



We don't often associate science with story-telling. Science is evidence-based, systematic, and rational. Stories are experiential, anecdotal, and emotional. But research by ISU Prof. Michael Dahlstrom shows that the human brain is attuned to story-telling. Audiences are more engaged by stories than by analyses, and understand them better, too. Facts presented in a story will stick longer than facts in an explanation. So when communicating with nonexpert audiences--and maybe even sometimes with expert colleagues--try telling a story.

Scientist-turned-filmmaker Randy Olson has a simple formula that will help get you started on storytelling. Listening to scientists talk, it sometimes seems like they are addicted to powerpoint bullets: this AND this AND this AND this. But that's no story. As Olson points out, a story needs tension, conflict, problems--a story needs a BUT. And that BUT then leads to a THEREFORE that resolves the tension, conflict or problem. So make AND-BUT-THEREFORE, ABT, your storytelling friend.

You love what you do. And it's important that other people understand your research. But if you communicate it speaking like a scientist, you'll frustrate everyone. Therefore develop your storytelling skills: you and your audience will both enjoy it.

Further resources: Randy Olson talks storytelling at TEDMED  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERB7ITvabA4>

An overview of Olson's work <http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/09/16/from-south-park-to-the-space-station-randy-olson-sees-an-and-but-therefore-story-solution/>

Michael F. Dahlstrom. (2014). Using narratives and storytelling to communicate science with nonexpert audiences. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(Supplement 4), 13614–13620. <http://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1320645111>