

## BOOK REVIEW

### ***Instructional story design: Develop stories that train***

RANCE GREENE

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In *Instructional story design: Develop stories that train*, Greene proves the benefits of using stories in training and demonstrates how to do that successfully. With practical instruction and examples, *Instructional story design* leads the reader through developing stories, working with subject matter experts (SMEs), and producing story-based training. Greene illustrates his expertise in story design by using story to inform his design methods throughout the book. The reader follows a fictitious instructional designer, Dayna, as she grapples with, learns to, and triumphs in using stories in her e-learning projects. She works with SMEs, clients, stakeholders, and managers and follows instructional design (ID) practices, while developing meaningful stories to connect with her learners and convey the training. Through Dayna's struggles and victories, the reader learns how to create audience personas, build relatable characters, and focus on the action and conflict of the story as it relates to training objectives. Greene further describes how to produce stories using common technology tools, champion stories to convince doubting stakeholders and overcome common pitfalls.

This learning method — which Greene calls Story Design — is poignant because stories are humanity's oldest pedagogical tool (Kromka & Goodboy, 2019). The tradition of passing histories from one generation to the next caused human brains to attune to the pattern of story (Kromka & Goodboy, 2019). Human brains contain mirror neurons that allow us to not only empathise with others telling us a personal story but also relate to fictional characters struggling in a story. Keyser & Gazzola (2010) explain that, due to mirror neurons, as learners connect with stories, they can simulate a character's actions in their minds. Additionally, Butcher notes, that “constructivism teaches that learning is mental and involves language. One does not learn isolated facts and theories separate from one's lives and experiences” (2006, p. 201). Because of this deep-rooted connection to stories and our ability to empathise and relate to characters and their struggles, whether real or fictitious, stories can increase learning retention and knowledge transfer by helping learners connect new information to their own previous experiences.

This book is for instructional designers, trainers in a learning and development department, or anyone looking to teach through stories. While the stories in the book are from a corporate perspective, the information — at its basic level — is applicable anywhere. The content is written with a solid foundation on instructional design practices and should have sound practical application anywhere in learning. Additionally, this book contains something relevant for every level of instructional designer: from someone just starting their career, or someone who may have stumbled into the learning and development department by accident and got stuck with a project, to someone who has been training for years and is looking for a new way to freshen up their work. Any designer or instructor should find something of value within these pages.

Greene's Story Design is a structure for adding story-based content to learning. His method “emphasize[s] that what you are already doing during the instructional design process



directly supports Story Design” (p. 11). Like the well-known ID process of Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate (ADDIE), Greene’s Story Design includes three phases: Discover, Design, and Deliver, which align with the Analyse, Design, and Develop/Implement phases of ADDIE. The main difference is that Story Design focuses on crafting stories to fit the learning needs, which may become part of a larger learning strategy—not necessarily the sole deliverable. So, Greene’s theory does not replace ADDIE but works in tandem. The Discover phase focuses on developing an audience profile and the actions they must take because of training—this also helps the designer create the authentic characters and conflict essential in a relatable story. The Design phase focuses on translating information gathered in Discover into action for the story beats, writing a script, and planning how the story will be delivered. Deliver includes creating the e-learning (or other methods) and delivering it to the learners. Greene further provides a model for Story Design wherein the story consists of relatable characters facing strong conflict which creates a desire (from the audience) for resolution. Once that desire for resolution arrives, it opens a window for training where the instructor can deliver the action(s) the audience can take to work toward the desired outcome. Greene does not discuss the Evaluate phase of ADDIE in this book but, rather, focuses on evaluating the designed story and determining its effectiveness.

One interesting aspect of the book is its layers of information. There is a story layer, where readers learn through Dayna’s point of view and experiences, and an instruction layer, describing the instructional story design process. In the story, Dayna’s friend, James, acts as a sage who came alongside to help guide her and develop her storytelling skills. He also became her sounding board and provided feedback on where she could improve—relating to the real-life aspect of the iterative design process and getting feedback from SMEs and stakeholders. Within Dayna’s narrative, readers are exposed to two scenarios which she must think through, adding a story to the instruction. As an observer, the reader sees how she struggles to create characters and actions in her stories for scenarios within both privacy and phishing training.

Additionally, a third scenario woven throughout the book allows the reader to be the instructional designer. The story is told in the first-person present tense as if the reader is experiencing it themselves. Through this third scenario, of a dysfunctional chiropractic office, readers are encouraged to practice what they learned at each point in the book as the author guides them through developing their own stories to meet the training needs of the fictitious chiropractic staff. This portion of the book works more like a workbook where Greene provides interspersed forms and blanks to help readers think through how they might develop this training while incorporating stories. The forms are available to download as resources for use in personal or professional practice as well.

The book is divided into four parts: Discover, Design, Deliver and Overcome Barriers. In the last part of the book, Greene provides case studies from several nationally recognisable brands to showcase how stories impact training with practical problem-solving tactics. Greene also provides tips on producing the stories as e-learning using common technology tools such as PowerPoint, videos, e-learning development tools and more, along with examples any instructional designer could easily follow to implement the strategies in their work.

Overall, the book was engaging and informative—Greene proves his theory by teaching through stories. However, the third scenario was somewhat redundant. The chiropractic office practice scenario would be perfect for those with less experience or who are new to instructional design, those who may not be currently employed as an instructional designer and are looking for a sample project to add to their portfolio, or perhaps those who learn better by doing and getting

hands-on practice. I did appreciate that he not only led by example throughout the book but also provided practical application instructions and resources for future use. It was certainly more entertaining to read through the eyes of Dayna than simply reading a dry instructional book on how to apply storytelling theoretically to training. I found I could relate to Dayna because, as an instructional designer myself, I have been in similar situations with the pressures of projects or client expectations. So, her world felt familiar and believable — a key aspect Greene describes when creating a character persona based on your audience for story design! Dayna's narrative is inspirational because she approaches every project with an eye for incorporating a story and looking for the action steps that would lead to the desired learning outcomes. I believe in the power of storytelling and its ability to impact learning retention. After reading this book, I feel more confident in crafting stories for training, and, like Dayna, I will be actively looking for ways to incorporate storytelling into my work.

### References

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### Reviewer Notes

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0437-4613>

**Kris Watterson** works as an instructional designer at The Government Employees Health Association (GEHA) in Kansas City, and is a doctoral student (EdD) in educational technology at Boise State University. Email: [kriswatterson@u.boisestate.edu](mailto:kriswatterson@u.boisestate.edu)

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