CREATING FLOW: STORYBOARDING
THE SEARCH FOR THE GOLDEN STORYBOARD

WRITTEN BY: TONY ENG
SCRIPT AND ART BY: JAEHO KIM
THANKS TO MITCHELL HWANG, EVAN DENMARK
BROUGHT TO YOU BY MIT OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR

O BRAVE EXPLORER
ANSWER IF YOU DARE.
INTRODUCE A TALK,
NOT ONCE BUT THRICE
HOW WOULD YOU FARE?
Hi, my name is Tony. Today’s topic is on storyboarding. It’s the ordering of events in your story. Without storyboarding, every movie you watch might unfold the same way, which would be predictable and boring.

I’m Tony and I’d like to talk about the ordering of events in a story, something called storyboarding. Without it, every story would unfold in the same predictable and boring way.

Not all movies begin at the beginning. Some begin in the middle, some at the end. Just like the ordering of scenes in a movie can affect the audience experience, so can the ordering of points in a presentation. I’m Tony and I’d like to explore this idea of storyboarding with you.
Same with a presentation. You have to think about the ordering of sections in the talk, the ordering of slides within each section, and the ordering of comments you make about each slide.

Which pieces I choose and how I piece them together matters.
You could in theory use signposting to glue together any ordering of points to create a storyboard.

But not all storyboards are equally effective.

Most won’t make sense.

Some are okay.
For your presentation, pick a storyboard that is:

(1) Natural for you
(2) Suitable for your message
(3) Appropriate for your audience
A STORYBOARD IS NATURAL FOR YOU IF...

WHENEVER YOU TALK ABOUT ONE IDEA...

YOU NATURALLY RECALL AND SEGUE INTO THE NEXT IDEA.

You will have an easier time remembering your talking points, and your presentation will flow better.
A STORYBOARD IS SUITABLE FOR YOUR MESSAGE IF....

THERE IS SOME SORT OF STORY-ARC - I.E. SOME OVERARCHING STRUCTURE WHEN YOU STEP BACK AND LOOK AT THE TALK AS A WHOLE.

THREE EXAMPLE STORY-ARCS FOR TALKS IN GENERAL:

CHRONOLOGICAL;

NORMALCY-CONFLICT-RESOLUTION;

WHAT-IS VS. WHAT-COULD-BE*;

THREE OTHER STORY-ARCS INCLUDE: ORDER-OF-IMPORTANCE; GENERAL-TO-SPECIFIC AND PROBLEM-SOLUTION (OR PROBLEM STATEMENT-EXISTING SOLUTIONS-PROPOSED SOLUTION).

*Due to Nancy Bcurt

THAT LAST ONE, PROBLEM-SOLUTION, IS USEFUL FOR TECHNICAL TALKS BECAUSE YOU CAN USE THE PROBLEM TO SPARK INTEREST AND TO MOTIVATE DISCUSSION OF YOUR SOLUTION. BUT SOLUTION-PROBLEM COULD WORK TOO! YOU COULD PIQUE INTEREST BY STARTING WITH THE SOLUTION, ESPECIALLY IF IT WAS SOMETHING NO ONE THOUGHT YOU COULD ACHIEVE.
Finally, a storyboard is appropriate for the audience if...

It helps facilitate the understanding of your talk.

The number of examples you include and the level of detail you go into might depend on who your audience is and how well they are responding.

You also want to minimize cognitive jumps that are too big by storytelling your points so that they build upon one another.

For example, theory-example is another common storyboard - i.e., give the formal mathematical definition first, then give some examples. But for some audiences, example-theory may be less overwhelming: start with examples within their grasp, and then derive the formal definition.
Three final thoughts. You can:

Storyboard on the fly in response to something unexpected! E.g. when interrupted by a question, you might end up skipping around in your slide deck and using your slides out of order.

Create a sense of progress, e.g. given two equally acceptable storyboards, I might choose the one in which the first few points can be covered quickly.

And lastly, provide closure by (1) tying up loose ends, and/or (2) ending with a callback to the start.
I often tinker with the storyboard right up until the actual moment that I give the talk! There is no one right storyboard. Be open to experimenting in order to find the best one for you, your message and your audience.
The Golden Storyboard

"Just go with the flow!"