

Questions to Ask When Turning Life Events into a Story

Overview: We can use story for many things, from conflict resolution to personal empowerment. It's a task that can seem daunting, but if you ask yourselves the following questions, you can break down the process to a manageable task. With practice, you'll find that you will internalize the process and be able to use the narrative "in the moment" to not only diffuse emotional situations, but in some cases, to prevent them.

The Story/The Background

When something happens that upsets you, grab a pen and ask yourself the following:

1. What happened?
2. What were your emotions in the moment?
3. What was the feeling you were left with?
4. What is the truth of the event?
5. What is the message you want to convey to your readers/listeners?

Think of a roller coaster ride. In the moment, you experience fear/excitement, but the *feeling* you're left with afterwards can be "yes! I want to do that again!" or "I'll never do that again!"

Plotting Your Story

Take the chronology you wrote out from above.

1. What was the inciting event—what was the thing that happened that started you down the path?
2. What happened next? And next?
3. What was the outcome?
4. Was there a history to the event? For example, if you had another fight with your mother-in-law, was there an incident that happened before that precipitated the current fight? If so, did those previous events play a role in the current argument?

Creating Your Characters

This can be the most emotionally charged part of writing your story. You need to:

1. Ask yourself, who are the people involved?
2. Then you need to make them into characters. This involves simplifying them—and this can be tricky. There's a tendency when we're angry or hurt to turn the conflict person into a caricature—a stereotype. This diminishes both us and the person. Though it's harder to do, we need to take a breath and:
 - a. Ask ourselves: how is this person made? What are their physical/emotional/educational factors?
 - b. What are their motivations?
 - c. How did their agenda rub against yours?
 - d. Do the same for yourself and the other people in the story.

Writing Your Story

There are a few versions of your story that you'll want to write:

1. First, write from your emotional place—pour out all your hurt, sorrow, anger—whatever that emotion is, just get it out.
2. Then, rewrite your story and the person you're in conflict with, write *them* as the hero and you as the villain. This is probably the hardest but most cathartic thing to do. It's difficult to see ourselves through someone else's eyes (especially when that someone has hurt us), but being able to see another's point of view can help you release anger and find forgiveness.
3. Write a third draft—is there a place for compromise and understanding?