

## What to Remember *when writing your story*

The list of how-to articles and books that are supposed to help you craft a compelling story is pretty much inexhaustible. While feminine storytelling rests on the principle of “feeling, not formula,” there are, nonetheless, a number of helpful pointers that will help you narrate your story with more clarity and truth.

**Here are just a few:**

### **The best stories are the ones about people.**

We are compelled to read stories with strong, easily identifiable protagonists—people with clear points of view and motives, whose struggles and triumphs we can easily relate to and empathize with, even if we haven’t experienced them ourselves.

### **Show, don’t tell.**

In order to show rather than tell, focus on attention-grabbing action rather than exposition (i.e., long-drawn-out explanations or backstory). Offer details through dialogue and description. All of this tends to make your story more credible and real. It paints a vivid picture for your audience so that they have a more direct emotional connection to the experience being described.

For example, let’s imagine a scene in which two people are having a disagreement. What are the characters saying? What is their body language? What are the emotions rumbling beneath the surface? How does the environment reflect the tension in the room?

By asking yourself these questions, you can jazz up a nondescript sentence easily. “They had a horrible fight” can transform into “He was facing away from her, hunched over his iPad. Her arms were drawn across her chest as she stared daggers into his back. The screaming tea kettle in the kitchen brought the tension in the room to a fever pitch. ‘I can’t go on like this!’ she finally screamed.”

### **Engage your personality.**

The best truth-tellers engage their personality in their work. Your quirks, idiosyncrasies, and unique way of seeing the world are all integral to your story. Try reading your words out loud. Ask yourself, “Is this how I would talk to another person?” While some writers are naturally more conversational than others, your words should always contain the liveliness and immediacy of a

face-to-face dialogue. Remember, if it feels difficult to translate your voice into writing, do what many writers do: record yourself speaking your account, and then transcribe it onto the page, where you can edit as needed.

### **Describe the conflict as it's happening in the moment.**

Creating a story that will make anyone want to read through to the end requires details and descriptions that make people pay attention more acutely—and those details almost always center around conflict. The Greek philosopher Aristotle described the “second act” of a story as the place where the protagonist experiences obstacles and conflict. What makes the story compelling is the protagonist’s opportunity to be transformed by the trials she faces. Ideally, your reader (whether it’s you or someone else) will be on the edge of their seat, wondering what happens next. The best way to engage them is to avoid being predictable. Stay in the moment you’re describing and allow the reader to feel what you went through rather than dropping hints about the outcome.

### **Identify what you want your audience to walk away with after reading the story.**

This tip may be more important than all the others, because it gets to the heart of why you are writing your story. Your “why” might be difficult to sum up succinctly, but you can get a strong idea of what it is by considering the following questions: *Why is the story I am telling important to me? What would I like my audience to walk away feeling and thinking? What do I want them to most remember?* Be sure to ask and answer these questions before writing your story, and it’s likely that your passion and conviction will shine through.

