'Engaging Student and Staff Voices'

How to…..produce digital stories with students and staff in higher education

# What does a good digital story look like?

Consider an assortment of examples from different disciplines to really understand the range of functions from various software packages. Have a look through the student and staff resources published by [Sheffield Hallam](https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/steer/digital-storytelling-shu/), [Yorkshire Universities](https://yorkshireuniversities.ac.uk/2017/10/25/digital-storytelling-for-hard-to-reach-students/), Advance-HE, advice from [Chris Thomson @JISC](https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/telling-better-digital-stories-20-jun-2014), and the power of [Patient Stories](https://www.patientstories.org.uk/). You will see how images can represent difficult concepts and how the timing and frequency of text can be hugely emotive. Some definition may be needed (narration or text), but don’t over use text that can't be read quickly (consider your audience and inclusivity). Audio can also provide powerful messages, especially if the narration is by the storyteller. Allocating time to a final edit before publishing can focus on slide transitions, music volume and sound quality to ensure maximum impact. But, the best way to learn how to produce digital stories, and then to teach others, is to produce one yourself!

# How long does it take to produce a digital story?

Effective sessions are premised on confidence building, both with the elements of storytelling and with the technology. This will take some time which will need planning and resourcing. In practice, a 2 hour session (in two parts), with a group of no more than 10 students or staff could produce a complete or partial digital story depending on confidence. Part A could provide an introduction to digital storytelling, utilising some of the resources above to generate discussions. Part B would be time and space to develop a written story (notes are fine), storyboard (doodles are fine) and to play around with choosing images (from internet stock or personal files). Build in peer support and discussion to help develop stories and test comfort levels. Importantly, obtain consent from participants to take part and to use the stories *as data* on completion (obtained separately at the beginning and the end of the session). You may need to find additional time and space to support participants with audio recording (microphones advisable), although many participants feel confident using their own equipment, in their own spaces.

# I'm now doubting my own digital capability, what 'tech' do I need?

Participants can be encouraged to bring their own device (IPad works well) or laptop. Send details of the software and any access requirements (e.g. Google account) beforehand to avoid issues in the session. In addition, either book a networked IT room, provide laptops or source a handful of IPads (easiest) from your IT department and taken them along, pre-loaded with any software or apps (such as Adobe Spark). Also take along microphone/headsets (you will need a big bag, or a willing helper) just in case your participants make good progress and are ready to record.

# What is my role as researcher in the storytelling process?

The reflexivity of the researcher is an interesting consideration. Your facilitation of the sessions should allow stories to develop organically in a way the storyteller is happy with. However, as a researcher you will need to be mindful of ethical parameters and will need to manage any risks for the participant and any associated stakeholders implicated in the story (friend, family, employer etc.). Also be mindful of your own wellbeing. You may find some participant stories emotional and upsetting.

# There must be serious ethical considerations here, what should I expect to deal with?

A well-crafted information sheet and consent form is a good start (see QAA example). This should cover the potential impact on storyteller, the right to withdraw (from the participant sessions and from sharing their digital story), functions which can assure anonymity (no personal images or storyteller narration) and any disclosures which may impact on associated stakeholders. Participants should also ensure that all images are attributed/referenced on the final slide (some software e.g. Adobe Spark, will automatically do this for stock images - students love this). If participants are searching the internet for suitable images they may need a quick lesson in Creative Commons licensing.

# We have produced 5 digital stories, where can they be stored and how can they be used?

Remember to teach participants how to save and share their digital stories, either as a file or web link. Web links will always require internet access to view (and rely on the software package saving your video and always being live). Digital files will need suitable storage capacity. Alternatively, the digital files can be uploaded to a video platform such as Vimeo or YouTube and embedded within presentations, blogs or websites. If you are using the digital stories as data you will now need to consider your approach to analysis (work on narrative and visual research can help here). The stories could also be used in various ways by the institution such as marketing/branding videos for prospective students or as conversation starters for discussions about organisational change. In some cases, you may need to consider the inclusion of a trigger warning, or tags of content, for prospective viewers. In all cases, participants should be informed at the outset as to exactly how their stories are going to be used and where they will be published.

# Ugh, is it really worth it?

Yes! Once you have created session resources, these can be adapted and reused. Once you have created and shared your own digital story you will understand how to teach others. The digital stories do not need to be polished productions. They need to communicate ideas and emotions. They should be accessible and easy to create, and empowering during and post production. The impact on the participant and the researcher is the most difficult to anticipate, but this mirrors most social science research practices. Enjoy!



This document has been produced and published by Liz Austen of the Directorate of Student Engagement, Evaluation and Research at Sheffield Hallam University based on content provided by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). As such, this document may contain content that is not wholly endorsed by QAA.

