

Keys to Storytelling in eLearning

An eBook by Trivantis®

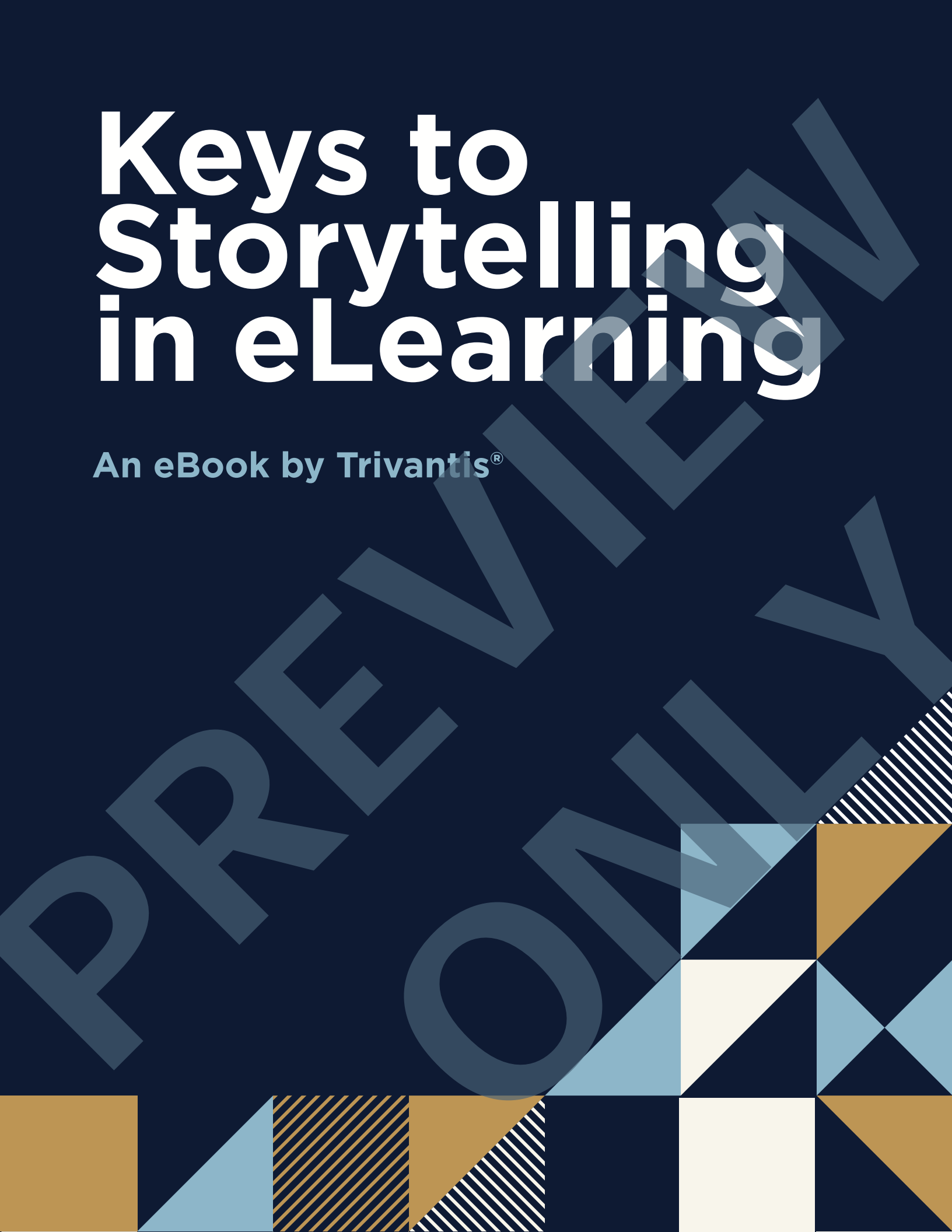


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The Science and Strategy of Emotion in Storytelling

Christie Wroten, Trivantis

Storytelling is a crucial part of human life. Through stories, we have the power to evoke emotions and to motivate. These characteristics make storytelling the perfect format for delivering eLearning training—especially the content that you want your learners to remember.

“A story is really—and storytelling is really—nothing more than what we have as a species done for thousands and thousands of years,” says Rick Zanotti, master storyteller and president of RELATE. “We tell stories to each other. We transfer and transmit knowledge from one to another. We also share stories with one another... We love to tell stories as a people.”¹

Why are we so drawn to stories? They’re certainly entertaining, but let’s take a look at the science behind storytelling and what that means for learning.

Paul J. Zak, Ph. D., and his lab were the first to discover that a neurochemical called oxytocin is a key trust and cooperation signal in the brain. “Oxytocin is produced when we are trusted or shown a kindness, and it motivates cooperation with others,” Zak explains. “It does this by enhancing the sense of empathy, our ability to experience others’ emotions.”² And when employees have empathy, they’re able to understand others’ reactions, including those of other coworkers or clients.

Here’s how this ties into storytelling: during tests, Zak’s lab found that character-driven stories do consistently cause oxytocin synthesis.³ So by using storytelling in training, we can create that empathy in employees for a specific work situation. For example, storytelling could be used to train a grocery store cashier—and create empathy—on how to interact with an unhappy customer and why the cashier should care about the situation.

“No, no! The adventures first, explanations take such a dreadful time.”

– Lewis Carroll

¹ Rick Zanotti. “5 Secrets of eLearning Storytelling.” 25 July 2016. <http://community.trivantis.com/knowledge-base/5-secrets-elearning-storytelling/>

² Paul J. Zak. “Why Your Brain Loves Good Storytelling.” *Harvard Business Review*. 27 July 2016. <https://hbr.org/2014/10/why-your-brain-loves-good-storytelling/>

³ Paul J. Zak. “How Stories Change the Brain.” *Greater Good*. 27 July 2016.

Using Branching to Put Your Learner in the Driver's Seat of the Story

Diane Elkins, Artisan E-Learning

Remember those choose-your-own-adventure books you read as a child? You'd read a section of the story, and then YOU would get to pick what the character does next. If you want him to open the door, go to page 43. If you want him to keep walking, go to page 63. Having choices made the book fun and exciting.

In eLearning, letting the learner make choices IS fun and exciting, but it's more than that. Most corporate training is there to help people make real decisions on the job. Do you approve this request or not? Do you use this piece of equipment or that one? Do you say what you *want* to say to that angry customer or what you *should* say?

A simple multiple-choice question with feedback can meet this need. But if you want to truly immerse your learners in the story (and into the real-world consequences of their choices), you can set that up with a branching scenario.

Branching scenarios can seem intimidating, but they don't need to be. The key is to plan out your goals and logic first. Here are three big questions to ask yourself:

Question 1: Do you want to test your learners or let them explore choices and consequences?

Learners don't do something just because a course tells them to. They have to really believe the "thing" is worth doing. So letting a learner freely pick the good OR the bad option can be a great way to help them explore consequences. Let them be rude to the customer or approve the loan they shouldn't. Let them see what happens.

If you go this route, be clear in your instructions that it isn't a test and they can choose whatever answer they want. And if you do want them to freely explore, you might want to include navigation that lets them go back at any point and try a different answer.

One Story Seven Ways

Stephanie Ivec, Trivantis

According to journalist and author Christopher Booker, there are only seven ways to tell a story.¹ These seven basic plot types are archetypal themes that recur throughout every kind of storytelling. Your challenge as an instructional designer is to choose the plot type that will be the best framework for your learning objectives.

- **Overcoming the Monster**

The classic underdog story goes all the way back to David and Goliath. This plot type is a great option when creating training for small businesses going up against established industry giants.

- **Rebirth**

During the course of a rebirth plotline, an important event forces the main character to change his or her ways, often making him or her a better person. A rebirth plot can be used for many soft skills or interpersonal relations training.

- **Quest**

The Lord of the Rings is a classic example of a quest story, in which the protagonist and some companions set out to acquire an important object or get somewhere, conquering obstacles as they go. This can be a fun plot to use for many types of training, including sales training.

- **Journey and Return**

Transformation through travel and homecoming—think *The Chronicles of Narnia*. You could use a journey and return plotline to teach cultural sensitivity and diversity training or to teach safety techniques to study abroad students.

- **Rags to Riches**

In this familiar plot, the main character acquires money, prestige, and more. A classic example is *Cinderella*. You could gamify this and have your character acquire more and more points as he or she advances through a course.

- **Tragedy**

Usually set in motion through a great mistake or major character flaw, a tragic plot evokes pity and sadness. Tragedy should be used carefully in eLearning, but can be very impactful for workplace or personal safety courses.

- **Comedy**

Comedy is more than humor, which can be difficult to do well in eLearning without offending. A comedic plot has a pattern where the conflict becomes more and more confusing, but is at last made plain in a single clarifying event. This can be very engaging training if done well.

The next time you're looking to incorporate storytelling into your eLearning development, use these seven plot types as inspiration.

¹ Christopher Booker. *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. 19 July 2016.



Creating Memorable Training With Stories

Andy Lockwood, Training Coordinator & Instructional Developer at Auto-Owners Insurance

Most people think that storytelling involves a lot of fantasy and drama. That it must be limited to the realms of fiction and fantasy, of bookstores and movie theaters. The common misconception, and main issue with most eLearning, is that facts must be dry and uninteresting. There is no commandment that states this. In fact, I believe it is the duty of all instructors, developers, and designers to work against this stigma.

I started my instructional journey in a small office focused on education technology for government level associations. These associations were spending too much on face-to-face training and wanted to cut costs by utilizing eLearning. In short, they wanted the face-to-face presentation to be put online. As you can imagine, what came of that was bland, and not very memorable.

I have since moved on from working with associations to internal education for corporate associates, but the stigma is the same. Fun is apparently a four-letter word, but it doesn't have to be. If I learned anything from my time on Sesame Street, it's that education can be entertaining—and might actually be better at its job when it is.

Not everyone agrees, but some people enjoy the insurance industry—or banking, or accounting. To each their own—not everyone finds NASCAR exciting either. But from the instructional side, you'd almost have to try instructing lessons at 200 miles an hour to make pages of legal insurance agreements interesting if you leave it to just the text.

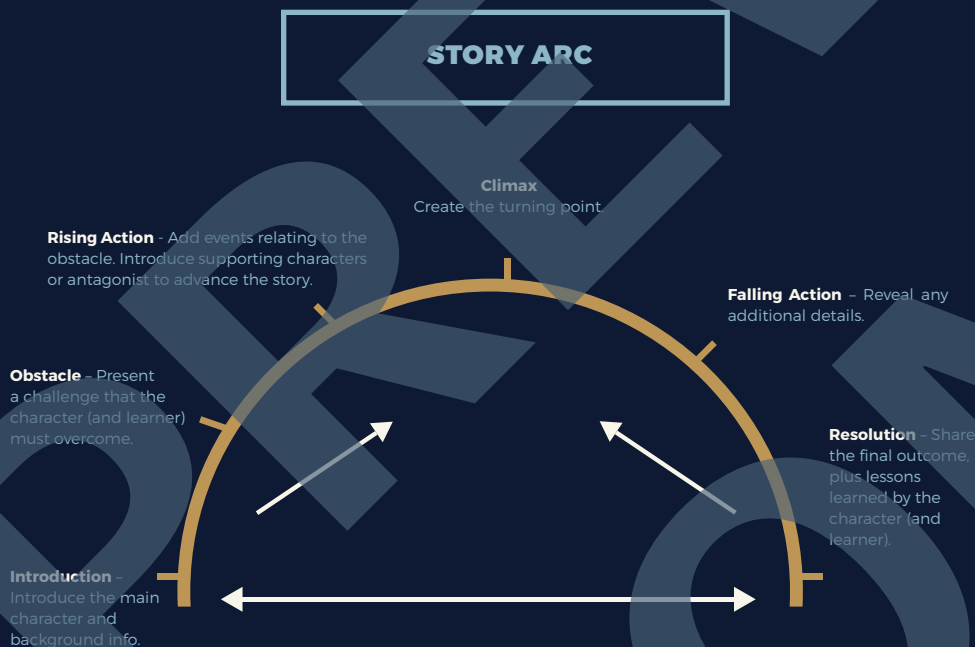
The Story Arc: Tips on Using This Classic Model for eLearning

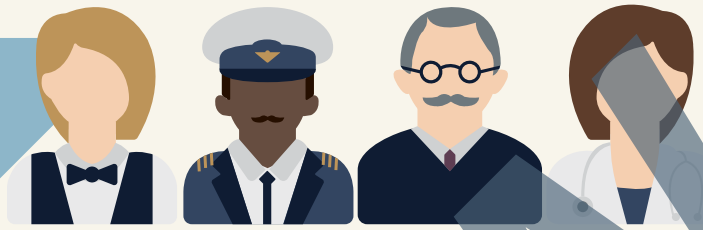
Jennifer Valley, Trivantis

A strong story arc can contribute to a successful eLearning story. This creates a narrative where the learner is introduced to a character, an obstacle occurs, and a resolution must be found. The story arc is used across television, books, video games, and movies to create tension and the feeling that the audience knows and can relate to each character. This is also true for a learner taking a training course. The more your audience is able to relate to the character, the easier it will be to apply the information to a real-life scenario in the future.

“Storytelling is about two things; it’s about character and plot.”

- George Lucas





1.

DETERMINE YOUR DEMOGRAPHIC

You might find that a younger audience is more willing to entertain a story with a fantasy tone than a group of seasoned office workers would be.

2.

IDENTIFY LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Trying to drive behavior change? Use an energetic, encouraging tone. Stories centered around a main hero character—or with the learner as the hero—work well here.



Teaching information or processes? Use straightforward, plain speech.



Emphasizing safety skills? **Keep it serious.** This isn't the time for cracking jokes.



REMEMBER YOUR BRAND IMAGE

3.



Expert



Authoritative



Fun

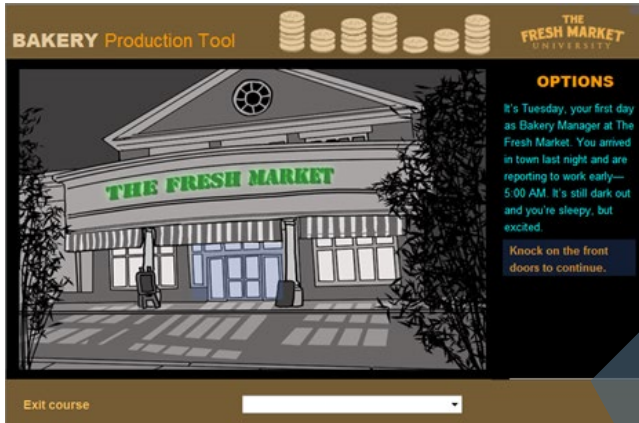


Casual

4.

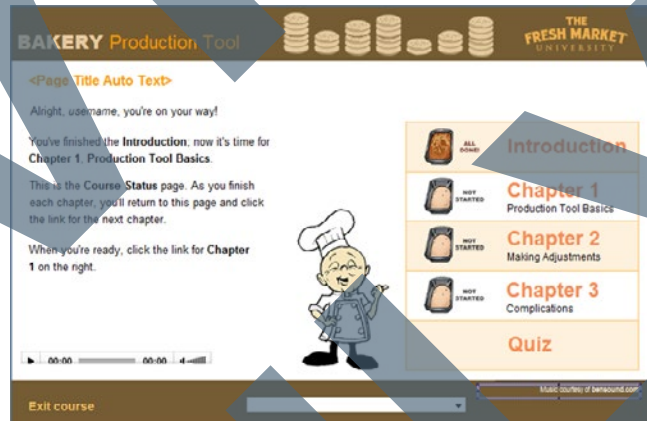
CHOOSE DELIVERY METHOD





Master Cannoli - Bakery Production Tool Course

Master Cannoli is the instructor for the Bakery Production Tool course. He is a cross between Buddha and Chef Boyardee, very animated and energetic.








Officer Shirley - Food Safety Basic Training Course

Officer Constance Shirley is the head instructor at the Food Safety Academy where she teaches employees how to prevent food-borne illnesses. She is a straight shooter and can be very serious at times. She is part drill sergeant, part Driver's Ed instructor.








Key Poses for Your Guide

When you are creating your GUIDE, there are a few standard poses that you'll want to use often.

				
Greeting pose, used for welcoming the student to the course	Basic pose, the default pose for presenting basic information	Happy pose, used when the user gets a question correct	Angry pose, used when the learner gets a question wrong	Pointing pose, used for indicating something onscreen

Here are 5 more advanced poses that can be useful.

				
Sage pose, used when sharing wisdom (same as basic pose but with pointing finger)	Not so sure pose, used when the student is not entirely correct	Smirky pose, used when GUIDE has something up his sleeve	Well done pose, used for a major accomplishment	Sympathy pose, used when the student fails, but doesn't need to be scolded