



Flash Media Services

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What makes a great story?

1. Stories must be real.
2. Stories must be about real people, characters, people whose lives are filled with all of the quirks and qualities we face as human beings, complete with stellar characteristics mingled with sometimes glaring, sometimes subtle flaws. I want to remember characters by name.
3. Characters must face impossible, or difficult, dilemmas. Perhaps the character carries a sense of hopelessness and sees no solution.
4. The story must carry an underlying element of hope.
5. A great story does not necessarily have to have a happy ending. But in most cases it will, or at the very least it will hold the promise of happier tomorrows. Don't leave us hopeless.
6. A story must happen quickly.
7. A story is one that shows the human side of its subjects.
8. A story has many details: How long have they been married? What color is the car she drives? How much money does he make an hour? Pay attention to everything during an interview. Sometimes your subjects can tell you so much just in passing...interesting information that can make your story really come alive.
9. A great story offers something that anybody can relate to.
10. A great story is surprising.
11. There should be a twist, something unusual that makes your audience stop, reflect, or gasp. Is there something counter-intuitive, weird or just plain unexpected that you can highlight? We all love a bit of strange. Give us a taste of that special moment.

What makes a great media story?

1. The story should be timely, newsworthy, relevant, interesting, and/or trend-worthy.
2. There should be drama, contrast, and an answer to the question: “Why does this matter?”
3. Readers should learn something from the story.
4. The story should make readers feel that they can make a difference, it encourages readers to get involved in a cause, or it gives readers information they can use.
5. The story is relaxing or simply entertaining to read.
6. The story relates to readers’ lives.
7. The story involves people who live in the area that matches a publication’s circulation area.

How do we get that great story?

1. Listen carefully.
2. Really take an interest in what the subject has to say.
3. Start from the beginning. Often the best way to get someone’s story is to just start from the beginning and go from there. “When and where were you born?”
4. Ask him to recall what current events occurred during his lifetime and how he reacted to it.
5. Get as many details as possible. Ask her for descriptions, i.e. describe your house for me.
6. Appeal to the senses. Ask how something smelled, tasted, sounded and felt.
7. Ask open ended questions.
8. Go back for more details.
9. This is really important – listen carefully. Really care.

Sources: Various writers and storytellers, including Cynthia Flash, Jill Eileen Smith, Ira Glass, Judith Moyer and Nancy Juetten.