains, not lists of events.
- The Pixar Story Spine begins with 'Once upon a time...' and ends with 'And ever since then...'
- If any beat can be removed without breaking the story, it needs to be stronger or cut.

Remember

Every 'because of that' should feel inevitable. If a beat could be skipped, the chain is weak.



Watch & Learn

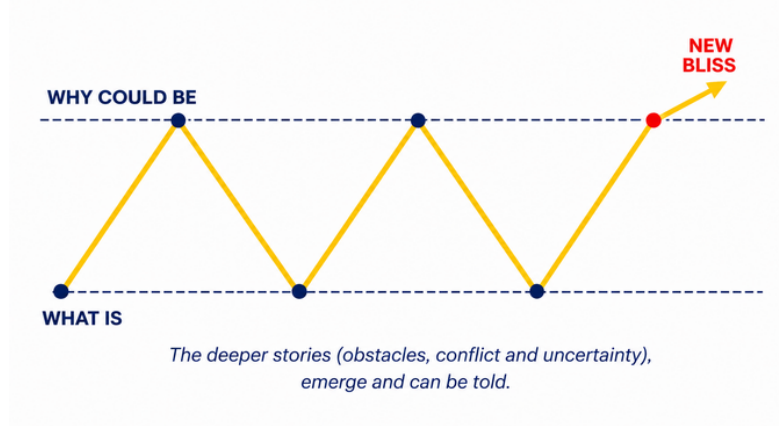
The Pixar Story Spine, Explained

Storytelling Masterclass (YouTube) — scan the QR code or visit youtube.com/watch?v=RG4WcRAgm7Y

8 Framework 4 : The Sparkline

Meaning

The **Sparkline**, identified by Nancy Duarte after studying the greatest talks in history, is the pattern of moving repeatedly between 'what is' (the current reality) and 'what could be' (a better future). The gap between the two creates tension that keeps an audience leaning in.



Simple Explanation

Do not just describe the world as it is. Contrast it with how it could be, again and again, so the audience feels the gap and wants to close it. End not on 'what is' but on 'the new bliss' — a vision of the better future plus a call to action.

WHY IT WORKS

Why it works: tension holds attention. By moving repeatedly between what is and what could be, you keep opening a gap the audience wants closed — and they stay with you to see it resolved. Ending on 'the new bliss' sends them out with a vision to act on, not just a problem to feel bad about.

Example

Strong storyteller: Alternates: 'Today, most students fear public speaking (what is). But imagine a school where every child speaks with confidence (what could be)...' — building tension toward a final call to act.

Weak storyteller: Describes only problems, leaving the audience deflated — or only dreams, leaving them unconvinced it is achievable.

8 Framework 4 : The Sparkline

Practice Exercises

- 1. Two-column draft:** Split a page into 'what is' and 'what could be.' Write your talk's key points in the correct column, then alternate between them as you speak.
- 2. End on bliss:** Write your final line as a vision of the better future, not a restatement of the problem. It should make the audience want to act.
- 3. Tension check:** Read your talk aloud and mark each shift between reality and possibility. Too few shifts means a flat talk; add contrast.

Key Takeaways

- The Sparkline alternates between current reality and future possibility.
- The gap between what is and what could be is what creates and holds tension.
- End on the 'new bliss' — the better future plus a call to action — not on the problem.

Remember

Show them what is. Then show them what could be. The gap between the two is your talk's engine



Watch & Learn

The Secret Structure of Great Talks

Nancy Duarte, TED — scan the QR code or visit

ted.com/talks/nancy_duarte_the_secret_structure_of_great_talks

9 Framework 5 :

StoryBrand — Audience as Hero

Meaning

The **StoryBrand principle**, from **Donald Miller**, flips a common mistake: the speaker is not the hero of the talk — the audience is. Your role is the guide who gives the hero a plan and helps them win. The talk is about them, not about you.



Simple Explanation

Weak speakers make themselves the star: 'Look what I achieved.' Strong speakers make the audience the star: 'Here is how you can achieve it.' Your story and struggles matter only as far as they help the audience see themselves and their own path forward.

WHY IT WORKS

Why it works: audiences care about their own story, not yours. When you cast them as the hero and yourself as the guide, every point you make becomes about their transformation — which is far more persuasive than a list of your achievements. The guide is remembered precisely because they made the hero win.

Example

Strong storyteller: Shares a personal struggle, then turns outward: 'You have felt this too. Here is what I learned that you can use tomorrow.' The audience becomes the hero.

Weak storyteller: Spends the whole talk listing personal achievements, leaving the audience impressed but unchanged — and slightly bored.

9 Framework 5 :

StoryBrand — Audience as Hero

Practice Exercises

- 1. Rewrite for 'you':** Take a paragraph of your talk written about yourself and rewrite it so the audience is the hero. Swap 'I' for 'you' wherever the lesson applies to them.
- 2. The guide's gift:** Write one clear, usable takeaway you are giving the audience — the 'plan' a guide gives the hero. If you cannot name it, your talk is still about you.
- 3. Mirror test:** Read your closing aloud. Does it end on your success or on the audience's next step? Rewrite until it ends on them.

Key Takeaways

- In StoryBrand, the audience is the hero and the speaker is the guide.
- Your personal story matters only as far as it helps the audience see their own path.
- A guide gives the hero a plan — end your talk with something the audience can actually do.

Remember

You are not the hero of your talk. The audience is. You are the guide who hands them the map.



Watch & Learn

The Danger of a Single Story

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED — scan the QR code or visit ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

10 Framework 6 :

What? So What? Now What?

Meaning

What / So What / Now What is a simple three-part close that turns a story into action. 'What?' is the story or fact. 'So What?' is why it matters. 'Now What?' is the call to action — **what you want the audience to do next.**



Simple Explanation

Many talks tell a lovely story and then just... stop. This framework makes sure your talk lands. After the story (What?), tell the audience why it matters to them (So What?), then give them a clear next step (Now What?). Without the last two, a story is just entertainment.

WHY IT WORKS

Why it works: a story without a 'so what' is just entertainment, and a 'so what' without a 'now what' is just a nice thought. This three-part close converts feeling into action by answering, in order, the three questions every audience silently asks: what happened, why should I care, and what do I do now.

Example

Strong storyteller: That is how I found my voice (What?). Your voice matters just as much (So What?). So this week, say the one thing you have been holding back (Now What?).

Weak storyteller: Ends on the story itself — 'and that is what happened' — leaving the audience moved but with nowhere to put the feeling.

10 Framework 6 :

What? So What? Now What?

Practice Exercises

- 1. Three-line close:** Write your talk's ending as exactly three lines — What, So What, Now What. Keep each to one sentence.
- 2. The action test:** Read your 'Now What?' aloud. Is it something the audience can actually do this week? Vague calls ('be inspired') fail; specific calls ('write one letter') work.
- 3. So-what ladder:** Take your main point and ask 'so what?' three times in a row, each answer deeper than the last. The final answer is often your real message.

Key Takeaways

- What / So What / Now What turns a story into action.
- The 'Now What?' should be a specific, doable step — not a vague feeling.
- A story without a 'So What?' and 'Now What?' is entertainment, not a talk that changes anything.

Remember

Tell them what happened. Tell them why it matters. Then tell them exactly what to do next.



Watch & Learn

The Danger of a Single Story

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED — scan the QR code or visit ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

PART III

Application & Practice

Turning the six frameworks into performance: real-world models, a self-check, and common mistakes to avoid.



11 Voices That Inspire: Real-World Examples

Studying real storytellers is the fastest way to see these frameworks in action. Watch (or read transcripts of) the speakers below and identify which frameworks from this manual they use.

“ Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Known for grounding complex national vision in simple, direct language and a warm, unhurried pace – a masterclass in Power and Projection used without aggression.

Steve Jobs (Stanford, 2005) ”

Structured his entire commencement address around 'three stories,' each a compact Hero's Journey ending in a clear lesson.

“ Malala Yousafzai

Combines quiet vocal power with unwavering eye contact, demonstrating that conviction does not require volume.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ”

'The Danger of a Single Story' opens with childhood vulnerability, then turns the lesson outward to the audience – StoryBrand and What/So What/Now What in action.

“ Sudha Murty

Known for warm, conversational pacing and body language that puts an audience at ease before delivering a firm, memorable point.

As a practice task, choose one speaker above, watch a clip, and identify at least two of the six Narrativa frameworks they are using.

12 Narrativa Checklist

BEFORE YOU TAKE THE STAGE, CAN YOU...

- ☐ State your single big idea in one sentence a child could repeat?
- ☐ Name the one specific struggle at the heart of your story?
- ☐ Show a clear transformation — what changed in your understanding?
- ☐ Trace your story as a cause-and-effect chain, with no skippable beats?
- ☐ Move between 'what is' and 'what could be' to build tension?
- ☐ Cast the audience as the hero, with yourself as the guide?
- ☐ End with a specific, doable call to action (Now What?)?
- ☐ Tell the whole talk from memory, with only light prompts?

13 Common Mistakes to Avoid

As you practise, watch for the errors that most often cost marks. Each maps directly to one of the six frameworks in this booklet.



Memorizing a script word-for-word and freezing when a single line is forgotten — deliver from structure, not memory.



Speaking faster as time runs low instead of trimming content beforehand.



Avoiding eye contact out of nervousness — use the lighthouse scan from Framework 6.



Ending abruptly without a clear call-to-action.



Relying on words alone and neglecting voice and body — remember the Mehrabian 7-38-55 rule.

14 Glossary

Term	Definition
Big Idea	The single sentence a whole talk is built around.
Throughline	The connecting thread that runs through every part of a talk.
Hero's Journey	A story arc: ordinary world, call, struggle, transformation, return.
Pixar Story Spine	A seven-line template beginning 'Once upon a time...'.
Sparkline	A structure alternating between 'what is' and 'what could be'.
StoryBrand	A model in which the audience is the hero and the speaker is the guide.
Call to Action	The closing instruction telling the audience what to do next.
Vulnerability	Sharing genuine, specific personal struggle to build trust.
Narrative Arc	The shape of a story from beginning through climax to resolution.
Scene	A specific moment shown with sensory detail, not summarised.

14 Glossary

Term	Definition
Transformation	The change in understanding at the heart of a story.
New Bliss	The vision of a better future a Sparkline talk ends on.
Throughaction	The single unifying goal a story drives toward.
Concrete Detail	A specific, sensory fact that makes a story vivid and believable.
Pacing	The speed and rhythm of delivery across a talk.
Resonance	The lasting emotional effect a story leaves in an audience.
Hook	The opening device that captures attention in the first moments.
Beat	A single unit of story – one event or turn in the arc.
Deck	The set of supporting visuals or slides behind a talk.
Big Reveal	The turning-point moment a story builds toward.