HARVARD
Online

Storytelling as Strategy: Narrative and AI

Syllabus

Designed for ambitious professionals who are tasked with communicating complex ideas in high-stakes settings, this course teaches learners how to frame insights as compelling narratives in order to engage stakeholders and communicate with clarity and impact. The course offers a practical, business-oriented, and AI-informed toolkit for effective story detection, diagnosis, generation, and delivery.

Modules		Expert Insights	Takeaways	Key Exercises
Module 0	**Introduction**	• Experts featured throughout this course include Esi Seng (CEO of Truff and former CEO of Tate's Bake Shop and Tom's of Maine) and Lou Shipley (three-time tech CEO and Harvard Business School lecturer).	• Get to know your professors and orient yourself with the course's structure and content.	• Reflect on your reasons for taking part in this learner journey. • Clarify your baseline knowledge and intended learner objectives.
Module 1	**Storytelling in the Professional World**		• Recognize the inherent nature of storytelling in human cognition and its impact on professional communication. • Understand why stories prove more salient than isolated facts or data points in communication efforts. • Distinguish between elements of storytelling that are enhanced by AI versus ones that should remain human-centered.	• Identify professional areas in which storytelling proves useful or effective. • Acknowledge the importance of narrative in human cognition as it relates to professional communication. • Clarify where AI can enhance storytelling and where it falls short.
Module 2	**The Foundational Story Archetypes**	• Business executive Esi Seng shares her own professional experiences that align with the different archetypes.	• Identify and analyze five foundational story archetypes that shape any narrative. • Apply these archetypes to common workplace scenarios that often need to be communicated.	• Understand the major components of the five universal story archetypes. • Practice applying these classic story archetypes to typical workplace opportunities and challenges.

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Modules		Expert Insights	Takeaways	Key Exercises
Module 3	**Detecting Stories**	• Business executive Esi Seng revisits the professional scenarios previously shared and detects various new stories living within the same conflict.	• Detect stories living within professional scenarios, using the universal archetypes as lenses through which to interpret conflict, characters, and tensions.	• Make use of the classic archetypes to identify and interpret professional stories. • Shift between archetype lenses to bring new tensions, perspectives, and possibilities into focus when interpreting a workplace scenario. • Leverage AI to brainstorm, test, and evaluate archetype application to professional situations.
Module 4	**Diagnosing Stories**	• Business executive Esi Seng engages in the act of story diagnosing, considering different archetypes to deploy when communicating the same situation to different audiences. • Business expert Lou Shipley provides insight and advice regarding active listening and intended purpose when communicating stories at work.	• Determine the optimal archetype to communicate a workplace scenario to a specific audience. • Combine story listening, audience analysis, and intended purpose to diagnose the optimal archetype for a story.	• Practice active listening to uncover the story the intended audience is already telling themselves about a situation. • Engage in audience analysis to adjust a narrative accordingly. • Reflect on a story's purpose as it relates to the desired outcome. • Leverage AI to help determine the optimal archetype to communicate a professional scenario for a specific audience.
Module 5	**Designing and Drafting Stories**	• Business executive Esi Seng offers insight on how a story's stage determines what to emphasize and when during communication. • Business expert Lou Shipley offers insight on non-chronological story telling as a way to engage and motivate audiences.	• Emphasize different stages of a story to evoke desired engagement. • Experiment with non-chronological storytelling to pique audience interest and introduce a story with the greatest emotional heft. • Shape stories based on the intended emotional trajectory for an audience. • Pace a story in accordance with time constraints as well as audience familiarity, skepticism level, and norms.	• Practice drafting stories that emphasize different stages of chronology: beginning, middle, and end. • Experiment with non-chronological and future-state storytelling. • Shape stories in accordance with Kurt Vonnegut's "shapes of stories" theory. • Leverage AI to brainstorm and pressure-test different story stages and shapes. • Leverage AI to test different levels of pacing for a story.

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Modules		Expert Insights	Takeaways	Key Exercises
Module 6	**Delivering Stories**	• Business expert Lou Shipley provides insights and advice on strong story visuals.	• Adjust voice and body to show confidence, conviction, and openness when communicating a story. • Make use of visuals to supplement, but not supplant, storytelling. • Use a story's archetype base to inform its presentation and engagement with audience response.	• Plan and practice optimal story delivery by considering voice, body, and visuals. • Consider the archetype foundational to a story and make use of it to ensure a consistent throughline when communicating to others.

Learning requirements: In order to earn a credential from Harvard Online, participants must thoughtfully complete all modules, including satisfactory completion of the associated quizzes, by stated deadlines.

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