

## Snap Judgment's Storytelling 101

So you've listened to some shows, you're inspired and excited, and you're ready to tell your story. And we're standing on the sidelines, rooting for you and blasting our air horns. We want to help you make the best content possible, so we put together the Snap Judgment Guide to Storytelling to get you all shined up and broadcast-ready.

**First and foremost: is your story really a *story*?** There's a place for musings, essays and hard-hitting investigative journalism. But it's not here. We're about raw, primal narrative. Forget about irony, satire and your thesis. Instead, go back to elementary school—where you were taught that stories should have a beginning, a middle and an end. You've got your setting. You've got your characters. And you've got your climax.

***Conflict*** is what Snap Judgment is all about. We can't stress that enough. That moment where you're tied to a chair and the room is filling up with water, the moment where you're trying on her dress and you hear the sound of your wife's footsteps signaling impending doom... that left, that right, jump! That's the kind of moment every good story needs. Try to identify that one moment within your story. Is there something important at stake? If the answer is no, then your story is probably not for us.

Think about it this way: there are movie houses that put out didactic documentaries, and ones that put out dreamy indie romps with lovely out-of-focus shots and forays into metaphor. But we are the house that puts out blockbusters. We want action. Suspense. Drama. If your car turned into an interstellar robot, we want to hear about it.

This is not to say that the stories should all be about bombs and kung fu. We're looking for the blockbusters of *public radio*, after all. We'd still like to hear about stories that address complex, sensitive issues, but we'd like you to show rather than tell. Don't tell us that the government should legalize gay marriage. Give us the story about a child who was raised by a lesbian couple, but when his biological mother died, he was forced into a foster home instead of living with his lifelong adoptive mother. Your story *is* your argument.

For more information on what makes a great story, read Ira Glass' **Transom Manifesto** [<http://www.transom.org/guests/review/200406.review.glass.html>]. Especially parts **Two** [<http://www.transom.org/guests/review/200406.review.glass2.html>] and **Three** [<http://www.transom.org/guests/review/200406.review.glass3.html>]

### Tips For Getting Your Story On Air

#### *Listen.*

Check out our past shows, The Moth [[themoth.org](http://themoth.org)], This American Life [[thislife.org](http://thislife.org)] and Story Corps [[storycorps.org](http://storycorps.org)]. Pay attention to the stories around you. What makes the good ones work so well?

#### *Make it Real.*

Let us see, taste and feel your sound. Make your words come alive with imagery and vivid descriptions.

*Strip It Down.*

Ideal Snap Judgment stories run between 6 and 9 minutes. Stories over 10 minutes are extremely rare. Find the essential parts of your story and whittle it down.

*Live it Up.*

There's nothing worse than a fantastic, swashbuckling story being told in a Ben Stein voice. Laugh. Squeak. Scream. Draw us into your world.

*Squeaky Clean.*

If you wouldn't say it in polite company, then don't say it on the radio. Public radio listeners are a very dignified bunch.