

Storytelling

Bring your project's
impact to life

NEBOJSA NIKOLIC



Photo by ali atyabi:

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/stargazers-watching-milky-way-and-shooting-star-29684537/>



Agenda

Why storytelling?

What makes it work?

Target audience

How to define and write for a specific audience.

How to structure a story?

A step-by-step guide and a template.

How to refine a story?

What mistakes to avoid and how to use AI help.

Case study

We will work on a real “North Sea Region” project story.



Example:
**A story of
soap?**

Dove: Real Beauty Sketches



"Real Beauty Sketches" by Dove, directed by John X. Carey. Watch the full video here: <https://vimeo.com/64077961>. Used for educational purposes. All rights remain with the original creators.



What if it were made by public administration?

Dove, a subsidiary of the Unilever Corporation, is a globally recognized provider of premium personal care solutions, primarily focused on the production and distribution of soap. Soap, an essential hygiene product, plays a critical role in the removal of dirt, oils, and other undesirable substances from the skin, thereby contributing to the maintenance of public health. UC remains committed to the ongoing advancement of soap technology, leveraging cutting-edge surfactant science to enhance lather efficiency and olfactory satisfaction. Moreover, Dove is dedicated to rigorous standardization of foam texture and bubble symmetry, ensuring a consistent consumer experience across diverse demographic segments.

Administration

- Brand at the start
- Dry and legal
- A list of unnecessary facts, outputs
- Abbreviations
- Disclaimers
- Association with boring
- Reporting

Dove

- Brand at the end
- A story of real people
- A story of self-care
- Emotions: bittersweet, healing sorrow, solemn joy
- Relatable situation
- Association with self-love
- Storytelling

Who was the story for?

Communication Persona

- A profile of a typical audience member, representing people who might care about what you do.
- This is known as “audience profiling” within a larger process of “audience segmentation”
- Think about age, gender, education, interests, hobbies, relationships, income, commute, social media they use, etc.
- Write a story for THEM



Photo by [Daria Pimkina](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Profiling with AI

Prompt: “Communication persona profile of a woman for a campaign about quality soap, to connect on a deeper level.”

Answer: “Clara is a 30 to 50-year-old professional who values authenticity, quality, and **self-care**. She seeks balance in her life, finding meaning in small, everyday rituals like a quiet morning routine or a peaceful walk in nature. Clara appreciates well-crafted products that reflect her **values** and bring a sense of calm to her busy life.

She’s **tired of superficial marketing** and prefers brands that connect with her on a deeper, more emotional level. She gravitates toward content that **feels real** and human: beautifully shot videos, heartfelt **storytelling**, and meaningful messages that resonate with her desire for mindful living. She’s drawn to brands that promise more than just a product – they offer a mindset, a moment of clarity, and a sense of connection.”

But this is a story of a **brand** and we are a serious public institution and we need to tell stories about **complex projects**.

**DO YOU
AGREE?**



"Once upon a time, a
brave project manager
decided to explore
priority axis 1"

Storytelling ≠ fairytale

A common misconception about
storytelling is that it has to include
phrases and style of classical fiction.

Photo by Josh Hild:

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/man-sitting-under-a-tree-reading-a-book-during-night-time-4256852/>

Fiction in movies, books and games

“A reader lives a thousand lives”

George R.R. Martin

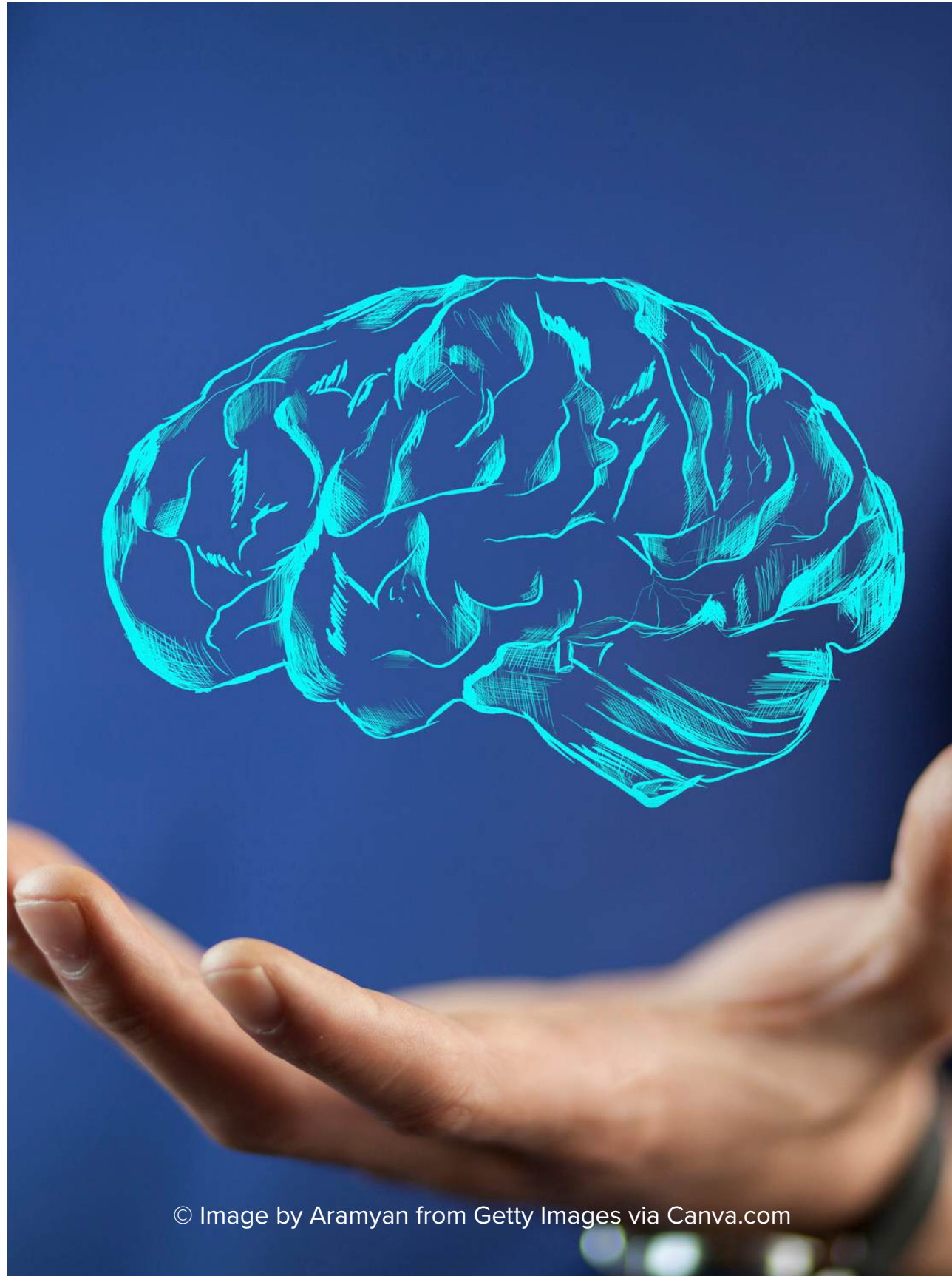
Brand association, in ads

Psychological connection between
emotions and a brands

Stories of knowledge

For teaching and informing

THREE TYPES OF STORIES



© Image by Aramyan from Getty Images via Canva.com

Storytelling works

Because it appeals to three types of learners:

- **Visual:** with illustrations and mental pictures
- **Auditory:** from words, lectures, discussions
- **Kinesthetic:** by doing, experiencing, feeling

<https://www.harvardbusiness.org/what-makes-storytelling-so-effective-for-learning/>

Example - auditory



Interview with Benedict Cumberbatch | National Theatre Live: The Best Seat in the House. Published by National Theatre on YouTube
Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hzomFy4cYQ&t=1s> Used for educational purposes. All rights remain with the original creators.

Example - kinesthetic



National Theatre Live: The Best Seat In The House. Published by National Theatre on YouTube

Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hzomFy4cYQ&t=1s> Used for educational purposes. All rights remain with the original creators.

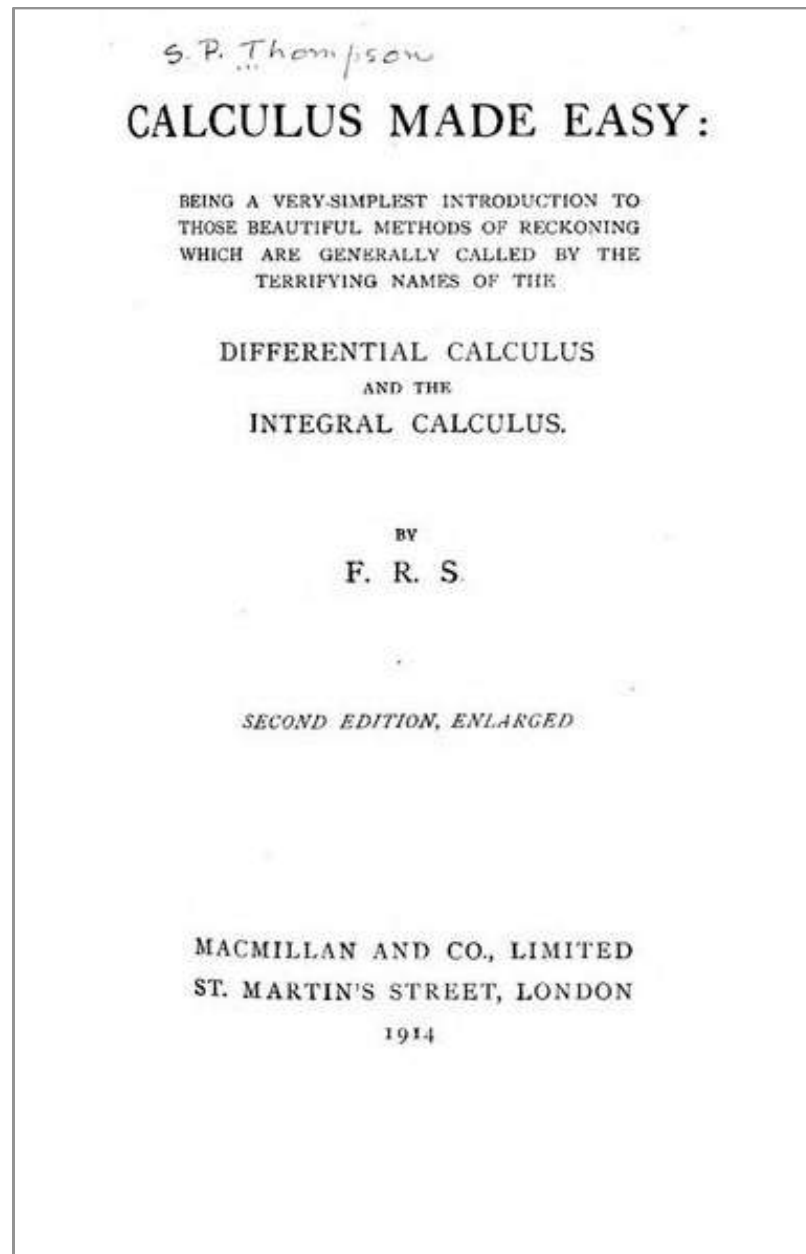


Image Source:
Calculus Made Easy by Silvanus P. Thompson
Cover image from <https://calculusmadeeasy.org/>

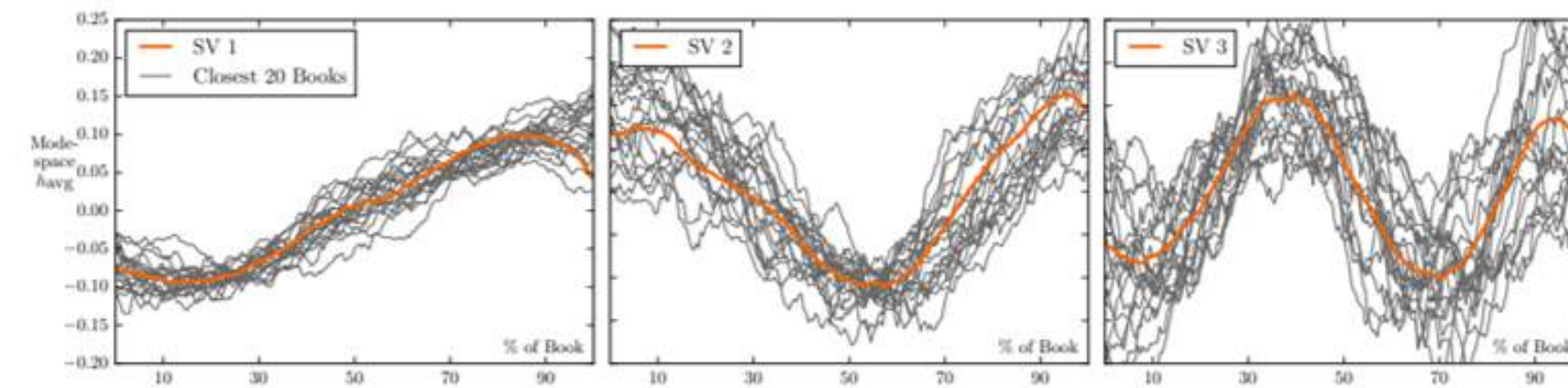
What good stories have in common:

Relatable problem

Use plain language

Illustrate with examples

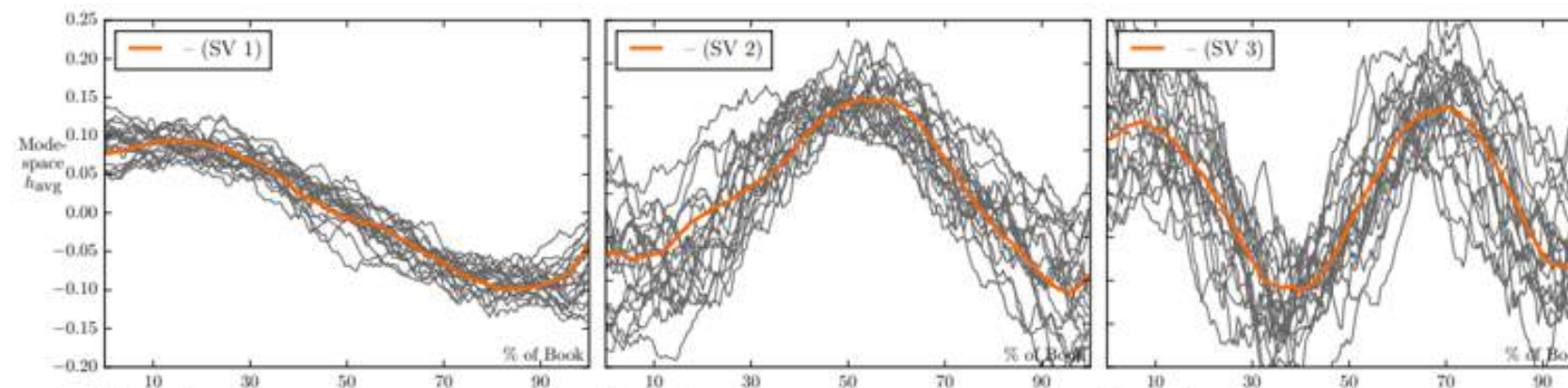
The six story arcs



1. Rise

3. Fall - rise

5. Cinderella



2. Fall

4. Rise - fall

6. Oedipus

- “Rags to riches” (rise)
- “Riches to rags” or “Tragedy” (fall)
- “Man in a hole” (fall–rise)
- “Icarus” (rise–fall).
- “Cinderella” (rise–fall–rise)
- “Oedipus” (fall–rise–fall)

Illustrations from Reagan, A. J., Mitchell, L., Kiley, D., Danforth, C. M., & Dodds, P. S. (2016). The emotional arcs of stories are dominated by six basic shapes. arXiv:1606.07772.

Available at: <https://arxiv.org/abs/1606.07772>

Project stories

WRONG STRUCTURE

- List of project partners
- Dates, fund specifics
- Procedures
- List of all the outputs
- Co-funding statements

CORRECT STRUCTURE

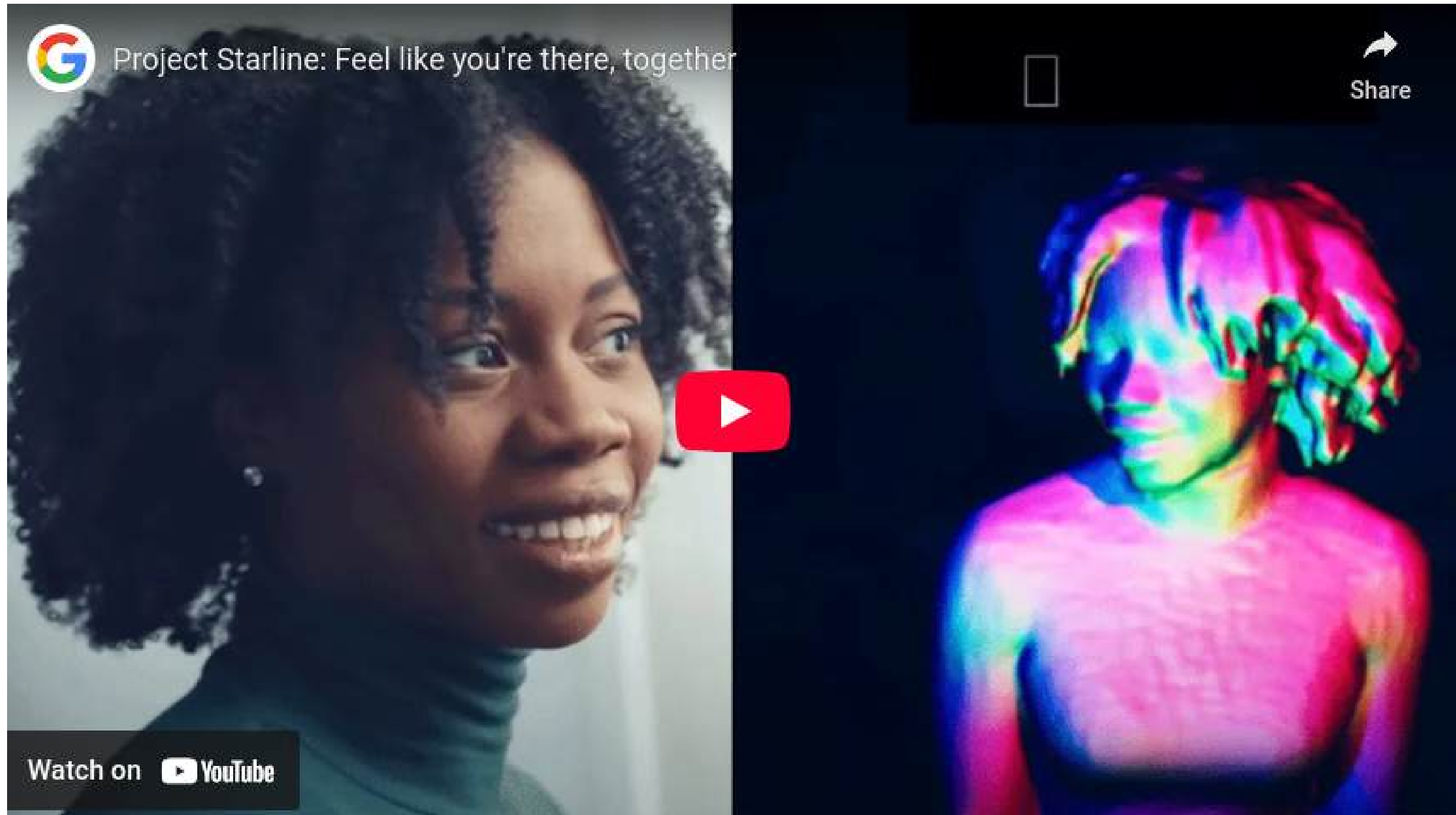
- **Context** - audience intrigued
- **Problem** - audience relates
- **Solution** - audience understands
- **Proof** - audience appreciates
- **Brand** - audience remembers

Example: Project Starline

This is a “**story of knowledge**” about a **complex** project by Google that follows the “**Rise**” story arc. It follows the correct **structure** and appeals on all **three levels**: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.



Project Starline: Feel like you're there, together. Image courtesy of Google
Available at: <https://blog.google/technology/research/project-starline/>



Project Starline: Feel like you're there, together. Published by Google on YouTube. Watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q13CishCKXY>
Used for educational purposes. All rights remain with the original creators.

Your storytelling template

We have prepared a storytelling template that will help you structure your story. It has instructions, examples, and placeholders for your project story - all in PPT format.





Comfort break

**Please come
back in 10 min.**



Revising

Formal language

Exhausting and confusing

Information overload

Overwhelming

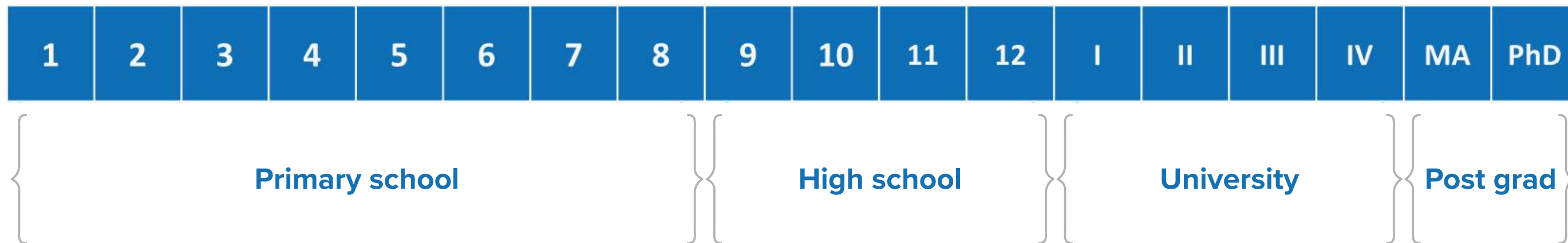
Unrealistic promises

Damages your credibility

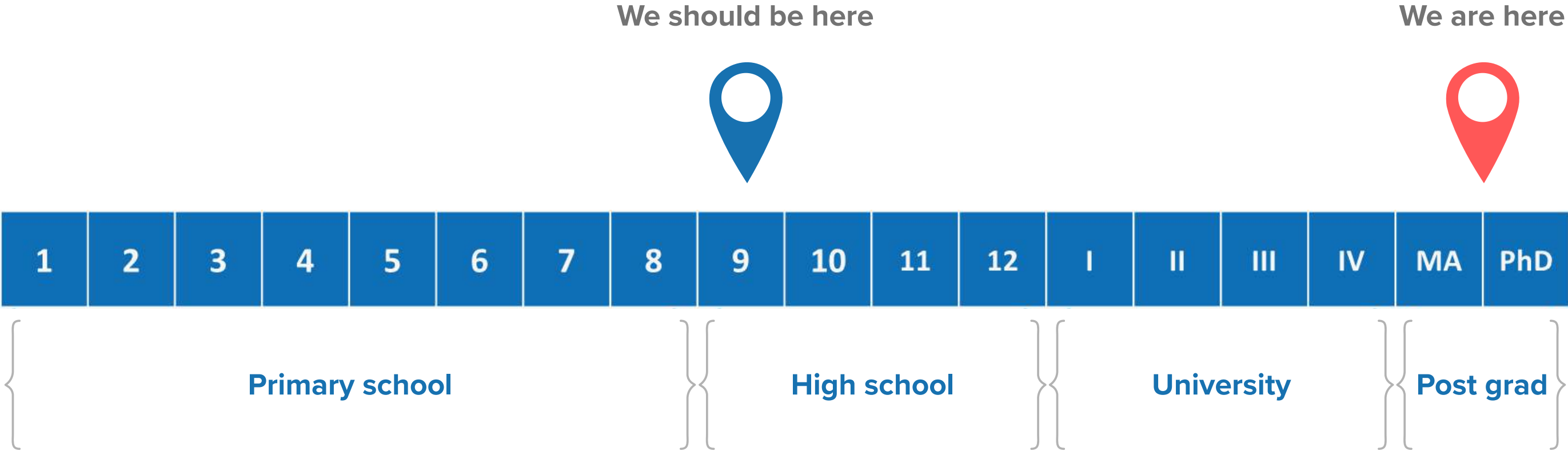
Readability score

Estimate of what should be your **education level** to **easily follow** the story.

- What is the average score of an Interreg project?
- What should we be aiming for?



Readability score



Testing

Hemingway App makes your writing concise and correct.

H2ignite is a transnational project funded by the Interreg North Sea Region Programme. We aim to foster cross-sector collaboration to bring green hydrogen into the mainstream of the North Sea Region's transport systems. With our innovative approach, we are breaking down barriers to hydrogen deployment by connecting industry leaders, public authorities, and research institutions. Our mission is to create a greener, more sustainable future for transport through hydrogen-based solutions.

Through our collaborative efforts, we aim to accelerate the development of hydrogen ecosystems that will transform transport and energy systems across borders. Here, you'll find key information about our groundbreaking pilots, the latest innovations in hydrogen technology, and opportunities to engage with a cross-sector network of experts.

Join us in driving the green hydrogen revolution and discover how we're shaping the future of sustainable transport. Dive into our interactive platform, explore our regional pilots, and stay up-to-date with our latest insights and innovations. Together, we can unlock the potential of hydrogen for a greener, cleaner future.

The project duration: three years, 1st of September 2024 to 31st of August 2027

The North Sea Region (NSR) is at the forefront of green energy transformation, offering enormous opportunities for energy security, economic growth, and hydrogen innovation capacity. The global green hydrogen market is projected to reach €591bn by 2030 (Deloitte, 2023), and hydrogen has a particularly crucial role to play in decarbonizing the transport sector.

However, three major challenges persist:

Small H2 Ecosystems: Most hydrogen ecosystems consist of small, isolated private sector groups that are in early test phases, with little public sector coordination or knowledge exchange.

Scarcity of Business Models: There is a lack of innovative and viable business models for both single and multi-user hydrogen applications.

Write Edit Feedback

Readability ⓘ



Grade 15

Poor. Aim for 9.

Words: 401

Show more stats ▾

14 of 23 sentences are very hard to read.

1 of 23 sentences is hard to read.

Find grammar and spelling issues with Editor Plus.
[Upgrade](#)

1 weakener.
[View details](#)

3 words with simpler alternatives.

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Formal language

Avoid:

- Words like: *stakeholders*, *synergies*, *capacity-building*, *beneficiaries*, *etc.*
- Empty, general claims
- Passive voice
- Abbreviations

Solution:

- Plain language

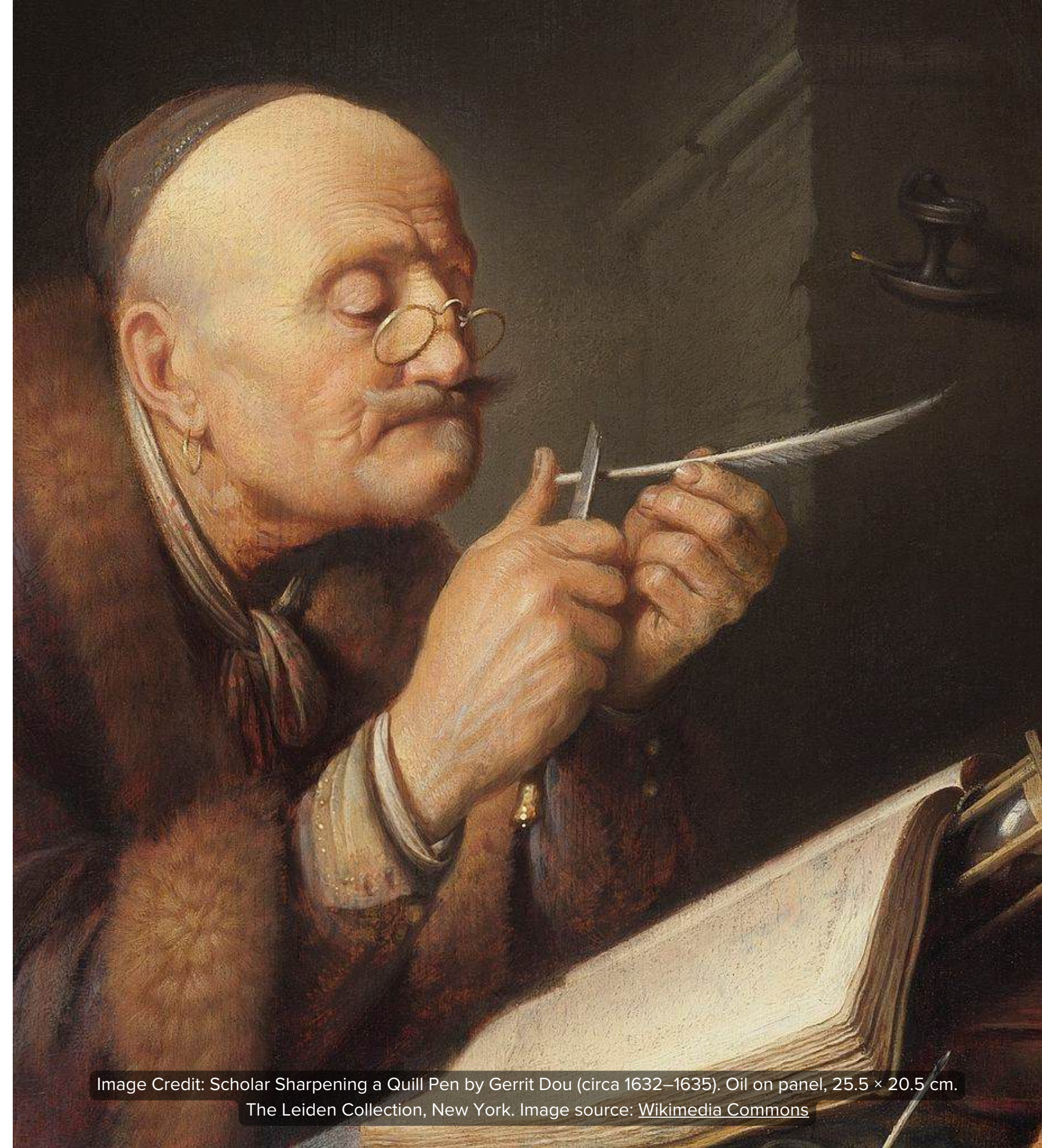


Image Credit: Scholar Sharpening a Quill Pen by Gerrit Dou (circa 1632–1635). Oil on panel, 25.5 × 20.5 cm.

The Leiden Collection, New York. Image source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Instead of – you could say

“Utilized” – try “used”

“Facilitated” – try “helped”

“Improved competences” – try “trained”

“Improved knowledge levels” – try “taught” or “learned”

“Held public awareness campaign about the project...” – try “we promoted the project by...”

“Fostered” – try “helped” or “supported”

“Procured” – try “bought”

“Target area” – just name the city/region

“Target audience” – people

Information overload

Avoid:

- Overwhelming your audience with too many numbers, statistics, and specifics

Solution:

- Choose only the most important information



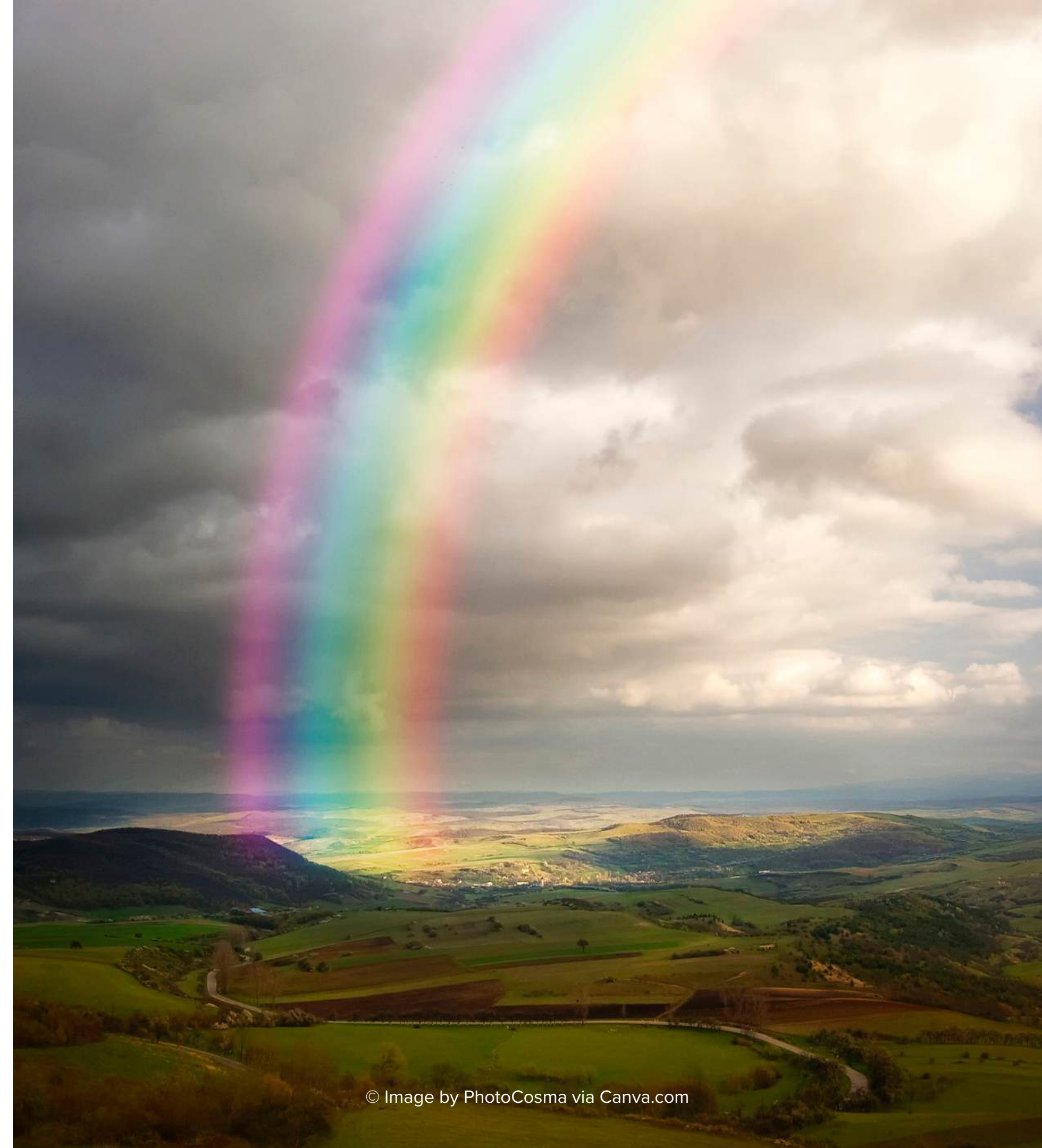
Unrealistic promises

Avoid

- Making claims and promises that you cannot prove

Solution:

- Be honest - a small project with real impact is better than a big project with questionable impact



Instead of saying...

With our 5 workshops, 14 Zoom meetings, 1000 pens, 500 USBs, 3 open days, multiple cross-border synergies on capitalisation and cohesion, and a high-level conference with policy makers on the future of the post-27 thematic ERDF networks, as well as the website, the newsletters and the internships we have significantly improved the challenging environment of complex systematic administrative congestions when applying for the initial career progression of young people and youths in the programme region.

#AreYouStillReading, #WHY



Try...

We helped twenty young people start a business.



AI tools

1. LLMs

- ChatGPT
- Copilot
- Gemini
- Claude

2. Writing

- Resoomer
- Grammarly
- Quillbot
- Hemingway
- LLMs

3. Multimedia

- Dall-E
- Midjourney
- Runway
- Suno AI
- 11Labs

4. Create content

- Canva
- Adobe Express
- Gamma

The process

A. Prep

Collect detailed project information and put it all in one document. Feed this to an AI and check the problem and solution.

B. Target

Ask AI to define the primary target audiences and to explain why it chose them. Draft “communication persona”.

C. Rewrite

Rewrite the story for your communication persona using our template. Check and revise with AI help.

D. Create content

Adapt the story for different communication channels. Check and revise before publishing.



Exercises

Freewriting

Task:

Write down your thoughts quickly and without any filter or worry about style and grammar.

Benefits: Great for brainstorming, processing emotions, releasing stress, manifesting thoughts, unlocking creativity.



Exercises

Story seeds

Task: You are given an opening line and then you need to continue a story. You can use a famous opening line and see where your imagination takes you.

Example: “Dear passengers, this is not your captain speaking.”

Benefits: Develops imagination, breaks creative blocks.

A surreal room with a light blue wall. On the left, a window with a black frame and white curtains is visible. A wooden chair with a thick, light-colored fur throw sits on a large, blue and white patterned rug that depicts a seascape with several sailing ships. A small, round wooden table with a slice of cake on it is next to the chair. A lamp with a white shade hangs from the ceiling. Three small, framed pictures hang on the wall. A blue rectangular box with the word 'Exercises' in white text is in the top right corner.

Exercises

PowerPoint Karaoke

Task: The participants get a set on slides with unrelated images, and they have to present on the spot, pretending it all makes sense and that it is all very important.

Benefits: Helping you develop improvisational, public speaking and storytelling skills.

Thank you!

Storytelling: Bring your
project's impact to life

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