

## Module 11. The Riveting Power of Mini-Stories

This is the eleventh module of your Enchanting Business Blogging course. Today we're talking about writing mini-stories.

Storytelling is a big topic. We can't cover everything in one week, so we focus on simple ways to introduce storytelling techniques in your blog posts. At the end of this presentation, you'll understand what makes a story boring and how to keep your reader spellbound instead.

Let's have a look first why stories are important.

**Stories add a splash of personality.** The tips you share, might be quite general. I mean that other bloggers probably share the same tips. But the stories you tell are yours. Nobody tells the same stories in same way. We'll also look at how you can introduce stories about your personal life in your blog posts.

**Stories of course also create a sense of drama.** This is almost the definition of a story – you want to read the next part because you want to find out what's happening next.

**And that's why stories keep your readers spellbound.**

**Lastly, stories make your advice sticky.** People find it easier to remember stories than simple facts.

Let's look at this idea of stickiness a little more. Chip and Dan Heath wrote the book *Made to Stick*. I highly recommend it. It's my favorite business book.

In the book, they discuss the 6 principles that make ideas sticky. And you'll find that you've already learned to apply most of these principles in this course.

- The first principle is **simplicity**. And simplicity is about finding the core of your idea, finding its essence. This is the big idea we discussed when we talked about outlining your posts. As soon as you try to communicate too many ideas, people forget. But when you talk in a compelling way about one idea, people will remember.
- The next principle is being **concrete**. And this is what we've talked about a lot. We've spoken about sensory words because they make your writing more concrete, and less abstract. So people can feel, hear, or see your words. We also talked about using specific details. This is all about being concrete. You know it already.

- The next principle is **credible**. And this is quite obvious for business blogging. When you share your ideas and when you tell stories, you need to be credible. When your ideal reader doesn't believe your story, your authority will be reduced.
- The next principle is **emotion**. People remember something when they can feel it. We've already talked about using your opening paragraph to empathize with your reader's struggle. And in stories, you can also touch on his struggles. All stories are about conflict and struggle.
- Memorable ideas have a touch of the **unexpected**. People will remember when you surprise them with a new thought.
- The last principle is **stories**. Stories add meaning to tips. They provide another way to explain *Why* your tips are important. Another way to tell a reader you understand his struggles.

Today we focus on mini-stories. So, let's think about what makes a story fascinating. And what makes it boring.

Imagine you're watching a soccer match.

What would make the match so boring you'd fall asleep? It's when you feel nothing is happening. Sure, a few guys or girls are running around a field, but there's no real action. There's no drama. You don't feel anyone will score a goal. No sense of anticipation. There's no fight between the teams as if they don't care who will win.

Let's think about the other scenario. What would make you sit on the edge of your chair? When will your eyes be glued to the TV screen? This is of course when you feel something will happen. Will the referee award a penalty? Will someone be sent off? Will they score? Are they really going to lose now in the last minute?

What makes a match really exciting is when you feel something will happen. There's lots of action. You don't know the outcome, but you want to know what's happening next. There's drama, there's anticipation. You want to know who will win.

And the most riveting matches have what football manager Sir Alex Ferguson called "squeaky bum time". The final few minutes of a match that could still bring a win for your team.

So we know what makes stories spellbinding. We know we need drama, action, a sense of anticipation, and a "squeaky bum time" – this is like the climax, the make-or-break-point.

Let's now have a look at how you can write your mini-story to inspire your reader.

I'll first go through the process, and then we'll look at an example.

1. First you decide which problem you'd like to explain
2. Then you think of a personal story or example that can illustrate the problem
3. And then you write your mini-story. This has three parts:
  - Sketch a quick intro (this is often referred to as context)
  - Build anticipation to “squeaky bum time” (this is where you create drama)
  - Transition to your lesson (this is where your reader understands the solution. You can make the lesson part of your story, but you can also transition to your list of tips)

So, let's look at an example.

Henrietta would like to explain the problem that presenters are rambling on about topics their audience isn't interested in. And rather than talk again about how John, her ideal reader, makes his audience bored, she decides to shift to a completely different scenario – a boring school teacher.

This is the story she writes:

*Imagine you're a history teacher.*

*You enter a classroom full of 12-year olds.*

*You're eager to talk about the French Revolution.*

*You start your lesson with a short animated cartoon. You explain how the revolution marked the rise of democracy. You express the importance of voting rights.*

*But your students aren't listening. In the back of the class they're whispering together. And in the front, you can see them yawning.*

*What's going wrong?*

So let's analyze this.

The first two sentences set the scene quickly. Note how specific these sentences are – it's not about a teacher, but a history teacher. It's not any classroom, but a classroom full of 12-year olds. It's enough detail to be able to visualize it.

This (*You're eager to talk about the French Revolution.*) is an important sentence. It's what we call an anticipation sentence. This is where the reader starts to smell trouble coming up. The teacher might be eager to talk about the French Revolution, but are those twelve-year olds interested?

This [the next paragraph starting with *You start your lesson...*] is where you're building anticipation. Note how all the sentences are active – you start a lesson, you explain something, you express something. These all follow each other quickly and you start to wonder. This all sounds too good to be true. What's happening next?

And yep, this [the paragraph starting with *But your students aren't listening.*] is where the problem arises, and you can transition to your lesson, your tips.

As you can see – this is a super-simple story. It explains the context, builds anticipation, and then quickly gets to the point.

To tell stories, you don't have to write a whole novel or a long blog post. You can use these simple techniques to make your blog posts more interesting, and keep your readers hanging on your words, wanting to read more and more.

You might now wonder where you use your stories.

And my favorite position is after the introduction. You might want to add another story later. You could start your post with a story, too; and some bloggers do this successfully. However, it's easier to use the formula we discussed in module 6 for your opening, and then include your story after it. Of course, you can experiment with this.

So here's your checklist for writing mini-stories

- You set the scene quickly – this is super-important. You only want to share a few details that help your reader understand what you're talking about. It's usually a quick *who, what, where*.
- You use vivid details in a limited dose. This is usually where you have to edit thoroughly, because first drafts of stories are almost always too long.
- You create a sense of anticipation – you want to give your reader a feeling that something might be coming up. They're not sure what, but they want to find out.
- You create a sense of action – you do this by using active words and creating a quick sequence of events.
- Your mini-story resonates with your ideal reader – you know this already. You want to read your story through the eyes of your ideal reader to understand whether he will like it or not. A story is not about the person telling the story, but about the person reading it.

That's it for today. In the reading material you find 4 examples and a more detailed analysis of mini-stories.

Cheers!