

How to Use Data to Tell Your Story

Los Angeles
County
Arts &
Culture

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ARTS DATATHON
Storytelling

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WHAT IS STORY?



WHAT IS DATA?



WHEN STORY
MEETS DATA



EXAMPLE:
ARTS EDUCATION



What is story?

“Every story describes a **sequence of actions and experiences** of a number of people, real or imaginary. These people are usually presented in some characteristic human situation, and are then shown either **changing it or reacting to changes** which affect that situation from the outside.”

(Gallie)

“In life, we don’t just open our mouths or put pen to paper to share our stories for no reason whatsoever, yes? There’s always a **motive**.”

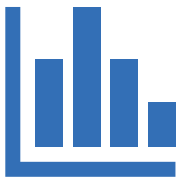
(Truong)

“That is the way with stories; we make them what we will. It’s a way of **explaining the universe** while leaving the universe unexplained, it’s a way of keeping it all alive, not boxing it into time. Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that **everybody sees it differently**.”

(Winterson)

“We all have **futures**. We all have **pasts**. We all have stories. And we all, every single one of us, no matter who we are and no matter what’s been taken from us or what poison we’ve internalized or how hard we’ve had to work to expel it — **we all get to dream**.”

(Jemisin)



What is data?

“Data becomes useful knowledge of something that matters when it builds a **bridge between a question and an answer**. This connection is the signal.”

(Few)

“Sometimes it is not the story that leads you to search for a particular kind of data. Sometimes, it is the data that **leads you to the story**.”

(Cairo)

“Data gives you a **scale**. It gives you a new **frame** of understanding.”

(Chalabi)

“Data, in short, **do not speak for themselves** and don’t always change hearts and minds or policy.”

(Benjamin)



When story meets data

1. Gather up the relevant **data**
2. Look for **confirmations** and **contradictions** between data points
3. Explore the **how** and **why** of those confirmations and contradictions
4. Explain the **context**
5. Imagine the **future**
6. Using all these elements, **write your story**

Potential **arts education** data sources include....

- LA County Arts Ed Profile
- California Arts Ed Data Project
- Personal experiences of arts education
- Thoughts and emotions about those arts education experiences



Example: arts education (part 1)

1. Gather up the relevant **data**

What arts classes did you take in school? How did they make you feel? How did arts fit into the rest of your classes? Did you participate in arts after school or in the community? What disciplines are taught in your school today? In your district? How many art teachers does your school or district have? What community arts partners work in your school or district?

2. Look for **confirmations** and **contradictions** between data points

Does your experience of arts education match the quantitative data (numbers)? Where do the numbers confirm what you saw and felt? Where do the numbers contradict what you saw and felt?

3. Explore the **how** and **why** of those confirmations and contradictions

Where the numbers match your experiences and feelings, how do they match? Where the numbers contradict your experiences and feelings, why might that be? What could explain the contradictions?



Example: arts education (part 2)

4. Explain the **context**

Has arts education changed since you were in school? Do some people in your school have opportunities that other students do not? How is arts education funded? How has the pandemic affected arts education?

5. Imagine the **future**

What better arts education outcomes do you want for yourself and for the students and teachers in your school or district? How do you want the future to be different from the past?

6. Using all these elements, **write your story**

Who are the people in your story? What actions did they take? What were the results of those actions? What changed? What stayed the same? What is your motivation for telling your story? How have you struggled? What obstacles have you overcome? What are your dreams?

Your story could take the form of an essay, poem, social media post, video, public comment at a school board meeting, letter to the editor, or even a zine.



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