



STORYTELLING



ICRC



IFRC



1. STORYTELLING

1.1 WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

By definition, storytelling is quite simple: to share a good story with an audience from which you have to engage or get a reaction (laughter, empathy, sadness, action).

In this section, we cover some of the essential ingredients to finding and telling a good story. Then, we will talk about how to craft a story that gets across messages, experiences, solutions and life lessons to evoke powerful emotions and insights. As you proceed as a storyteller, please think about what kind of stories you want to tell.

Where do I find a good story and how?

To tell a story, first you have to find it. Here are some recommendations to help you find a good story to tell:

- **Talk with people** in your surroundings, listen to them, everyone has a story to tell.
- **Find trends in social media.** For example, look at the trending topics on Twitter, that will give you an idea of what is happening at the moment and see if there is a story to tell.
- **Ask your contacts in the organization,** they are closer to the people and their needs so they could tell you if there is a worthy story to tell.
- **Use your own experience,** what are the topics you are interested on, what people you know that are related to the topic.
- **Identify problems** or emergencies happening in your context.



Which are the key elements I should look for?

There are so many ways to tell the stories you identify. And these are some of the key ingredients you can look out for:

A character or characters who overcome a challenge.

Example: [Philippine seaweed](#) farmers find a solution to storm damage.



A conflict of some kind between competing interests.

Example: We need data from people to ensure effectiveness, but [how can we protect that data?](#)



Sometimes a good story is just factual recount of something important that happened that affects a lot of people.

Example:

- o 10,000 people arrived today fleeing conflict
- o The Red Cross delivered 10,000 hygiene kits



Something unusual happened.

Example: [A Syrian refugee living at an airport for 7 months.](#)



An interesting person did something cool, inspiring or funny.

Example: [Young people in Uganda make paper bags to help the environment.](#)



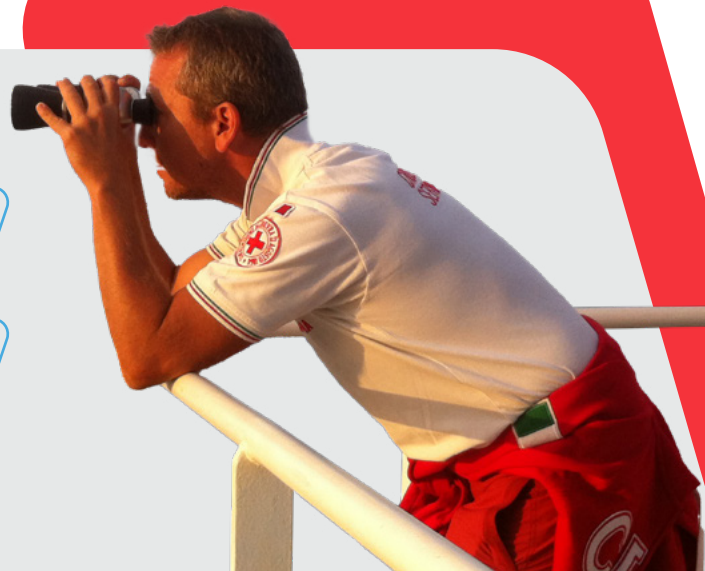
These are just a few story models to explore, and sometimes good stories have all these elements.

WHAT KIND OF STORIES DO YOU WANT TO TELL?

For more tips on how to find a story:

NPR: [3 simple ways to find story ideas](#)

Writers.com: [7 ways to come up with story ideas](#)



1.2 THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG IN STORYTELLING

It's up to you to determine the best kinds of stories and the ways to tell them according to your audience's preferences, the needs of your National Society, the tools at your disposal, and even things like your personal style, talents and passions.

Quick tips: things to think about

To tell a story, first you have to find it. Here are some recommendations to help you find a good story to tell:



Who do I want to talk to?



What media will you use to tell your story?



In which platform will your story live? This will influence the kind of story and how it will be told.



Is the story interesting?



How will your National Society promote this story? Will it be part of a larger campaign, or be linked to an event or key date?



What do you want your audience to do? They will remember a story more easily and it will be more impactful when we invite people to **take action**.

1.3 GETTING STARTED: HOW TO TELL A GOOD STORY?

So, you have a great idea for a story. But you do not know how to tell it? We recommend you follow a few steps before you head out to gather/produce your story:

Decide what kind of story you are telling

Is it for entertainment, inspiration, education or information? The theme will determine the format, outcomes and platforms where you'll place your story. It will also determine the elements you will need to create your it, the people to involve, and the questions to ask.

For example, if the story is about someone's personal experience and it's mainly intended to get people to empathize with their personal situation, you will take a very different approach than a newsy story about the latest developments in an unfolding emergency, which would be more informational.

Do some research and plan accordingly:

Even if your subject matter is very specific to one person's story, you will need to do some basic research to better understand the subject you are dealing with and the audience you are trying to reach. This way, you can ask better questions, gain more trust and deliver a

more relevant story if you research the topic at hand.

You can ask yourself, has this story been told and if so, how can it be told differently? How does this person's story relate to larger trends (for example, climate change, migration, conflict or disasters)?

To look for trends, you can ask your communications colleagues at your National Society and ask them what kind of thematic priorities they are focusing on.

You can also use a process called 'social listening'. This process consists of listening to what people are saying about a particular situation by trying to measure social media sentiment through research. To do this, you can use free tools such as:

Google Trends

Google Alerts



Or simply searching for topics or hashtags on different social media sites

Here are some examples of different kinds of stories.

LinkedIn: 7 types of video storytelling for social media

Forbes: Storytelling and the power of social media



Here is an example on how to use these tools and make a better research: **TUTORIAL.**

Write a catchy pitch:

One good way to help you define your story is to write a pitch – a one-paragraph (150 word) catchy summary that will convince others that your story is fantastic. A pitch is composed by these elements:

- **Start with a hook:** You can put a question, a statement, a phrase, a statistic or something that will capture the audience attention.
- **Describe the problem:** Be clear and concise to describe the problem or necessity that the story is presenting.
- **Give a solution/raise awareness on the importance of this issue:** If there is a solution you can emphasize in that, and if there is not, you can describe how to help or what is needed to give a relief. However, we don't always need to provide a solution. Explaining why a particular problem matters is also important in storytelling.
- **Conclusion:** Close your pitch with a call to action, be clear on what you want the viewer to do or think. A strong finish makes your story have more impact.



Here are some examples:

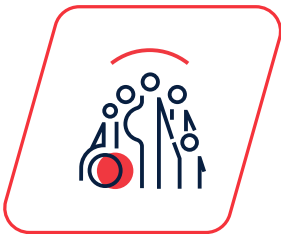
- **Indeed:** How to pitch a story
- **Muck Rack:** How to write a pitch: examples and best practices.



Know your target audience, people involved and culture

As part of your research, take time to think about your audiences, the kinds of topics they are interested in and what kinds of stories and platforms they like.

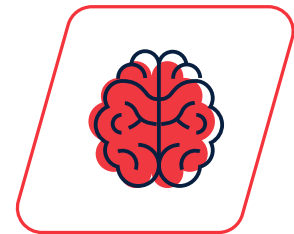
FIRST: Define who this story is directed to. These are aspects that will help you target the right audience: You can define some variables to determine your target audience:



Demographic: age, education, gender, occupation, family status and income.



Geographic: where are they located, country, city, district, etc.



Psychographic: Type of personality, lifestyle, attitudes, interests and values.

This process of choosing your target is called audience **segmentation**. It is often referred to as the 'profile' of the ideal person you want to reach with your message and it helps determine how your story appeals to them.





SECOND: Know the people you need to do the story – your characters. Here are some tips to approach the people you want to interview or take photos of:

- Try to **contact them before** you do the production of the video or photo, if it is not possible because is an emergency, at least talk to them first to ask for permission and explain them what your story is about.
- If possible, **share the questions before** and do a practice with them. If the story is made of photos, tell them what kind of photos you would like, when, where and if they need to bring something.
- Always **present yourself with trust and respect**, telling the truth about your story, in what platform it's going to be published and what organization are you representing.
- **Get a signed consent form.** This is a form that allows us to use the photos or videos in different platforms with the authorization of the person/s involved.
- **Consider if you would need an interpreter** , since it is possible you don't speak the same language of the interviewee, consider contacting a person who speaks the local language. If this is not possible you can use an app that translates simultaneously, like "Say hi"
- **Use the pitch** you made to approach someone you want to talk to, that will give them a general idea of what you want to achieve.
- **Be grateful** and motivate the person to talk freely. Make sure that people you are interacting with understand that their participation in your story is not linked to them receiving or not receiving assistance.
- Remember that **you are in charge**, tell them where to stand/sit, what to do, if you want them to repeat or explain something further. Be confident and transmit that confidence to the person.
- **Help your interviewee feel comfortable.** It is normal for the person to be nervous or to not know how to act in front of a camera. You can practice together first, but try to find a good balance – too many rehearsals might lead to less authenticity. Sometimes a silence is worth a thousand words.

THIRD: Think about which parts of your story will be most interesting to your target audience. Your story will stand out more if you tap into the culture of your audience and make it relatable to them.



What do they like to eat or do?



What motivates them?



What entertains them?



What inspires them?



What popular trends are they interested in?

Examples: Telling the humanitarian story through:

Do-it-yourself videos
Cooking: for food lovers

Nature and environment
Science



2. BUILDING YOUR STORY

2.1 THE 5 W'S

Defining the 5 W's (who, what, where, when, why) in storytelling helps to establish a clear and complete narrative by answering the essential questions about your story, making it more engaging and understandable to the audience.

What

is the story you want to tell?

Who

is it about? / Who is your main character? / Who do I want to talk to?

Where

is the story happening? Is there just one location, or are there other secondary locations that will help provide further insight into your story? Do you need to investigate access, permissions, or any health and safety requirements?

Why

did this happen / Why is this happening? Why are the people doing what they are doing?

When

is the story unfolding? Do you need to take visuals over a long period? Could you incorporate archival audiovisual material into your story?

Bonus

How did this story happen (is it happening)?

These questions will help ensure your story covers all the essential elements, as well as help you tell a unique and interesting story.

More info:

NPR: Beyond the 5w's, what should you ask before starting a story?



2.2 STORY COMPONENTS

With the questions answered before, you can define the components of your video or photo stories. These components are:



- **Character(s):** Who is it about
- **Setting:** Where does it unfold
- **Plot:** The sequence of events that make up the story, including the character's actions, reactions, and decisions that drive the narrative forward towards the resolution or conclusion.
- **Conflict/problem:** Refers to the main obstacle or challenge that the character(s) must face and overcome in order to achieve their goals, driving the plot forward.
- **Resolution/conclusion:** This is an essential part of any story. Think about how you want it to end, and what will the audience take away. If this is a story with no resolution, consider ending with a call to action to improve the situation and raise awareness to the problem.

These components will help you share an emotion to your target audience and motivate them to take action when needed.

TIP: If your story is intended for social media, try to always think about solutions. People are more likely to watch a story that is uplifting or where there is a committed person, a clever idea or an interesting approach that is helping people solve a problem.



2.3 DEFINE YOUR FORMAT.

Would this story be better as a video, text, audio or photo story? For now, you just need to define the format, in chapter 4 you will learn how to make more professional productions using the equipment you have at hand.

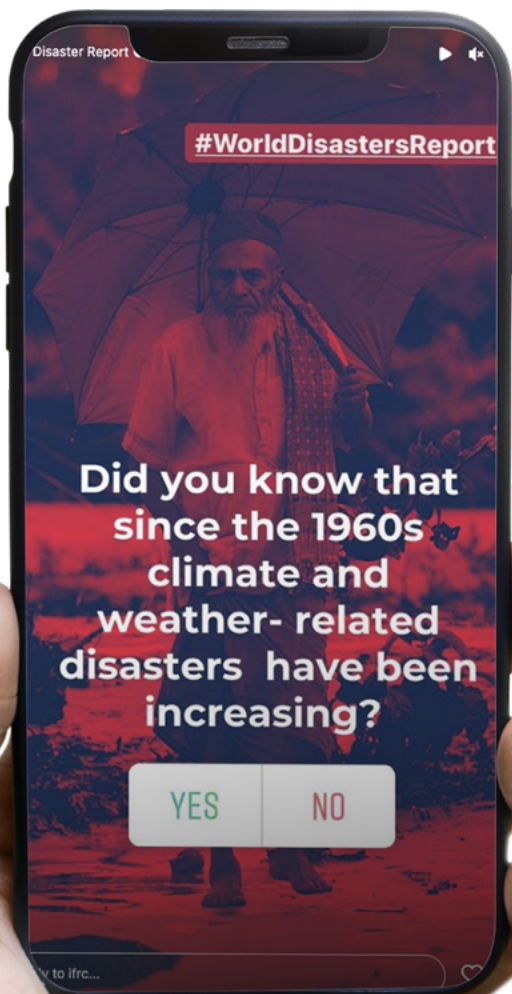
Key photo formats:



Photo sequences: A series of images in a thread describing a specific moment or a series of events in a given period of time.

Social media assets:

- Photos with design or text. Take the photo thinking of the spaces you need in the image where you will put a design or text (a section of sky, for example).
- Photos for posts in square format (twitter threads, Instagram carousel, Instagram/facebook stories...)
- Photos for IG stories in vertical format



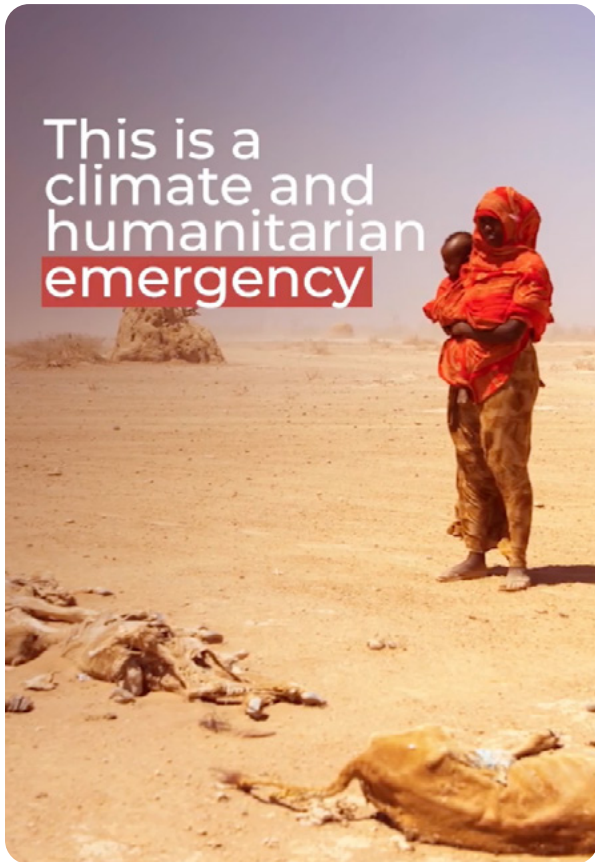


To tell a good story using **photos** you can use the next tips:

- **Decide your composition**
Composition is to decide what goes into the photo and where, as well as what's left out. What you decide that goes on your composition will determine the success of your photo.
 - **Engage with the people or places** you are taking the photo of. Become part of the moment you are photographing.
 - **Capture the in-between moments.** Try to capture every stage of the experience you are photographing.
- Do not wait only for the end result of the event or situation, you can capture the process and find yourself immerse in the experience and get better material.
 - Since you want to **tell more natural stories**, try not to do poses, try to document it as it is and to find better angles of the story.
 - **Focus on the smaller details.** Those details are important to tell the story, for example if you are photographing a farmer, take photos of his hands, his tools, the crops, detail every part of their experience.

AS THEY SAY, A PHOTO SAYS MORE THAN A THOUSAND WORDS.

Key Video formats:



Interviews: focusing on one or more characters and asking the right questions for them to tell their story in their own words. To make it compelling, make sure to capture supporting videos (or as we call it: B-Roll) that will illustrate what your interviewee is saying. Also, to make interviews you have to make the right questions, here are some tips to make good questions:

Start with a question that introduces your interviewee, it could include the name, background information and maybe some creative question to break the ice, for example to ask about something that the person likes.

Avoid yes or no questions, instead use open ended questions to get a better answers.

Do not be afraid to ask 'dumb questions'. Not everyone in your audience will know everything about the theme you want to talk about. So, it is important to be as clear as possible.

Plan and do follow up questions. If you consider there is more to the story, you can ask questions like "how" or "tell me more".

Repeat as much as you can if you consider you need more or if the person is too nervous.

Remember that you can edit the video, so if the person makes mistakes, you don't have to worry.

Video story with text: compiling a series of shots (B-Roll) to illustrate a story, taking long shots and calculating the space to layover the texts.

Voice over videos: Write the text you want the voice to narrate first, if possible, so that when you shoot the footage you know exactly what you need to capture. This will help you get different shots to show and describe the story.



Video with actors and defined dialogues:

This style can support videos with interviews to recreate a story that already happened or tell a new story.

- It's important to define your dialogues and search your actors and locations before you shoot the footage.



Vlogs: videos of you or someone else talking about a theme directly to the audience, supporting it with b-roll or photos.



Selfie videos. Particularly for social media. A person in a friendly tone talking directly to the camera, recording him or herself. Usually, they are in a relevant setting/location to show what they are seeing/working on.



LET'S PRACTICE!

Make a list of 5 story ideas. Think about interesting people within your Red Cross or Red Crescent branch, activities or interesting projects your branch is developing, interesting people from the communities you support as a volunteer/staff.

1. Choose two of these story ideas and for each respond the 5W questions we did before, to make sure your story has all the elements we need.
2. Describe what is the problem and what is the solution (if any).
3. Suggest which format and platforms would be best for your two stories.