

The Pixar Method / The Story Spine

Widely known as the Pixar method this was developed by Kenn Adams as a method for creating a story in an improv setting. It is a way of using starter sentences to put all your information into a story structure.

How it works

Complete these sentences with your story. Use 'Because of that' as many times as you need – but try to keep it to a maximum of 5-7 if you need them to be memorable.

Once upon a time...	The beginning which includes the 'inciting incident' – often comes from your brief / why you did the work. Decide how much to reveal about the conclusion up front.
Every day...	
Until one day...	
Because of that...	The middle: the biggest section which can get bogged down by too much information. Boil down the steps to overarching sentences . Once you have each 'because' you then treat them as mini stories with their own beginning, middle & end
Because of that...	
Because of that...	
Until finally...	Your big ending: it needs to show how it relates back to the beginning. How have you answered the question raised at the start?
And ever since then...	

Example

Here is an example using an Insight project. It's unlikely that you'd have the full answer to 'ever since then' when first presenting the story as you will only have completed the insight work. Instead this section can be possible next steps / recommendations.

Once upon a time...	There was a highly successful fundraising department.
Every day...	We were steadily recruiting new supporters using reliable methods.
Until one day...	These methods no longer worked and our supporter numbers were declining.
Because of that...	We decided to look at how people perceived us and our cause and develop a new proposition.
Because of that...	We identified five different types of reasons people might support us and held focus groups.
Because of that...	We developed a set of phrases and images that worked well and we quantified these with a survey.
Until finally...	We had a tested proposition we knew would attract new supporters.
And ever since then...	We've rebranded our charity, redeveloped our major campaigns and recruited new supporters.

Tips

When using this method it can be helpful to start with pen, paper and post-it notes, so that you can move around the content you have to where it best fits. Also treat this as a first draft for you, don't worry about getting it perfect first time – you are telling yourself the story to start with.

Blank version to copy

You can copy and paste this to create your own version:

Once upon a time... Set the scene	
Every day... Starting state – before the project	
Until one day... What prompted the project?	
Because of that...	
Because of that...	
Because of that...	
Until finally... What did you find? Answer the question from 'until one day'	
And ever since then... Include recommendations / next steps	