



BUILD A CLEAR STRUCTURE FOR YOUR STORY

Preparatory online module for the
Analytic Storytelling training

ANALYTIC
STORYTELLING 

Welcome to the online module of the Analytic Storytelling training.

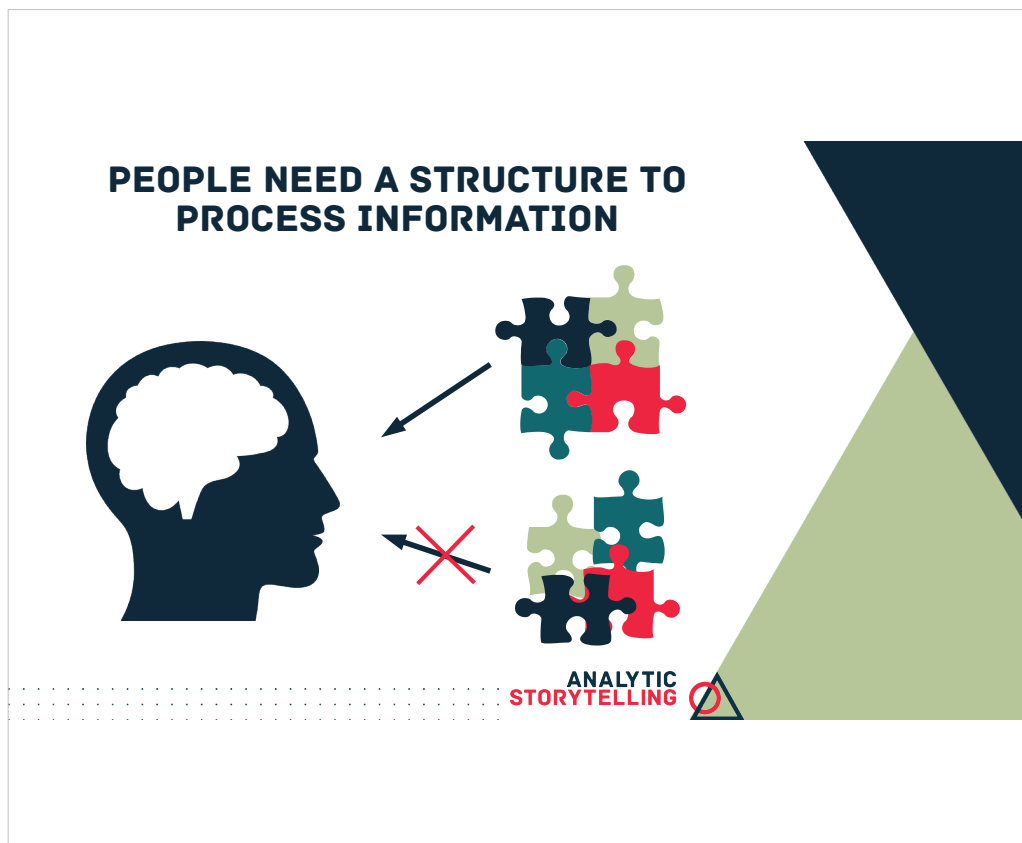
This module is the preparation for the first meeting.

In what follows, you will learn a method for structuring your story.

After this we will ask you to apply this method to your own work by making a storyline about your work, which you can then send to your trainer.

We will discuss your story structure during our first meeting. And it will be the basis for your further work during the training.

This being said, let's take a closer look at the structuring method and begin with the question why a good story is in need of a clear structure.



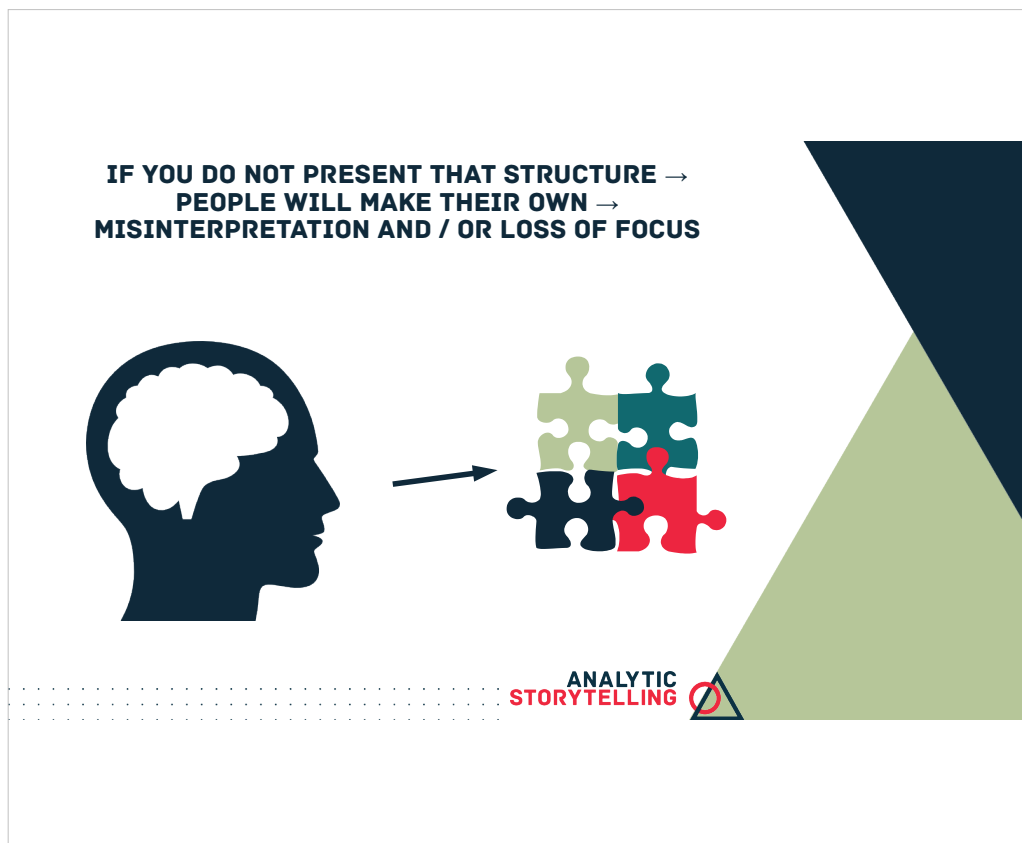
People need a structure to process information. In order to follow a story, either written or spoken, people need to understand how all the bits of information relate to one another.

So, when you present information to your audience, they will look for logical connections between the things you're saying.

Such as: this must be a reason for that statement; or, this is probably an example of the previous point.

This structuring can be a conscious or an unconscious process in your audience, but in any case it will happen, since people automatically look for structure and are in need of it.

So if you do not present a clearly structured story, then your audience will start looking for it, leading to two potential problems.



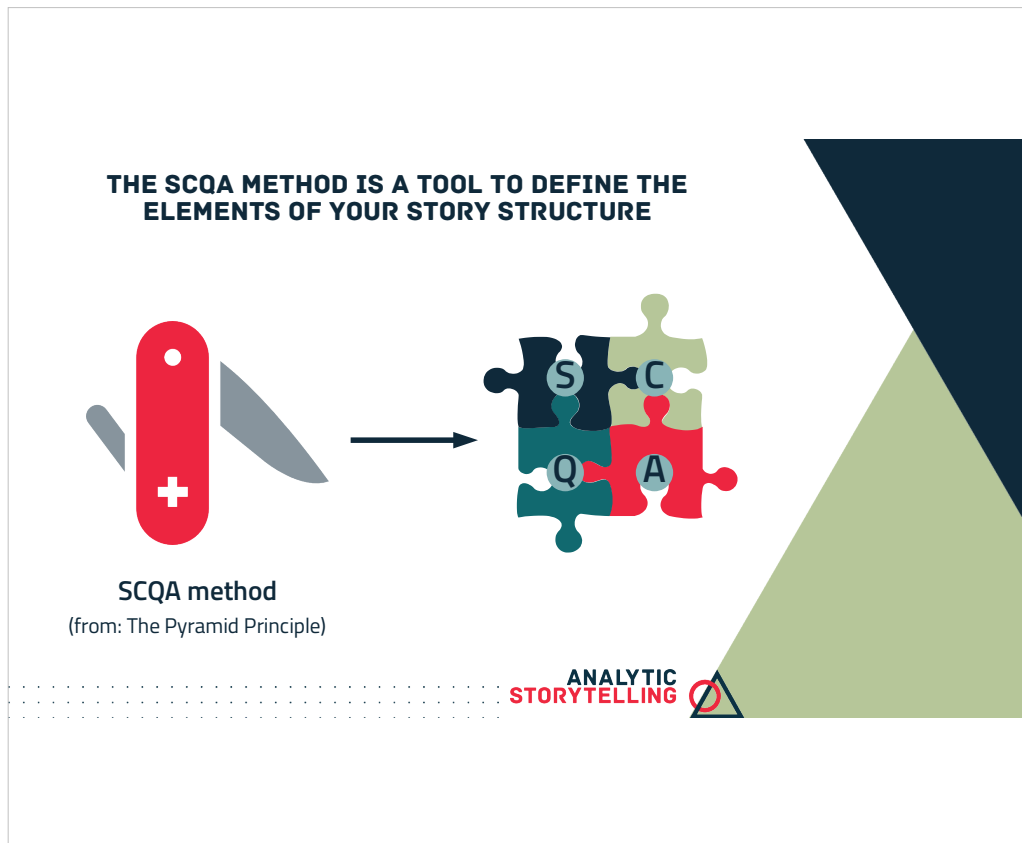
First of all, your audience could misinterpret your structure and thus would not be able to understand your story. Because of that, they might lose attention, or they may draw false conclusions

Secondly, even if your audience interprets your story correctly, they have to work hard to do so. And because of their effort, they will have less attention for what more you have to tell them or they might lose attention all together and stop reading or listening to you.

Thus to prevent these negative effects and instead have your audience fully grasp what you are telling them, you as a presenter or writer, need to structure your story as clearly as possible.

This requires you to have a very clear view on your own story structure.

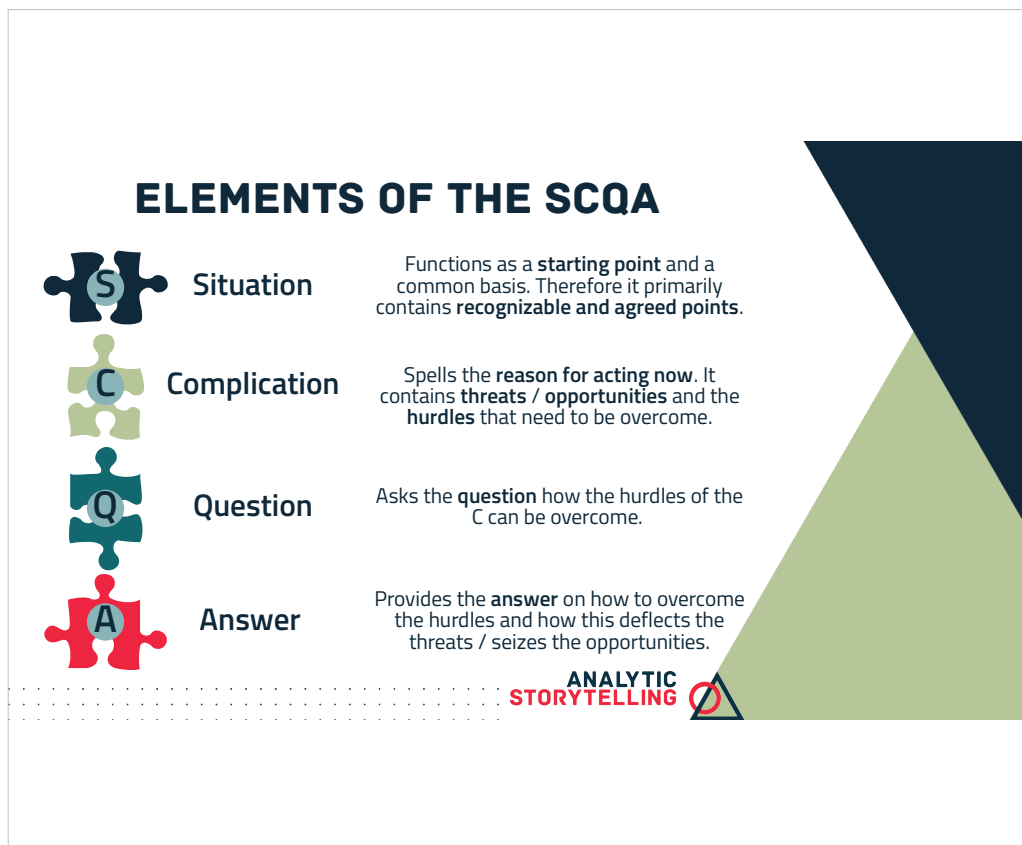
So, our next step is to learn a method that enables you to gain that.



The SCQA method is a tool to define different elements in your story. It is very suitable for structuring storylines in a broad range of fields: from research, to business, policy making and even creative writing.

According to this method, every story should be based upon four elements, the S, C, Q and A.

We will introduce each element and then we will discuss an example to make it more concrete.



The SCQA stand for Situation, Complication, Question and Answer. Together these elements form the structure of the story; so let's take a closer look at each of them.

The Situation, is the starting point of your story. It is important that your audience can easily understand it and can recognize what you are telling them, so they get introduced to your topic and how it relates to their own world. Therefore, the Situation is mainly made up of recognizable and mostly agreed points. They describe what is going on in the world and the topic of your work.

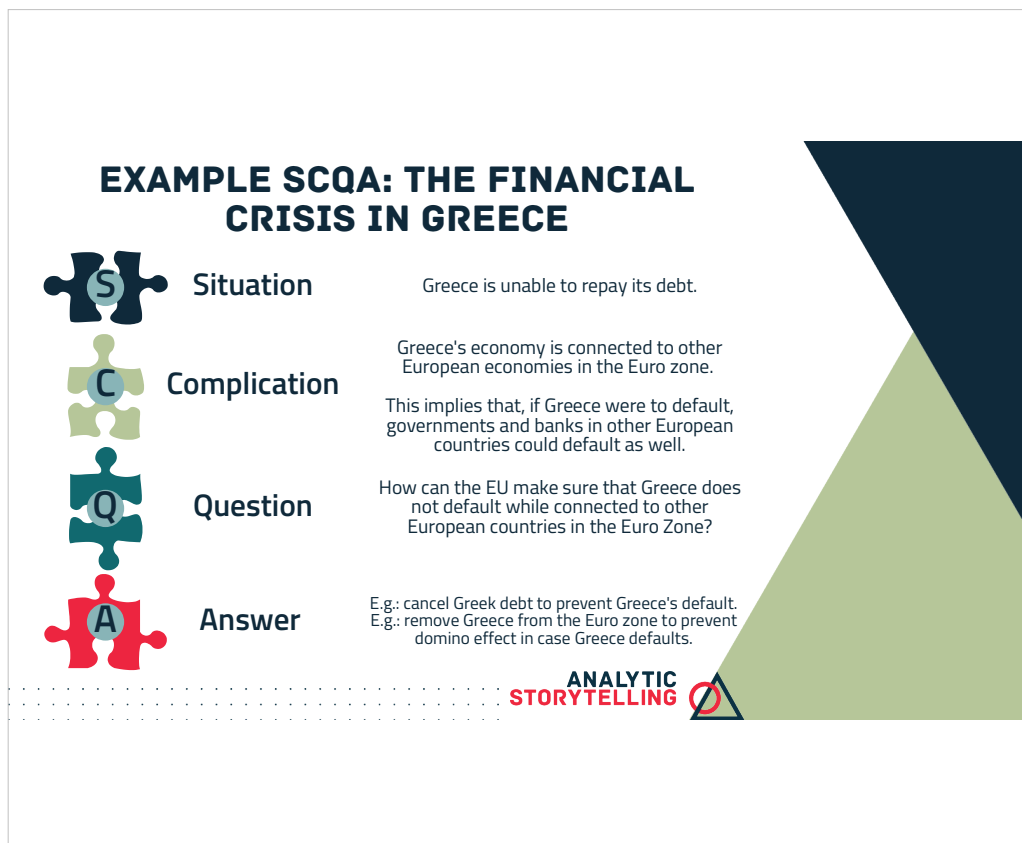
Of course, this is not a story yet. For if you would only describe some situation as it is, there is no reason to act. For example, there is no reason to carry out research, or to make new policy or to want to change something in the world or to invest in new projects. While of course there is a reason that you ask people's attention for your story..

This is where the Complication comes in: what threats do we face if the Situation carries on as it is now? Or what opportunities do we miss, if it carries on? Explaining this well in your Complication, will give your story its urgency.

Also part of the Complication is: what practical hurdles do we need to overcome to prevent those threats or to realize those opportunities? If you sharply define the Complication, the Question follows naturally. It asks how the hurdles in your Complication can be overcome so that we can either deflect the negative effects or seize the opportunities.

The A provides the Answer. It explains what we should do and how we can do it. Thereby, your Answer should make explicit how it will succeed in solving the Complication that has been raised.

This theoretical explanation of the SCQA is a bit abstract, so we illustrate it with a short, rudimentary example of an SCQA.



As an example, we will take a topic that in recent years has often been in the news. So you will most probably have heard about it. The financial crisis in Greece.

First, we are looking for a brief description of the Situation. Try to come up with one sentence that describes what was going on with Greece and Europe in say, 2008. Remember that it serves as a common starting point, so it should be something that for example the Greek government, as well as European officials and European citizens would be able to recognize.

As statement for the Situation, we chose "Greece is unable to repay its debt". This is a statement that the different parties involved can probably all recognize. Now, you may have a different statement that is equally adequate; there is not one right answer here. For the sake of the exercise however, continue with the Situation we just formulated, so that we can determine the other elements from there.

To move towards the Complication of our storyline we can ask ourselves "So what?". So what that Greece can not repay its debt? Why is that a problem?

Now, here perspective comes in to play. Whereas the Situation is more of a factual statement, in the Complication it becomes more argumentative. Because why some situation is a problem will differ for the different parties involved. Now, for this exercise, try to formulate a Complication that arises for the European Union. So from their perspective, what threats are there that arise from the fact that Greece is unable to repay its debt?

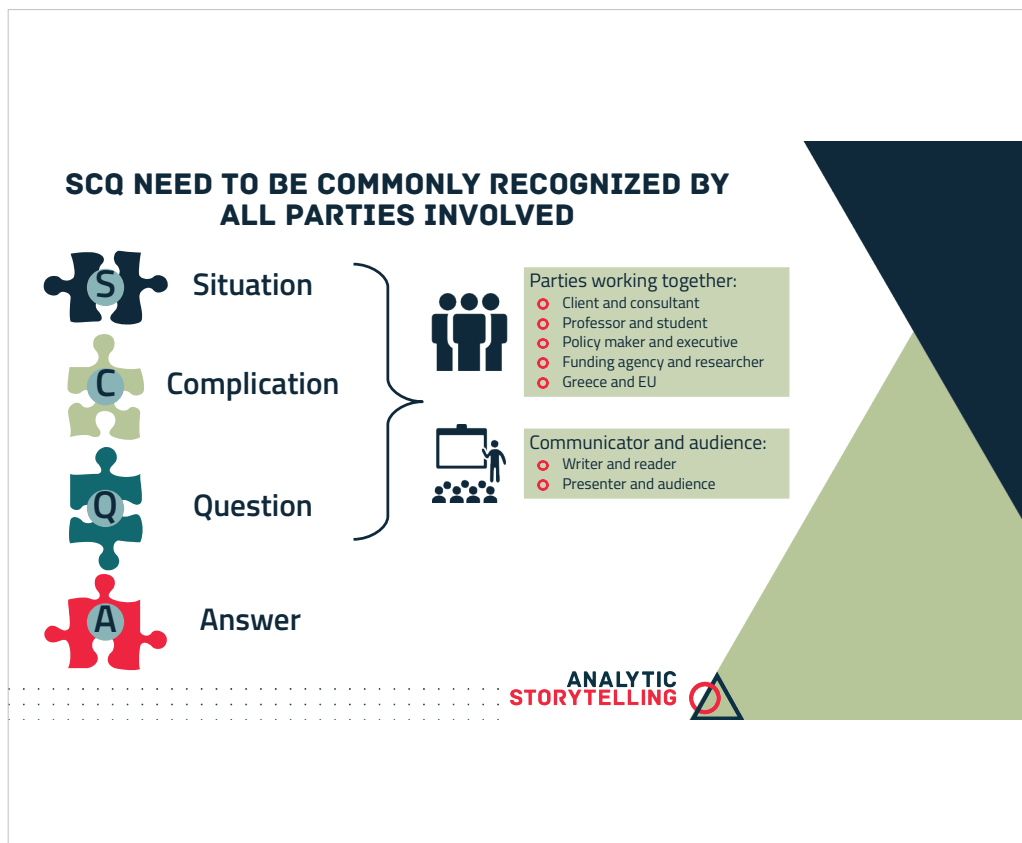
One way to formulate the Complication from the European perspective is shown here. The threat is that the European Union could default as well, because, 1): Greece might default and 2) Greece is connected to the EU by the Euro zone.

As we said, perspective determines the Complication. So for other involved parties, such as the Greek government or Greek citizens, the Complication could be a very different one. The Greek government, for instance, might formulate a Complication like: we might lose our ability to provide public services such as police and health care to our citizens.

To continue with this exercise, we will maintain the European perspective. Given the Complication, what could be the Question?

As you can see, the Question directly follows from the threat and the two points that were raised in the Complication. Given this Question, could you think of a few (hypothetical) Answers?

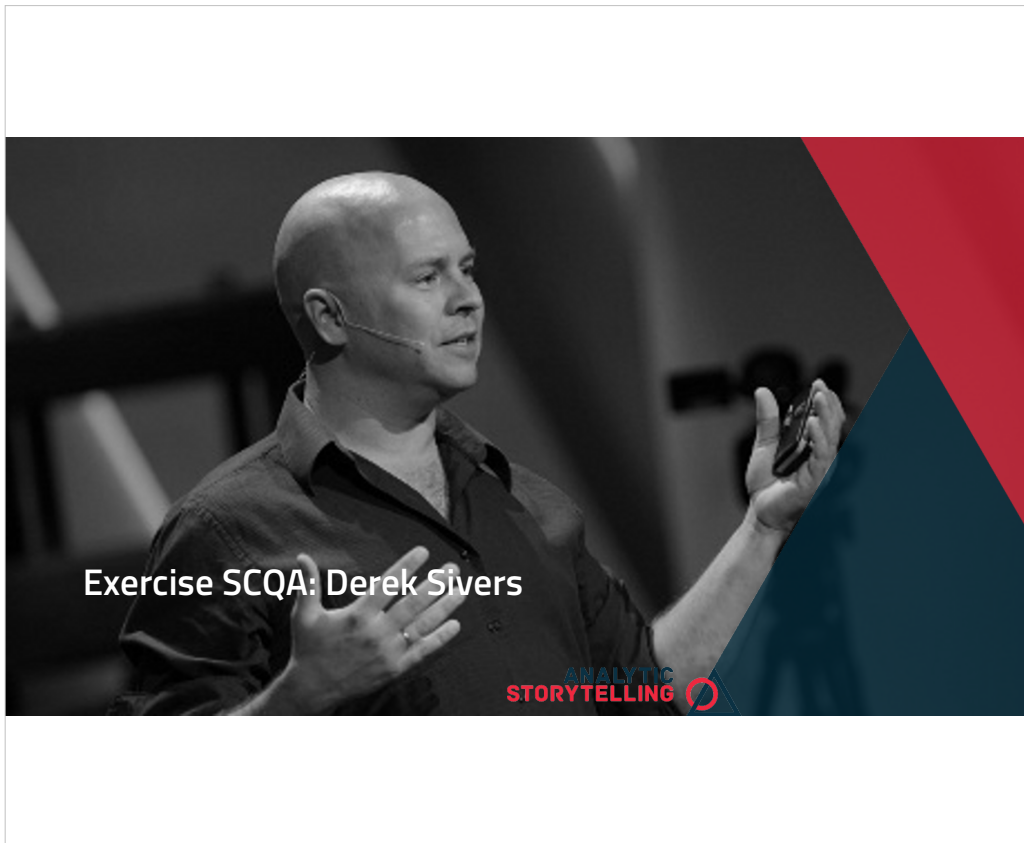
Take a look at our few potential Answers to the Question. Again, note that the Answer will depend on on the Complication. If we had formulated the Complication from the Greek perspective, the second Answer would probably not have been a possible Answer at all.



In the example of the Greek crisis, we saw that you can build an SCQ from different perspectives. And that the perspective will determine what could be possible Answers.

Now, when working together in a project, the SCQ should be agreed upon by all parties involved. For only if all parties consider the same thing to be the problem, can they work together and understand one another in their search for potential answers

When communicating your story, a commonly recognized SCQ makes sure that the audience understands what you want to do in your Answer, for instance in your research project or in your policy proposal, and also will they understand why this is relevant.



Now that you have been introduced to the SCQA and looked at an example, let's do a short exercise. You will watch a three-minute TED Talk of Derek Sivers, who will explain something about how people deal with their personal goals. Your task is to formulate the SCQA of Derek's story.

So, while listening to the talk, make notes on the Situation, Complication, Question and Answer that Derek uses. An answer model will be available on the next slide.

[Please find Derek's TED Talk here:

http://www.ted.com/talks/derek_sivers_keep_your_goals_to_yourself]

EXERCISE SCQA: DEREK SIVERS

S:
Everybody has personal goals, and finds it feels good to share them.
[Additionally: There is a conventional wisdom that it's good to share your goals.]

C:
But telling someone your goals makes them **less** likely to happen.

Q:
So, if this is true, what can we do?

A:
Do not share your goals or share them in a way that does not give you immediate satisfaction.

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Here you see the SCQA that we found in Derek's talk. Do you recognize this flow? Let's quickly run through it.

Derek starts by describing how people tend to share their goals. He then introduces why this tendency leads to a problem. From this Complication, he phrases a short Question. He ends with two possible answers to the Question that could solve the Complication.

What is interesting to notice is that Derek spends the vast majority of his three minutes on explaining and proving the Complication. This is probably because the Complication is very counter-intuitive for his audience, so he figured they would need some more convincing there. When working on your own SCQA, you can also take into consideration which element of your story needs most attention.

Now that you have identified the SCQA in someone else's story, it is time to exercise building one yourself.

EXERCISE: MAKE AN SCQA FOR A CASE ON ONLINE STORAGE

Case starting point: an ever increasing amount of data and files is stored online by individuals, governments and companies.

Please do the following:

- Formulate an SCQA for this case from the perspective described below
- Write it down in a list of bullet points (aim for ~10 – 15 points in total)
- The perspective:

You work at the legal faculty of a university. You want to create a Master's degree program on digital and online law. You need to convince the board of the university of this idea.

Some tips:

- You can use the case starting point above as the first bullet of your S.
- To reason from the first bullet onwards, ask yourself "So what?". This leads you from one bullet to another, further into the S and ultimately to the C.
- Try to incorporate in your C: 1) what threats / opportunities there are and 2) which hurdles should be overcome.
- Your Q should follow directly from your C.
- Your A should answer your Q and solve your C.
- There is no single correct answer, the answer model provides an example answer and discusses common pitfalls.

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In this exercise you will build an SCQA for a storyline on online data storage.

The task is to formulate an SCQA for this case from the described perspective. The starting point will be: "an ever increasing amount of data and files is stored online by individuals, governments and companies."

Build your SCQA in the form of a list of bullet points. Aim for about 10 to 15 bullet points in total. You can use the tips we provide to get from the starting point all the way to your Answer.

After finishing your SCQA, you can compare it to the one on the answer model provided here:

http://analytic-storytelling.com/online_module/slides/Answer_Model_Exercise.pdf

Also read the pitfalls that often occur in making an SCQA; they are explained on the answer model as well.

Now that you have finished this exercise, it is time to apply the SCQA method to your own work.

PREPARATORY ASSIGNMENT

- Formulate the SCQA for your project
- Make sure that you choose a project that is relevant for your current work
- Adapt to your audience: your fellow members of the training group, so no specialists in your field

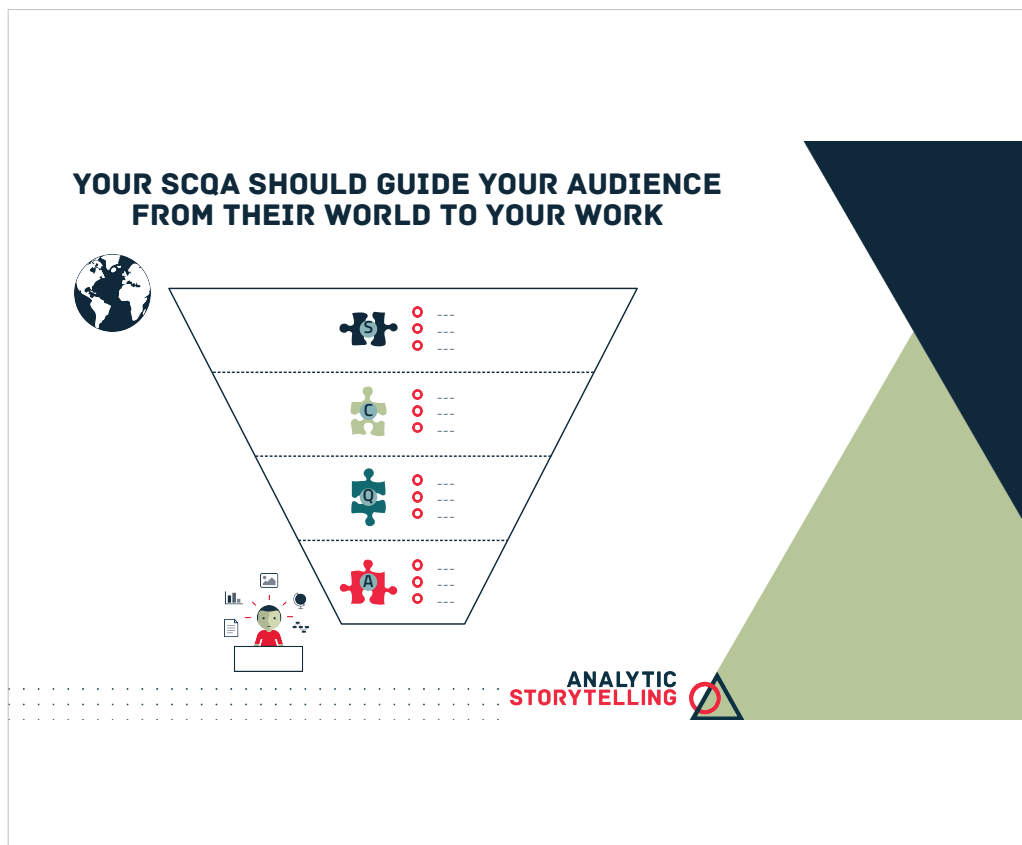
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You will apply the SCQA in a preparatory assignment for your first training session.

The assignment is as follows: make an SCQA for a project that you are working on. It can be a large project you or a specific part of your project.

There are two things to consider. One, if possible, choose a project that you are currently working on, so that you can directly use the SCQA you will make for your work. Two, your first audience will be the members of your training group, so make sure you write your SCQA in a way that intelligent laymen can understand. This means: not too much jargon, or at least no jargon without explanation.

While making your SCQA, you will of course use the insights you have gained from the theory and the exercises. But in addition, there is one more thing we would like to show you, for it may be helpful.



Here you see the SCQA depicted in a funnel. You can consider the SCQA to be a funnel that helps your audience to move from the world that they know and are familiar with, to the very specific area of your work.

When you start a story, your audience is at the broadest end of the funnel, in the general world so to speak. And you are at the smallest point of the funnel with all the details of your work.

Now, it is your task to bring your audience all the way to your specialized field. This implies a few things:

First of all, start with a broad perspective in the Situation. One that connects well with your audience. Then reason along to your Complication, for instance by repeatedly asking yourself: "So what?" whereby you can move from point to point.

Then, in your Complication, make sure that you get to your complication, the actual problem that you are trying to solve – not a more general one that is behind your work. For example, if you are doing research on a specific element of a new drug, do not only state that the Complication is that currently the disease can not be cured. Continue to explain what practical hurdles need to be overcome to get to a final solution and how your work fits into this picture. This allows you to go from the bigger picture to your own topic.

Then, in your Answer be clear on how your work will contribute in overcoming the hurdles and thereby solving the problem. In this way you refer back to the bigger scheme, at the broader end of the funnel.

If you are building a storyline for a policy or advisory context think about who you address and what you want to convince them of. For this will influence the flow of your SCQA. For example, when you are at the start of the policy process you might be informing the board on different possible solutions to a problem. Later on in the process, you might be writing a concrete action plan for the employees involved in the project.

These are two very different audiences. In both cases, your SCQA should guide your audience from the world they are working in, to the details that you want to show them.

With this funnel view in mind, let's return to the assignment.

PREPARATORY ASSIGNMENT

- Formulate the SCQA for your project
 - Make sure that you choose a project that is relevant for your current work
 - Adapt to your audience: your fellow members of the training group, so no specialists in your field

Please do the following:

- Write your SCQA in the format provided here
- E-mail the result (~1 A4) to your trainer before the deadline specified in his or her e-mail
- Bring enough printed copies for your group members to the first training session

In case you have any questions about this assignment, please contact your trainer.

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So here are the practical details of the assignment. Please write your SCQA in the format provided here:

http://analytic-storytelling.com/online_module/slides/Format_PreparatoryAssignment_AnalyticStorytelling.docx

Aim for a maximum of one page.

E-mail the result to your trainer at least two days before your first training session. Please make sure that you hand in the assignment on time.

Finally, bring enough printed copies for your group members to the first session.

Should you have any questions, please contact your trainer as soon as possible.

THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Please do not forget the preparatory assignment.
We look forward to seeing you at the training.

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You have now reached the end of the module on how to build a clear structure for your story. Thank you for your attention.

We look forward to seeing you at the first session!