

THE STORY CIRCLE & SCRIPT WORKSHOP: DEFINITIONS AND TIPS

Overview: The Story Circle vs. the Script Workshop

STORY CIRCLE

In typical digital storytelling practice, the **story circle** is an occasion for participants to talk through their early-stage story ideas and get feedback that will help them to better tell their stories.

In the story circle, the storyteller drives the process: he or she may read an early draft, read part of a draft, or simply talk through ideas. Facilitators might give story circle participants a prompt – for example, to find and tell the group about a meaningful personal photo – or the discussion can be more free form. In the story circle, storyteller can sit back and take group feedback, or be more active, asking questions of the circle members.

The overall goal of the story circle is for the storyteller to move toward greater comfort with and insight about the story that he or she wants to tell.

SCRIPT WORKSHOP

The script workshop is a peer review session that happens after workshop participants have a chance to draft a script. Each storyteller reads their script aloud to the group, and then sits back and listens to feedback from peers and facilitators.

Each storyteller is typically allocated 10-15 minutes to read their script, get feedback, and ask questions.

Tips for the Story Circle

Remember that the goals of the **story circle** are for each participant to share his or her initial story idea(s), determine his/her comfort with telling this story publicly, and entertain questions and ideas that help to better articulate his/her experience and insights.

Ideas shared in the story circle are often underdeveloped and in some cases, provisional: it's not unusual for participants to heavily revise or even completely redo their stories after the story circle.

TIPS FOR STORYTELLERS IN THE STORY CIRCLE

- When it's your turn to present your story idea(s), consider what feedback you feel you most need at this point. Orient the rest of the group before you begin reading (e.g., "I have a draft that I feel is an okay start: I'm just going to read it." Or, "I'm not sure how to tell this story. I'm going to talk through my idea, and I want you to tell me what you think is interesting in it, where you connect.").
- Use the time productively: ask questions; take notes.

TIPS FOR THOSE GIVING FEEDBACK IN THE STORY CIRCLE

- Typically, a story circle has a *facilitator*: someone who is in charge of managing time, keeping the discussion positive and constructive, and synthesizing feedback. The facilitator doesn't do all or even most of the talking, but does interject to keep the discussion productive.
- If a storyteller gets emotional, the facilitator should ask if he or she would prefer to continue, or prefer to move on to the next person and resume later.
- If you have questions about the details, meaning, or backstory of a story, ask the storyteller to clarify! One of the hardest tasks of telling a personal story is deciding how much context to provide, and your honest questions will help the storyteller see what needs more explanation and/or context.

Tips for the Script Workshop

Remember that the purpose of the **script workshop** is to test-drive scripts, which may still be too long or unshapely, but should still be on topics that the storytellers are pretty sure they'll stick with.

TIPS FOR STORYTELLERS IN THE SCRIPT WORKSHOP

- You may give a *little* preface to your script before you read – for example, tell us things you'd like us to pay attention to in our comments (“how can I make this shorter?”) – but please no comments that will color our response. This means no apologies (“this really stinks, I just couldn't say what I wanted to”), no evaluative statements (“this is terrible,” or, “I read this to my mom and she loved it”), and no comments regarding how long the writing took (“I went through five drafts already – I'm close to done, I think”). You can see how each of these comments might make those giving feedback feel awkward or inhibited in offering feedback.
- Read the draft as if it is your final script, slowly and with heart.
- Try not to be defensive about your writing. This can be tough, but keep in mind that even the most talented writers revise a ton. Words are difficult materials. Also remember that giving story feedback is an acquired skill, and sometimes those giving will be more blunt in their feedback than you (and often they) would like.
- Writing down the feedback that you hear from the group is a good idea. The notes can help you ask follow-up questions.

TIPS FOR THOSE GIVING FEEDBACK IN THE SCRIPT WORKSHOP

- Don't be afraid to give feedback. The best and most natural comments are simply responses:
 - How did the story as a whole affect you?
 - What moments do you remember? What particular parts resonated with you?
 - What line(s) stuck out?

- After these responses, think about giving feedback on the story's structure:
 - Is there any change in the story? That is, do we see the narrator's approach to life change over the course of the story?
 - Does the story have a clear conflict, where something really feels at stake? If not, can you see a conflict that might be developed more?
 - Is there a clear beginning, middle and end?
 - Are there parts that might be cut, condensed, or rearranged to make the story more suspenseful?
 - Do you see any central images or themes emerging? What are they?
- Finally, a little 'multimedia thinking' can also yield helpful comments: is something said that might be better accomplished through text slides (words typed onto a slide) or an image? Did specific visuals enter your mind during certain parts of the story?