

# ECR Training: A Good Proposal Tells a Story



# Why Tell a Story?

Doesn't diminish a science proposal

Keeps reviewer engaged

Powerful information retention tool

Consider including these elements of a good story in your proposal: hero, villain, conflict, intrigue, plot twists, winners, losers, underdogs, conundrums, mystery, adventure

Find inspiration from well-structured podcasts and well-written books.

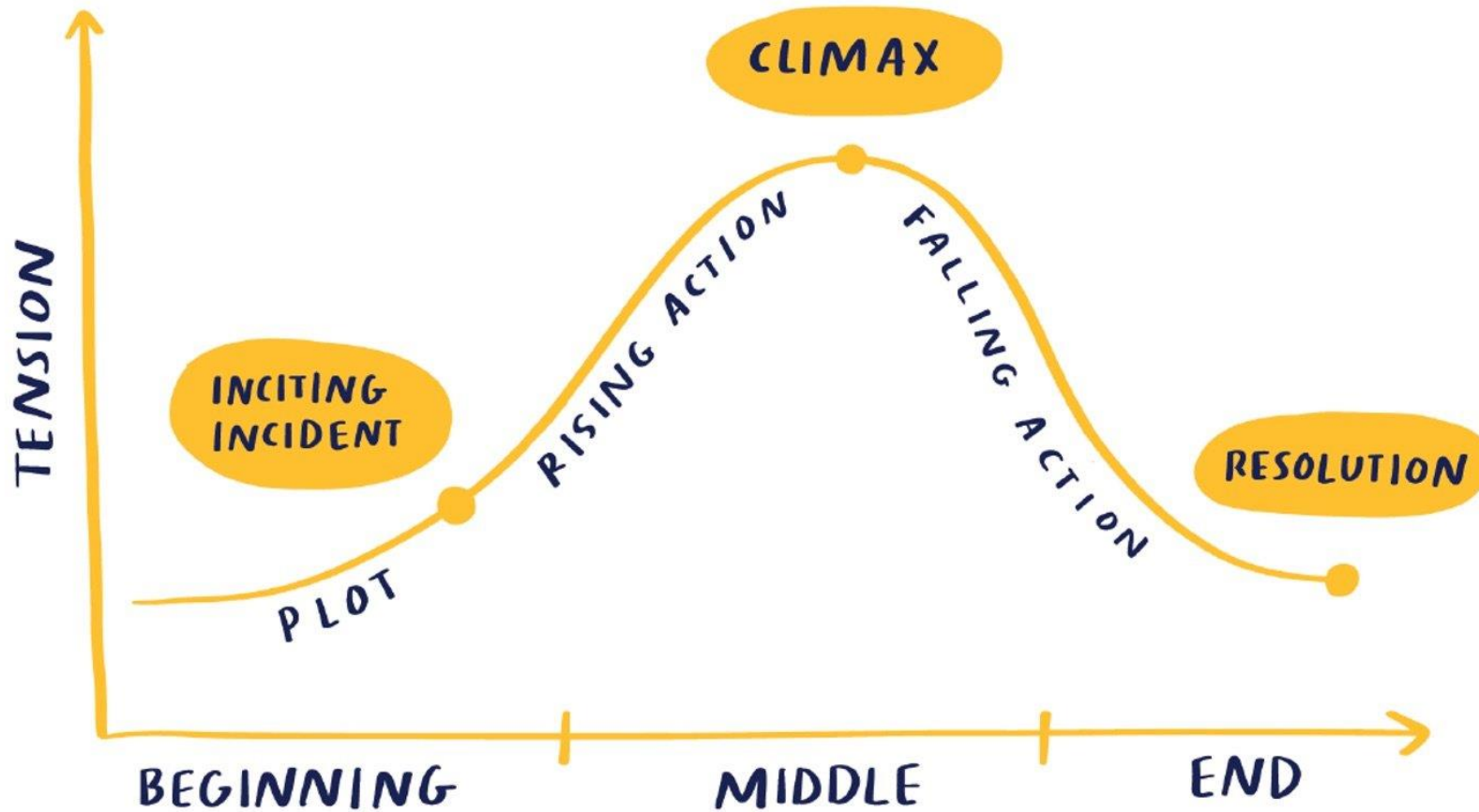
Shorts in support of storytelling as a powerful tool:

Your Brain on StoryTelling: <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/795977814>

BBC Inside Science on The Science of Storytelling:  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00057rl>

# The Story Arc or Narrative

## Components of a story arc or narrative



### Story:

Set Up → Event → Conclusion

### Proposal:

Introduction → Methods &  
Expected Results → Outcome

# Mapping Abstract or Summary to Story Elements:

A captivating proposal abstract or summary has all components of a story arc:

1. **What is the question?** What questions is the proposal seeking to answer? What specific ideas will be tested? **[Set up]**
2. **What will be done?** How will the proposers go about answering these questions? What methods will they use? **[Event]**
3. **What are they likely to find?** What are the anticipated outcomes from the proposal? **[Climax]**
4. **Why is it important?** Why is the answer to the question meaningful? How general/transferrable are the findings? What will change after this study? **[Resolution]**

**Pitch it right.** Consider background of reviewer reading your story.

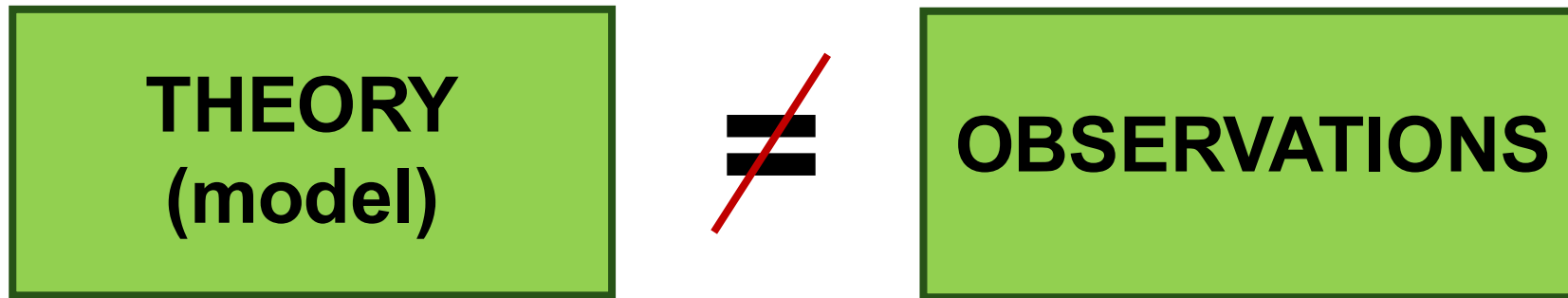
**Start early. Iterate.** A good story evolves.

# What's the Question / Issue? (Intrigue)

The **hook** that engages the reviewer

A proposal often starts with an intriguing question, issue or conundrum

One example: theory doesn't match observations!



Theory might come from a state-of-the-science model

Large biases in the model as indicator of severely knowledge gaps

Perhaps there is no ability to evaluate theory as there are no observations!

**Lots of implications:** Science is wrong, environmental policy decisions misguided, climate/ozone/air quality/health assessment errors large, industry losing money, etc.

# Steps to Take to Develop a Strong Narrative

*Just a suggestion. Try it to evolve your own approach.*

- Prepare powerpoint slides of core parts of story arc
- Slides should answer the 4 summary questions
- Slides should explore ways to visualize key aspects: motivation (large model biases, absence of observations), approach, how people and activities fit together
- Present to others **you trust with your ideas** and who will provide honest and constructive feedback (mentor, group members, PhD cohort)
- Use helpful feedback to amend slides
- Use updated slides to write the first draft of the proposal
- First draft, get words on a page, ignore word limits.
- Subsequent drafts: edit away the fluff, improve clarity, meet word limits.