

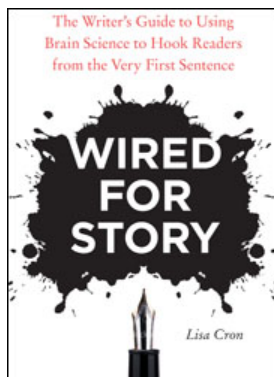


Why We Are "Wired for Story"

Story expert Lisa Cron explains why your audience doesn't just like stories - they crave them.

I devour books about storytelling, and Lisa Cron's *Wired for Story: The Writer's Guide to Using Brain Science to Hook Readers from the Very First Sentence* is a meal and a half. I took copious notes starting on page one where I was stopped cold by this insight: "Story, as it turns out, was crucial to our evolution - more so than opposable thumbs. Opposable thumbs let us hang on; story told us what to hang on to."

Cron currently teaches storytelling at the UCLA Extension Writers' Program, and she honed her skills as a story consultant for Warner Brothers, the William Morris Agency, and other Hollywood institutions. Recently, we sat down to lunch in Los Angeles and talked about her new book.



Goodman: I've read many books about the craft of storytelling, but this is the first I've seen that examines it through the lens of neuroscience. What got you interested in this kind of research?

Cron: For decades a big part of my job was to read manuscripts and screenplays and evaluate them. Most of them were really bad, so this almost always translated into figuring out why they didn't work. It wasn't long before I noticed something curious: while each story that didn't meet my expectations crashed and burned in its

own unique way, my expectations were few and constant. A couple of years ago I began reading a bit of neuroscience just because it interested me. It was thrilling to discover that the expectations I'd identified corresponded with what the brain is wired to respond to in every story. The minute I saw the connection, I began devouring books, articles and studies in neuroscience, cognitive psychology and evolutionary biology.

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Why We Are "Wired for Story"

A fascinating new book has the answer.

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About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Lori Matsumoto. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.agoodmanonline.com and www.thegoodmancenter.com.

Wired for Story looks ideal for aspiring novelists and screenwriters, but how can it help nonprofits who simply want to tell better stories about their work?

Story is story - whether it's a novel, a screenplay, or the story of an organization, its mission, or how a problem it faces might be solved. When writing the book my goal was twofold. First, to help anyone who wants to communicate via story decode what a story really is and what people are wired to respond to in every story they hear. Second, I wanted to provide a hands-on method for creating a story that would meet those expectations every time. That's something that would definitely benefit nonprofits.

What's your definition of a "story"?

Great question, especially since people often mistake the story for the things that happen in it - the plot, the unfolding sequence of events. The plot is secondary. It is constructed to force the protagonist to deal with the inner issue - a mistaken belief, a misconception - that's keeping her from achieving her goal. So what *is* a story? It's how what happens affects someone who's in pursuit of a difficult goal, and how he or she changes as a result.



Lisa Cron

Your book makes the rather bold claim that all stories can be summed up in a single sentence: "All is not as it seems." What do you mean by this?

Do you know what life is like when all *is* exactly as it seems? It's boring as hell. When something is 100% predictable, it's 100% boring and we pay no attention to it. Why should we? We already have it figured out. When something *isn't* as it seems, we're wired to notice it, lest it be something that could harm us (or help us). Stories are about making sense of, and navigating, the unexpected. What lures us in is the desire to find out what's really going on. The sense of urgency we feel when our curiosity is piqued is actually a delicious dopamine rush that makes us pay attention.

In chapter 4, you cite research that shows how a good story will cause the audience to create mental simulations in their heads. Why is this important?

Stories are by definition mental simulations. When they're not - they're not stories. It's that simple. When we're caught up in a good story we're feeling what it would be like to experience what the protagonist is going through. Think of story as the world's first virtual reality. It lets us sit back and vicariously experience someone else suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, the better to learn how to dodge those darts should they ever be aimed at us.

I love the Ernest Hemingway quote in your final chapter: "All first drafts are shit." At first blush, that can seem discouraging, but you say it's really liberating. How so?

Knowing that the first draft will probably suck helps silence that nagging, self-doubting inner critic we all have who's always

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whispering, "Really? *That's* what you're going to write? Are you *sure*?" That said, it's not a license for unbridled self-expression, or not to try hard from word one because it doesn't really "count." It does count, because it's the raw material you'll be working with, straying from, reshaping, paring, parsing, and then lovingly polishing. The goal of a first draft isn't beautiful writing; it's to come as close as you can to identifying the underlying story you're trying to tell.

Wired for Story will be published July 10, 2012. You can pre-order a copy on [Lisa's website](#).

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Summer Classes at The Goodman Center

Registration is now open for classes in July on strategic communications, presentation skills, and running better webinars.

Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter shows how three classic public interest campaigns engaged and motivated their target audiences and achieved remarkable results. In reviewing these success stories, we'll cover:

- The basics of framing
- Message creation and delivery
- An easy-to-use template for campaign design



Classes will be held on July 17th and 24th from 11a-12n PT (2-3p ET) each day. Learn more and register online at [The Goodman Center](#).

Why Bad Presentations Happens to Good Causes is a two-hour online class designed to help presenters at all levels, from newbies to seasoned veterans. Curriculum in this webinar includes:

- The three most common characteristics of excellent presentations
- The five most frequent mistakes (and how to avoid them)
- How to structure presentations to ensure your audience learns more
- Why PowerPoint should never be used as a presentation and a handout
- Techniques to help you deliver talks with greater confidence



Classes will be held on July 19th and 20th from 11a-12n PT (2-3p Eastern) each day. Learn more and register online at [The Goodman Center](#).

The Webinar on Webinars is a one-hour class on July 27th from 11a-12n PT (2- 3p Eastern) that will teach you:

- How to keep participants engaged from beginning to end
- The fine details of creating a good online experience
- How to use your two assets (voices and visuals) to maximum advantage
- What else we learned from talk radio that makes webinars even better



You can learn more and register online at [The Goodman Center](#).

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