

A Story from Start to Finish

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Storyboarding

Why Do a Storyboard?

A storyboard is a sketch of how to organize a story and a list of its contents.

A storyboard helps you:

- Define the parameters of a story within available resources and time
- Organize and focus a story
- Figure out what medium to use for each part of the story

How to Do a Rough Storyboard

A multimedia story is some combination of video, text, still photos, audio, graphics and interactivity presented in a nonlinear format in which the information in each medium is complementary, not redundant. So your storyboard should be put together with all those elements in mind.

The first thing to tackle is the part about the story being nonlinear.

1. *Divide the story into its logical, nonlinear parts, such as:*

- a lead or nut paragraph, essentially addressing why this story is important
- profiles of the main person or people in the story
- the event or situation
- any process or how something works
- pros and cons
- the history of the event or situation
- other related issues raised by the story

Instead of thinking "first part," "second part," "third part," "fourth part", think "this part", "that part", "another part", and "yet another part". It helps to avoid linear thinking. The home page comprises a headline, nut graph, an establishing visual (can be a background or central photograph, a slide show or a video), and links to the other parts, which are usually subtopics of the overall story.

Next, divide the contents of the story among the media -- video, still photos, audio, graphics and text.

1. *Decide what pieces of the story work best in video.* Video is the best medium to depict action, to take a reader to a place central to the story, or to hear and see a person central to the story.

2. *Decide what pieces of the story work best in still photos.* Still photos are the best medium for emphasizing a strong emotion, for staying with an important point in a story, or to create a particular mood. They're often more dramatic and don't go by as quickly as video. Still photos used in combination with audio also highlight emotions. Panorama or 360-degree photos, especially combined with audio, also immerse a reader in the location of the story.
3. *Does the audio work best with video, or will it be combined with still photos?* Good audio with video is critical. Bad audio makes video seem worse than it is and detracts from the drama of still photos. Good audio makes still photos and video seem more intense and real. Avoid using audio alone.
4. *What part of the story works best in graphics?* Animated graphics show how things work. Graphics go where cameras can't go, into human cells or millions of miles into space. Sometimes graphics can be a story's primary medium, with print, still photos and video in supporting roles.
5. *Does the story need a map?* Is the map a location map, or layered with other information? GIS (geographic information systems) and satellite imaging are important tools for reporters. Interactive GIS can personalize a story in a way impossible with text by letting readers pinpoint things in their own cities or neighborhoods - such as crime or meth labs or liquor stores or licensed gun dealers.
6. *What part of the story belongs in text?* Text can be used to describe the history of a story (sometimes in combination with photos); to describe a process (sometimes in combination with graphics), or to provide first-person accounts of an event. Often, text is what's left over when you can't convey the information with photos, video, audio or graphics.
7. *Make sure the information in each medium is complementary, not redundant.* A little overlap among the different media is okay. It's also useful to have some overlap among the story's nonlinear parts, as a way to invite readers to explore the other parts of the story. But try to match up each element of a story with the medium that best conveys it.
8. *Interactivity means giving the reader both input and control in a story.* By making the story nonlinear, you've introduced an element of interactivity, because the user can choose which elements of a story to read or view and in which order. By including [online forums](#) or chats, you give readers input into a story. Some news sites have included interactive games so the reader can construct his own story. One newspaper let people help plan a waterfront redevelopment project with an [online game](#) in which they placed icons on a map of the waterfront showing where they thought parks, ballfields, restaurants, shops and so on should be located. For more examples of how news Web sites are including different types of interactivity, check out J-Lab -- the [Institute for Interactive Journalism](#).

When you're done breaking a story down into its elements - both in terms of its content and the different media you could use - you need to reassemble all that into a rough storyboard.

On a sheet of paper, sketch out what the main story page will look like and the elements it will include. What's the nut graph? What are the links to the other sections of the story? What's the menu or navigation scheme for accessing those sections? What multimedia elements do you want to include on the main page as the establishing visuals, whether video or pictures.

Then do the same for the other "inside" pages that will be the other parts, or subtopics, in your overall story. What is the main element on each page and what other information should be included there? What video, audio, pictures or graphics would best tell this part of the story?

A rough storyboard doesn't have to be high art - it's just a sketch. And it isn't written in stone - it's just a guide. You may very well change things after you go into the field to do your interviews and other reporting.

What storyboarding does is help point out the holes in your story. It helps you identify the resources (time, equipment, assistance) you'll need to complete the story, or how you have to modify the story to adjust to your resources. A good way to learn storyboarding is to take a newspaper feature story and sketch out a storyboard of all the elements in it, the multimedia possibilities if it were more than a print story and how you might break it up into a nonlinear Web presentation.

Example - Dancing Rocks Rough Storyboard

Here's a rough storyboard for the "Dancing Rocks" story.

From the preliminary interview in which [Dr. Paula Messina explained](#) what she does in the field, [her Web site](#), and a [review of an existing story](#), the content -- existing and anticipated -- broke down into:

Nonlinear parts -- Home page with four inside pages. The four parts are the quest (research), a bio (of Messina), the rocks (how they move), and the site of the dancing rocks, Death Valley's Racetrack Playa (its colorful history).

Video -- Anticipate video from the field trip: Messina mapping the rock trails, assembling her gear, the trip to and from the playa.

Audio -- Anticipate audio from the field trip: Messina explaining how she works, what the gear does, and why she does what she does. Maybe what the Racetrack Playa sounds like.

Still photos -- Available from Messina's Web site, and professional photographers, if necessary. Anticipate grabbing still photos from video of wide-angle shots of the playa, rocks and trails, maybe Death Valley National Park rangers.

Graphics -- Existing aerial photo, maps and rock trails.

Text -- History of research, history of the Racetrack Playa from interviews with Messina, other researchers, and the park rangers.

This is a sketch the rough storyboard (click for larger versions):



Home page -- Background photo of Messina and sliding rock in Racetrack Playa, with headline and four links to inside pages.



The Quest -- Research history and application in text, how Messina did her research in video, and a competing theory in text and photos, if available.



Bio -- Messina background in text, why she does what she does in video, day-in-the-life-of-a-high-tech geologist in photos grabbed from video and text captions.



Rocks -- Pick up graphic from Messina's Web site and use text blocks to explain in more detail than research page how rocks move. Maybe highlight a couple of rocks to show trails -- photos, graphics from Messina's Web site.



Racetrack Playa -- History in text, map placing it in Death Valley, and photos of playa, perhaps park rangers on patrol.

[View the Dancing Rocks site](http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/media/static/rocks/)

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