

Adapting Narratives Job Aid

A journey to aligning your training content to classic narratives.

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Dedicated to...

*This job aid is dedicated to my loving wife and mother of my children.
May she forgive me for my inaccuracies in interpreting classic literature
for I am an art historian and she a creative writer.*

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Preface

Need inspiration for your training narrative? Look no further than the last story that you read or movie that you watched! This job aid will help guide your practice in utilizing existing narratives for developing engaging training sessions that pull your audience along a desired pathway toward identified objectives.

Consider the journey, the characters, the challenges, the theme. There are many considerations when adapting a narrative and you may choose to either make it an overt adaptation, or an invisible structure to your learning pathways. Pulling from an existing, and ideally familiar, narrative will help you to move more quickly toward your training design goals, designing training that is both engaging and memorable. I hope that the process outlined in this interactive document will assist you on this journey.



Adapting Narratives

1

Define Your Characters



An Unexpected Party

This is about empathy. The Hobbit begins with our protagonist, Bilbo, or in the scope of this narrative, you. A wandering wizard, Gandalf, approaches Bilbo and after a very brief conversation, chooses to set him off on an adventure despite Bilbo's protests. The next day a cast of dwarves introduce themselves and a journey is begun. This unexpected party is much like the peers that are alongside you in training, and the wandering

wizard is like a trainer. Each character has a story arch that can be used to drive the narrative of training.

Every story comes with its own cast of characters with their developed story arcs. **Who is your audience? Who is the narrator? Define your audience and the presenter. What are their general motivations? What challenges do they face?**

2

What Does Victory Look Like?



Roast Mutton

Define the intended outcomes for your training. Consider the organizational objectives and what the challenge or problem is that you intend your characters to face. For learning to occur, the problem should be something that they will likely fail to accomplish without help. The journey will be about providing assistance.

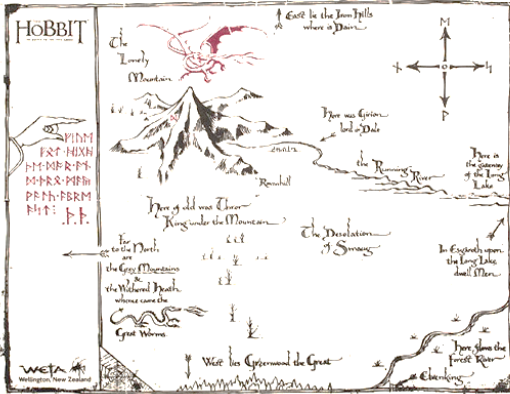
Also. Note what type of transformation is taking place for your characters. Is the experience one of knowledge building, skill building and demonstration, habit formation, changing ideals? How will you measure success?

Use the next page to define outcomes with these questions in mind.

Define your outcomes:

3

Choosing a Narrative



A Short Rest

Training participants require a clear map toward the intended objectives. It does not matter that the map demonstrates countless perils along the journey to the ultimate goal, but that there is a clear structure to follow. In *The Hobbit*, the goal was to get to the mountain, defeat Smaug, and recover the treasure and kingdom taken from the dwarves. The fact that the dragon is a formidable foe did not even enter the equation and was constantly questioned. Gandalf provides a map to Thorin and Elrond demonstrates that there are “moon letters” that reveal a hidden passage to the lower chambers. This gives the party a sense of hope.

Metaphor is important. Here we can consider hidden objectives, scaffolding, enabling objectives, and other mechanics that drive

learning. The map and the hidden objectives are similar to the journeys created within training. What is the journey that you intend to take your characters on? What might that look like?

Before you jump to the most recent book you have read or the most recent movie you watched, consider that there are a limited number of plots that most stories may be mapped to. Booker (2004) describes 7 basic plots that dominate most stories, and a few more that are also growing in popularity:

- ❖ **Overcoming the Monster:** in which the hero must venture to the lair of a monster which is threatening the community, destroy it, and escape (often with a treasure).
- ❖ **Rags to Riches:** in which someone who seems quite commonplace or downtrodden but has the potential for greatness manages to fulfill that potential.
- ❖ **The Quest:** in which the hero embarks on a journey to obtain a great prize that is located far away.
- ❖ **Voyage and Return:** in which the hero journeys to a strange world that at first is enchanting and then so threatening the hero finds he must escape and return home to safety.
- ❖ **Comedy:** in which a community divided by frustration, selfishness, bitterness, confusion, lack of self-knowledge, lies, etc. must be reunited in love and harmony (often symbolized by marriage).
- ❖ **Tragedy:** in which a character falls from prosperity to destruction because of a fatal mistake.
- ❖ **Rebirth:** in which a dark power or villain traps the hero in a living death until he/she is freed by another character's loving act.

- ❖ **Rebellion Against "The One:"** in which the hero rebels against the all-powerful entity that controls the world until he is forced to surrender to that power.
- ❖ **Mystery:** In which an outsider to some horrendous event (such as a murder) tries to discover the truth of what happened

Who are your characters? Are they knowledge based, skill based, attitude based or other? What stories have you read or movies that you have watched that fit that narrative?

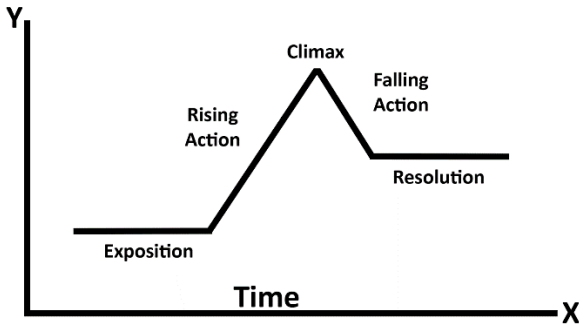
Outlining Your Narrative



Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire

Understanding how the chosen narrative connects with your trainer, participants, content, and drives these competing forces toward intended objectives requires a bird's eye perspective. This step requires that you rise above, outline the key events of your chosen existing narrative, and map it to your ideal learning

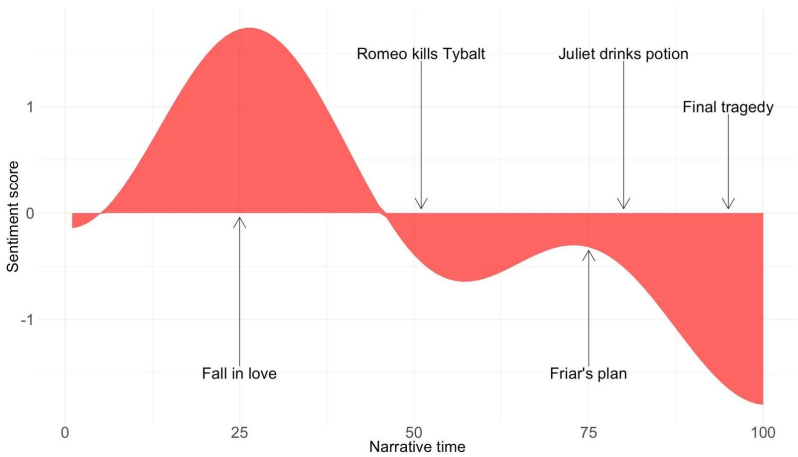
journey. The existing narrative will provide you with clear ups-and-downs demonstrated through the challenges faced by the characters within the story. Many stories may take a simple story arch following an introduction, rising action, climax, falling action and a resolution:



This story arch will also change based on the type of story. A hero journey often has the protagonist learning that they have a power or goal, failing, gaining a mentor or team to help them overcome loss, learning to hone the skills or regroup, overcome the foe or transform through the climax, and the falling action begins to tie off storylines and lead to an inevitable resolution. Thus, in a hero journey, there are often one or more challenges within the rising action that create dips in the narrative.

Tragedy narrative is a very different arc in comparison to the hero journey. Take Romeo and Juliet for instance:

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(Credit: Chart by Miriam Quick, created using R packages Syuzhet, Tidytext and Gutenberg. All charts use smoothed data)

The arc for a tragedy demonstrates pulling the audience along a climactic journey upward only to drive the narrative toward a completely negative conclusion. May a tragedy be used for training? Perhaps if the content and goals demand such a narrative.

Arcs are a great way to visualize the tempo of the pathway toward objectives. At the high level though, start with outlining the chosen narrative then outline your learning content. Where characters face challenges, consider how you may develop similar challenges to assure that your learners are on the path. On the next page, outline the plot and intent of your chosen story and develop inferences as to how your content may align to this storyline. Note several things along this path including (but not limited to):

- ❖ Zone of proximal development
- ❖ Outcome alignment (enabling or terminal)

- ❖ Scaffolded skills, knowledge, or attitudes developed at each step
- ❖ In driving the narrative, is the interaction informational, dialogue, feedback, practice, or demonstration of evidence?

Outline your chosen narrative with the above considerations. Use plot summaries or have the text in front of you where possible. Return then and outline your training content and outcomes and develop a cross-walk between the classic narrative and your intended training pathway.

How Overt Is Your Narrative?



Barrels Out of Bond

Does your chosen narrative need to be overt? No. You can use your magic ring to turn a narrative into an invisible structure. The chapter in *The Hobbit* where The Company is captive to the Wood Elves, Bilbo takes his time while invisible to study and understand the systems of the captors. In doing so, he invisibly puts events in motion that allow him to pull his companions out of bondage. He models a design-thinking approach and also metaphorically demonstrates the importance of invisibility in some cases.

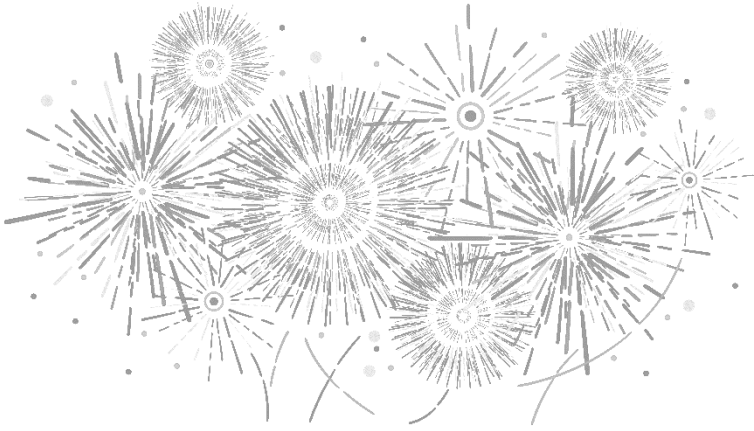
You can use a magic ring and make the narrative an invisible structure. The narrative is a mechanic that drives learners down a pathway. Underlying that narrative is a pattern that can be utilized to provide structure to your content and experience. If I went to my client and said, let's do a fantasy journey using *The Hobbit* to teach government workers racial equity habits, they may have fired me. The important thing here is that I used the inspiration and structuring of challenges from an existing narrative structure to form a baseline for scaffolding my content delivery and reinforcement.

Can we slip off the ring and make the underlying narrative more overt? Sure! For instance, you can create a training on relieving organizational stress (and tackle cultural competence) by using the narrative, "Around the World in 80 Days" to have employees experience different cultural approaches to stress relief. In this instance, you would want to immerse the participants in the experience of the narrative so that they may suspend disbelief and fully engage the content to develop clear habits.

A simple question here is how overt do you want to approach the narrative you have chosen based on your topic?

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MAKE IT POP!



Inside Information

What elements can you add to drive the narrative? This is where the theme comes in and the theme should match the topic. For example, you likely don't want to develop a comedic style for developing racial equity training. But you may want to bring in comedy when trying to teach someone about how to be engaging in meetings.

This is the point where I would begin applying more of the gamification lens to designing mechanics that drive the narrative in a meaningful way that furthers alignment to trainee motivations. Consider how the plot and different story arcs align

with identified motivators (according to a Reiss motivation profile). For instance, stories overcoming the monster may directly align with motivations such as adventure, independence, power, and vengeance, but may also align with expedience, honor, idealism, interdependence, physical activity, or status depending on the plot and context.

Steve Abrams of Sententia Gamification provides a general alignment of motivators to 7 basic stories:

Plot	Motivations	Plot Dependent
Overcoming the Monster	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Adventure (Low Tranquility) ❖ Independence ❖ Power ❖ Vengeance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Expedience (low honor) ❖ Honor ❖ Idealism ❖ Interdependence (low independence) ❖ Physical Activity ❖ Status
Rags to Riches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Adventure (Low Tranquility) ❖ Independence ❖ Power ❖ Status ❖ Vengeance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Expedience (low Honor) ❖ Honor ❖ Idealism ❖ Interdependence, Low Independence)
Quest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Adventure (Low Tranquility) ❖ Honor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Order ❖ Physical Activity ❖ Power

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Idealism ❖ Independence ❖ Power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Savings ❖ Status ❖ Vengeance
Voyage and Return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Adventure (Low Tranquility) ❖ Honor ❖ Idealism ❖ Independence ❖ Power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Curiosity ❖ Expedience (Low Honor) ❖ Physical Activity ❖ Power ❖ Status ❖ Vengeance
Comedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Order ❖ Social Contact ❖ Tranquility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Acceptance ❖ Expedience (Low Honor)
Tragedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Honor ❖ Vengeance 	
Rebirth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Honor ❖ Idealism ❖ Independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Acceptance ❖ Curiosity ❖ Power

Knowing such alignment allows consideration of other mechanics such as feedback and reward systems, branching, choice points, non-player characters, or other mechanisms to drive the story.

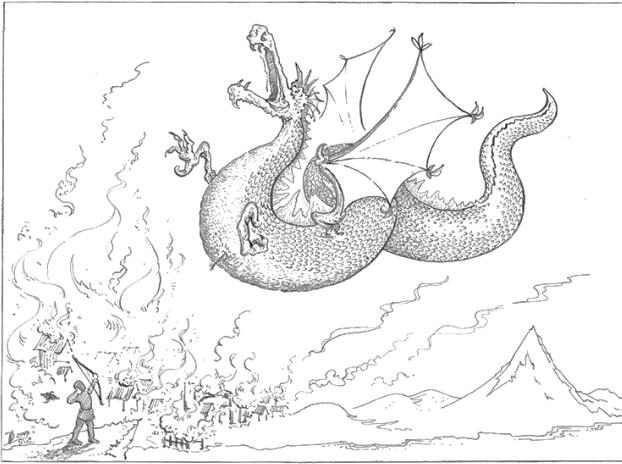
Let us not forget about the importance of good graphic design. Adapting narratives and suspending disbelief in your audience

requires real work toward graphic design and meeting audience expectations for engagement.

Use this page to brainstorm your fireworks. What game mechanics might be useful to incorporate? What graphic elements are necessary? What is the style?

7

Develop, Implement, and Iterate



Fire and Water

You identified a massive beast and implemented a narrative-based solution. You conquered the dragon. Now what?

Collect feedback and understand the effectiveness of your narrative in delivering results. Adjust as necessary. As we have been referring to *The Hobbit*, defeating Smaug was just the beginning of another cataclysmic event. Smaug was relatively easy to overcome despite his massive frame, needing only a single arrow in the correct place.

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Designing Innovation

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