

Making the Middle of a Good Story

In [Winning Edge #64](#), we looked at how to start a story with a tight opening line. But once you have your audience's attention, how do you keep it with the rest of the story?

One great way to improve is to watch and study some of the best storytellers. Comedians are a good place to start. Pull up a few Nate Bargatze clips on YouTube and watch what he does.

If you watch the clip to the right, you'll notice Bargatze does three big things. He mostly relies on dialogue between him and his wife. There's just enough detail to picture the scene, and everything is action, then reaction. He says he hates pizza parties, but it's really about figuring out the right amount to order.

Now, Bargatze has honed that story by telling it hundreds of times. But we can still learn from how he does it.

Once you have your opening line, most good stories rely on three things:



Dialogue is the fastest way to bring a story to life. Quote someone in the story, or quote what you were thinking at the time. Hearing someone's inner dialogue gets the audience to think, *"I've had that exact same thought."*



Details: A few details can turn a story from abstract to a scene we can picture. Usually, two or three details are enough. Think about what details, when told, will paint an entire scene.



Action and reaction: You want to show cause and effect. Someone did this, and it led to that. I saw this, and then I thought, [insert inner dialogue].



[Comedian Nate Bargatze telling a story about pizza.](#)

A pizza party is my nightmare. I have friends over for pizza, so I'll be like, "All right, we've got to order a pizza."

And [my wife] goes, "How much?"

I go, "Order the most. I don't wanna run out of pizza in front of my friends."

And she goes, "Just call and ask them."

I go, "I can't call these 40-year-old dudes. And just be like, how much pizza do you think you're going to eat tonight?"

"They have a real job, they have a family. They work in a building right now. And you want me just call them and ask, 'Did you have a big lunch today?...Nah, we are trying to save money, so I need to know exactly how much pizza you're going to eat in eight hours.'"

The Bottom Line

When you need to tell a story, start with a great opening line, then add dialogue, details, and action and reaction. Finally, test out telling the story, and revise and refine it.

Creating a Memorable Story

So the next time you are working on a story you want to tell:

- 1 Write a tight opening line.
- 2 Add in one or two lines of dialogue.
- 3 Include a few details to paint the scene.
- 4 Make sure you have action and reaction.

People keep listening to stories because they want to know what happens next. How did they respond? What are they worried about? What changed? Stories are compelling because something happens, and people have to deal with what happened.

Then play with how you tell it. Good storytellers test stories just like comedians. Test the story on a few people. Revise it. Test it again. And pretty soon you'll have some great stories to tell.

Opening Line

“So		
	<i>specific time</i>	<i>person</i>
	<i>action</i>	<i>place</i>
	<i>goal / tension</i>	
	”	

The Rest of the Story

What's some specific dialogue or inner thoughts?

What are a few details to help people picture the scene?

What's the action and reaction of the story? Outline the story below.