

## STORIES WE DON'T TELL PRESENTS: DON'T TAKE THIS ADVICE

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### — — RESOURCES: SWDT BLOGS — —

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#### 1. Write it all out.

This is a five part series to open up Season 3 of the podcast and we're calling it 'don't take this advice'. So it's five pieces of advice that you don't have to follow but that if you're feeling stuck these are some things you can do.

These are also just some tricks and tips that we've learned after doing this for years and participating in a lot of workshops and helping guide a lot of people through their stories. These are just things that we either keep coming back to or that just seemed to be helpful.

If you listen to the podcast from previous seasons you might have heard us say some of these things before. However, we thought it might be useful to really dive directly into some of them in bite-sized chunks and create a resource to some extent.

The first one is write it all out. Very simple advice. The idea is that you know you might be working on a story for a long time. You might have a lot of different thoughts about it. Or before you do anything else or at any point during your writing process you might find yourself stuck. And one of the things we advise especially early on in writing a story is to really just write out every single part of the thing you're thinking about because you might see it from a new perspective. It helps in a whole variety of ways but really trying to provide as long a description of each individual detail is very helpful.

What we think is important during the stage is not to even worry about trying to craft the story or trying to shape it in any kind of way. The point of doing this exercise is just to get all of these things out because you'll start finding those new details. You might even find new feelings about what you're trying to say. A lot of stories that people come to share at the event are stories from the past and could be from when you were a kid and you have a fixed way that you've told that story to people over the years. You've done your own internal editing as you've been sharing it in informal ways. Writing it all out is almost like opening up and unpacking the story and revisiting those experiences again.

We also censor ourselves. We avoid writing about parts of a story that we don't want to talk about. The value of digging into the details of the story and actually writing out even those seemingly unimportant parts can help you move past self-censorship and improve the story. We're not saying you have to share everything but writing it out gives you a better understanding of why the story matters to you. A lot of people that have participated in the event and have heeded this advice come away with a different perspective of how they fit into the story. What it means to them and what they're trying to say. Writing it all out can be uncomfortable sometimes but it's a good discomfort.

To wrap up, writing your story all out helps with seeing the narrative from a new perspective, discovering new details and figuring out where you are in the story.

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## 2. Find your moment.

Welcome to the Stories We Don't Tell Podcast and our mini-series about 'not taking our advice'. The idea here is you can write a great story without this advice. But if you get stuck maybe this helps.

So, you've got a whole bunch of words written down and you're trying to figure out where the story is.

Today we're looking at finding your moment and slowing things down. First you define the moment.

Finding that thing that happens - the one moment that really matters to you and inspired you to write the story in the first place.

We're dealing with pretty compact stories here. Usually about 7 to 10 minutes of time or a couple of pages. You write it all out and then you zero in. One of the issues with finding that moment or the reason why we suggest this is that sometimes people want to tell their entire life story leading up to that one thing that they think their story is about. All you need to do is set up the narrative properly and pick those details that are important to the story.

Finding the moment doesn't necessarily have to be only the climax of the story. Creating a frame for your story itself within this longer moment is important to communicate the emotions you want the audience to feel. Something that might happen is the focus of the story might change. You write out the entire story and then there's a little piece where everyone's like, "Oh that's the story."

As the storyteller and as the writer you decide how fast time moves. If you start describing the scene or space or your feelings or what's happening - the more detail you provide, the slower time feels. No one will understand and be there with you unless you really invest their time into making them feel it with you and keeping them there in that moment.

To wrap up, after writing your entire story down, find the moment your story is about and slow down time in order to make the emotions come alive.

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## 3. Context!

This is part 3 of our five part series: don't take this advice. In this episode we're talking about context and setting the scene.

We think it can take different forms. First, you want to place people in the environment with you. It depends on what kind of story you're telling, what kind of tone it is, what the theme is and what you're trying to accomplish with it. Remember that you are guiding an audience to go along with you in the story - whether emotionally or you just want them to enjoy the story or whatever. We think it is important to place yourself or whatever the story is about in some type of context. Where it is or what we're talking about here.

There's different indications or nods to the audience where you can let them know about the time period that you're in or if you're a teenager or it's a different location or a specific place. Just those things we think are important because you don't want to confuse the audience. For example, all of a sudden you say in the middle of the story, "I'm in Japan!" And the audience doesn't know what's going on. You're throwing them off. You're pulling them out of the story.

The goal should be that you're trying to get everyone to come along with you. Placing the audience in the story with you is important, but perhaps you want to remove context. Perhaps there is a reveal late in the story. But, the point here is just to start making those decisions. It's also important to understand where you are in the story. Maybe you don't want people to know you are in Japan.

Context helps you navigate through the story. We always want people to see themselves in the stories. By not placing your story, and by extension you, in your story, you run the risk of alienating the audience. They might not understand why you're doing the things you're doing and that all of that can come from the fact that you don't give them enough context to where you were at that time. And even if you end up doing something that's wrong or that they don't agree with, they'll still be in the story. It's a melding of your experiences and the audience's experiences in some kind of weird way. So: provide context!.

To wrap things up, so far you want to write out your entire story, find the specific moments you want to talk about and place those moments in context for the audience.

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## 4. Cut! Cut! Cut!

This is part four of our five part series: don't take this advice. But, if you're going to take one piece of advice, make it this one: cut, cut, cut. Basically: edit, edit, edit.

This might seem very obvious. Every piece of advice usually seems obvious but people don't do it. People just don't do it. When people don't edit, they don't fully understand what their story is about. And so they think they need to include a whole bunch of other information that doesn't necessarily relate to their actual story. And so they include a lot of parts at the beginning getting the audience all caught up, when a lot of those details might not matter. It really comes down to knowing what your story actually is about.

You can be precious with your story at the beginning but now is not the time to be precious with it. And if something's got to go it's got to go. Many times what actually happens is when you cut a part of the story, that might develop into an entirely different story. So you're never throwing anything away. But you also really have to have an understanding of what's the focus, stick to that focus and just cut the shit out of it. No one has ever said a speech is too short or a story is too short. You can also benefit from sharing your story with a trusted person. This is one moment where you want other people to read or listen to your story. You want them to tell you if a percentage of it doesn't make sense, especially if you are certain you can't get it under a certain time limit.

This is a bit of a danger zone for people because there also is a tendency to think, "It's perfect! I cannot cut another word!" You really have to be open minded in order to make the best editorial decisions for your story. You need to have a single-minded focus on what you can edit to make your story better. Sometimes that might even mean cutting the thing that made you start writing the story in the first place. To wrap up, first you write out your story, find the moment in all that writing, place your story in context and edit the shit out of it.

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## 5. The Audience

This is our final episode in our mini-series: 'don't take this advice'. We like that this is advice you shouldn't feel pressured to take. This is a safe space. We feel quite strongly about this last piece of advice.

So you have a story and it feels good but you are about to present it to an audience.

We've talked about editing. This is almost like another layer of editing where you're done writing and you're happy with the story you're going to tell. It's tight. It's great. You took all of our advice or you didn't. You start practicing your story and editing it in the way you speak. Sometimes you take out words or switch things around. Or you write in the pauses or breaks. You should just try to be mindful that you are in front of an audience and there are different little tricks and things that you can use to enhance the storytelling. You can slow down your speech, which slows down time. Or pause after a joke to give the

audience the chance to catch up. If you have a weirdly worded sentence that's going to be hard for you to get out no matter what, maybe change that sentence.

Knowing how to live inside your story in front of an audience brings more meaning to it. Or you can lose your audience by not doing it well. Be present. This sounds weird but it's like you're almost feeling the audience, which is a skill you can develop. Sometimes if you practice your story and then you kind of assume the audience will react in certain ways, it can throw you off. Different audiences completely react differently to different things. They might laugh where you didn't expect them to laugh. Just practice it see where all your beats are. Try to really be in the moment and listen to the audience - if they're laughing, let them laugh and so on.

The more comfortable you are with the story, the more comfortable the audience will be. By preparing, your head will allow your heart to reach those emotional moments. If there's a part in the story that is more emotional, you can give yourself markers to get in and out of these sections. Maybe the emotional bits are more improvised because you want to try and experience those feelings again and have the audience experience those feelings with you. But then have these markers - maybe just a word or a phrase - that pulls you back in into the story to keep it going.

To wrap up, first you write out the entire story, find the specific moment you want to talk about, place that moment in context, edit the shit out of it and then prepare it for an audience.

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## — — FURTHER ONLINE RESOURCES — —

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### 1. Website.

- [storieswedonttell.org](http://storieswedonttell.org).
- [Blog](#).
- [Podcast](#).

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### 2. Social Media.

- [Event Facebook Group](#).
- [SWDT Facebook Page](#).

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### 3. Podcast

- [iTunes](#).
- [Stitcher](#).
- [Android](#).