



## Narrative, story and gamification

### Description

Whenever I speak to people in the circles within which I hang out, one of the things I keep hearing is story and narrative. “You have to tell your story”, “What is the narrative?”, “What is the company’s story?”. To be honest it drives me a little nuts, but that’s by the by. The fact is, these are important things to consider. One of the things that has got me thinking, is what is the difference between story and narrative?

Story seems to have quite a few definitions. According to the Oxford dictionary it is:

1. an account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment
2. a report of an item of news in a newspaper, magazine, or broadcast
3. an account of past events in someone’s life or in the development of something
4. the commercial prospects or circumstances of a particular company

Whilst narrative is defined as:

1. a spoken or written account of connected events; a story:

So really, story and narrative are pretty much the same thing! For me the most important definition for gamification is number 3 “an account of past events in someone’s life or in the development of something”. The way I look at both is that the story contains a start, a middle and an end. A narrative is more real time, it describes events as they are happening from the perspective of the person they are happening to. If you consider a game, the narrative would be the way events unfold as you play. The story will include the back story and the ongoing plot of the game. That being the case, the story would be the same for each player, where as the narrative would potentially be unique to each one.

How does this relate to gamification? Well, on the one hand you could consider that everyone has a story, they have a history and they have things happening to them right now. All of this goes influences who they are and who they may be in the future. In gamification we are often looking at influencing or changing behaviour, knowing the story of each person can help inform us how best to engage with and motivate them.

You could look at it even more literally though and actually create a story and so a narrative for each user to engage with whilst they use your system. This could be especially useful during the onboarding or scaffolding phases. Take your users through a story, preferably one that changes based on the choices they make and how they they wish to go through it. Give them what they need through completing parts of the story. Doing it this way, when done well, will have far more impact on them than giving them points for doing things. The sense of purpose that a story can give is very powerful – even if it is more a short story rather than an epic!

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but a good story is worth a thousand instruction manuals.

### **Category**

1. Gamification
2. Gaming

### **Tags**

1. narrative
2. onboarding
3. scaffolding
4. story

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### **Author**

andrzej-marczewski

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