



Framing & Reframing

In terms of story telling, framing means how you present the material, the context you put it in.

So reframing means changing the context in which you view an experience. It's seeing the events in your life in a different light, through a different lens, from a different angle changing your "frame of reference" or your "frame of mind."

Reframing can make the transition from...

- Seeing yourself as a victim to seeing yourself as a survivor
- A crisis to an opportunity.
- Saying, "I have to..." to saying, "I get to..."!
- A perceived weakness (e.g., shyness) to a strength (e.g., introspective and sensitive).
- A "failed" relationship to a valuable experience that taught you important lessons and prepared you for something (or someone) better in the future.

When applied to your life, reframing is based on a very powerful premise: Your past doesn't define you YOU define your past!

Reframing does not mean lying or changing/distorting the facts of your experiences. It simply means seeing them from a different and, hopefully, more helpful perspective.

For instance, the would-be painter from earlier examples could tell two very different stories based on her life, depending on how she framed her situation:

I just turned 50, and I never did the one thing I wanted to do most all my life: pursue art. I just kept putting it off and putting off, and then one thing after another kept getting in my way, I never got around to it...and now I never will.

It's too late. All the up-and-comers in the art world are in their 20s and 30s. How can I compete with that or with people my age who have been doing this for decades? Forget it! This whole art thing was never anything more than a pipe-dream.

I'm worse than a has-been; I'm a never-was! I'm a total failure. I'm a loser. I'm worthless. Or, here's the same situation put in a very different frame:

I just turned 50, and I've never been more sure of what I want to do with my life: paint! It's been a long-time dream, and I feel that now is the right time! In addition to my passion for art itself, I'll be able to bring lots of life experience to my work. I've learned so much about life and about myself what's important to me and what isn't, how to get motivated and get focused, and how to get things done!

I've also loved, lost, and experienced so much that I know will enrich my work and bring a depth and maturity to it that I never could have done when I was younger. This is what I want. I feel the passion, I'm motivated, and I know that the right time is right now! I'm ready to paint!

Which frame do you think shows her story in the most helpful light? Which frame boosts her self-esteem? Which frame is going to support her continue to write and live the kind of life-story that she wants?

Since YOU are the author of your own story, why not frame it in ways that support you? Why not interpret the events in your life in uplifting ways? Why not ascribe empowering meaning to your experiences?

As you edit and rewrite your story (this week and beyond), keep in mind what it means to you. And remember that you CHOOSE the meaning through the way that you frame and interpret your story!

Give Yourself an Empowering Frame

What other frames, interpretations, and meanings could you bring to your story? How could you present the same material in a different light? Briefly summarize your story in three different ways from three different (but all positive/empowering) angles.





Frame #1:

Frame #2:

Frame #3:

A Caveat About Reframing

Reframing is one of the most powerful tools you have in your transformational tool kit as a storyteller and in your everyday life.

I invite you to put it to use this week (as you rewrite your story), next week (as you bring your best story to life), and for the rest of your life (whenever you sense that there's a more empowering perspective to bring to your experiences).

But reframing can also be a double-edged sword (or, to double down on clichés, a slippery slope), so I feel compelled to offer this caveat: Use reframing as a way to tell a different story, rather than as an excuse to keep repeating the same old story from a slightly different angle.

For example, if your old story was about a “failed” relationship or a string of “failed” relationships you could reframe that in a number of empowering ways. For instance, you could consider what you learned from each relationship.

Maybe one partner mistreated and disrespected you...until you said, “Enough!” so you learned to respect and stand up for yourself.

Maybe the end of a so-so relationship taught you that you don't have to settle. Or maybe noticing patterns repeated again and again taught you that it wasn't just about the other people that something in you was attracting these partners/situations.

And now you can learn from that “something” becoming more aware, more empowered, and ready to move forward in your life rather than reliving those no longer helpful patterns. You're ready to really live!

HOWEVER...

If you keep on telling your “new” story about how you finally said, “Enough!” to a disrespectful partner, you run the risk of making that partner and that relationship a major focus of your current story and your current/future life!

This is especially true if you find yourself getting angry when retelling your “new, empowered” story. You might be holding onto the past and a particularly undesirable piece of the past!

With all the people and things that you could choose to focus on, is this really where you would like to put your attention?

Is this really the most empowering topic for you to think about and talk about (regardless of your angle or frame)?

Is this how you'd choose to define yourself? If you've studied or practiced the Law of Attraction, you may know the danger of the double-negative.

For instance, if I tell myself, “Don't procrastinate! I really need to stop procrastinating! No more procrastination! I am no longer a procrastinator!”...what key word am I pounding into my subconscious mind? Of course: procrastination!

(And what a less than optimal charged word at that!) I might kid myself that it's OK because I've reframed the story (and yes, to an extent I have: changing the angle from “I procrastinate” to “Don't procrastinate”), but the key word is the same, the theme is the same, the subject matter is the same, and there's a good chance that the energy is the same.

Basically, the STORY is the same! (I've just changed a detail.)

Next month we'll revisit the idea (and practice) of reframing. But for now, as you edit/rewrite, bear in mind its double-edged power!

Now, let's wrap up this month's lesson on a more heroic note...

Your Heroic Journey

We've touched on so many different areas of your story: character, themes, motivation, arc, subtext, and many other elements that go into writing, editing, and rewriting. One aspect that we haven't explored much, however, is structure.

Yes, I provided a basic template, which you may have used while writing your story. But there are many other ways that you can structure a story.

For instance:

- Some writers think in terms of a protagonist who wants something but must overcome obstacles to attain it.
- Screenwriter John Truby uses a structure of 22 plot points, which he summarizes in seven main steps: problem/need, desire, opponent, plan, battle, self-revelation, new equilibrium.
- And perhaps most common of all dramatic structures is the three-act story (which, in screenplays, is usually divided by turning points at roughly the 25% and 75% marks generally marked by an inciting incident early in Act I and a climax and denouement late in Act III).
- Or, in lay terms, you can just keep in mind that most stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Beyond dramatic structure or screenwriting conventions, however, there's a much deeper structure that your story probably reflects.





I invite you to review your (new) first draft, and then consider the notes you've already made while editing, including double-checking to make sure that the story embodies the character you want to be, reflects the values you cherish, and leads to the happy ending you desire.

Make sure it's a compelling enough story to invest your energy into one that you'd be excited to write, rewrite, and live!

New Draft of Your New Story

Take some time to reflect on your new story including your first draft, edits, and all the notes that went into it. Keep in mind your responses to last month's processes as well as any new thoughts and feelings that may have arisen over this past week. And then write a new draft of your most empowered, most inspiring, most YOU story possible, describing your new "character" and your new life...the way you declare them to be from this point on!

New Story Summary

Write a brief summary of your new story in just a few short sentences. (Almost like an "elevator speech": a condensed version that gets right to the heart of your new life-story something that you could tell someone during a short elevator ride.)

Your Homeric Epithets

Let's further focus your story and continue last month's theme of your heroic journey by giving yourself Homeric epithets!

Epithets are labels, nicknames, or short descriptions that convey someone's essence or, at least, a noteworthy aspect of their character. Although they've been used widely for thousands of years, they're probably most closely associated with the epic poet Homer (author of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*). He used many recurring epithets to describe the gods/goddesses (e.g., "wide-seeing Zeus"), mortals ("swift-footed Achilles"), and nature ("rosy-fingered dawn"). Some characters are described by multiple epithets, such as Odysseus, who is alternately referred to as "much-enduring," "wise," "man of action," and "great teller of tales," among other descriptive phrases.

So, if you had to give yourself Homeric epithets, what would they be? What if you had to choose just one?

Embrace your inner (and outer) hero, and ask: How would an epic poet describe your highest self?

Your Homeric Epithets

Write down self-descriptive words/phrases that accurately (and heroically) reflect your highest self. Then, circle the one that you're most excited about. In other words, if you had to choose just one epithet for yourself, what would it be? (remember that this is a description of your ideal Shero and life-story the way you'd like to live, even if it doesn't describe you 100%...yet!)

Through the process of writing, rewriting, and summarizing your new story, you've probably gained a clear sense of who you are and the life you're consciously creating. You know your character and your story. You've reflected on your life and your values, and you've drawn inspiration from many types of writers: from songwriters and stand-up comedians to ancient Greek poets and contemporary novelists.

You've done a lot of writing, and you've arrived at your best story (for now, at least) onto the page. Now it's time to translate that story into your beyond-the-page life. Or, to use a more apt writing metaphor, you're going to adapt your story for the "movie" of your life!

Adaptation: From the Page to the Screen (of Your Life)

Just like a writer might adapt a novel into a screenplay, this week you're going to adapt your on-the-page story into a living, breathing experience not for the stage or the screen, but for your actual life.

And just like a film adaptation of a novel might require some tweaking (taking into account the actors, scenery, special effects, and other film-related factors), you'll probably make adjustments during your own adaptation. You'll try out actions, attitudes, and lines of dialogue to see what works, what feels right, what feels like the story that you want to live, and what feels like YOU (the you that you becoming!) Some parts of your story may look great on the page but not work so well in your actual life, while others might make a seamless transition into the real world.

As you adapt your story for the "big screen" of your life, let's explore some key principles of screenwriting and see

what inspiration and insight they can bring to your adaptation process.

Cinematography: How Does It Look?

The first step in adapting your story is to ask yourself how it might look in real life. For instance, you might know that your "Shero" is artistic. Great! But how does this translate onto the "screen" of your life? Does it mean that she paints impressionistic landscapes? Or wears funky bohemian clothes? Or gives performance-art shows? How does her creativity manifest itself?

Or let's say that you've written a new worldview for yourself: you've decided to see the world as a compassionate place, full of good, trustworthy people. How might that translate into your day-to-day life?

Will you be more likely to trust strangers? Will you give people the benefit of the doubt, even when their motives seem questionable? Or will you simply feel more relaxed and have faith that it will all work out?





How might your on-the-page character translate off the page? Are there any specific “scenes” from your story that you know would transition easily to real life? What parts of your story might require a little more creative adaptation to work them into your daily life? Imagine that you’re a cinematographer involved in your story’s adaptation (working closely with the film’s writer, director, and lead actor who are all you as well!). How would you film it to best represent this story and its lead character?

Your Adapted Self

What does the adaptation of your “Shero” look like? How might this new character express herself in the real world? What scene or image would best capture the character’s essence?

Your Adapted Story

What does the adaptation of your story look like either in general terms or specific scenes? In what ways would it be different from your written story, or would it be basically the same?

Show (Don’t Tell)

This is an important principle for many forms of writing, but especially for screenplays. After all, film is such a visual medium—you’ve got to be able to see the story!

(In fact, some screenwriting teachers say that you should be able to watch a movie with the sound off and still get the gist of what’s going on. I once heard a teacher describe this as the “airplane” test—namely, if you’re in an airplane that’s showing a movie, but you don’t buy the headphones, you should still be able to follow the story just from looking at other people’s screens. That’s because most effective movies show the plot through action.)

As you adapt your story into the movie of your life, think of ways to bring your character’s inner dynamics into their external life. For instance, instead of having a character who goes around telling people, “I’m very confident”—show them acting confidently! Instead of having a character who goes around telling people, “I’m very talented”—show them in action, doing what they’re talented at...and doing it very well! Instead of having a character who goes around telling people, “I’m very compassionate”—show them helping others, listening with empathy and understanding, and acting for others’ benefit.

In other words, have them “walk the walk.”

Of course, the writer needs to know their character’s inner life very well before they can show it to others. So, review your character notes, reread your most recent story draft, and spend some time taking a good honest look at your “character’s” predominant qualities: confident, compassionate, or any other significant traits. And then think of how you can best express these beautiful qualities in your everyday life.

Character Traits

What are your lead character’s most significant, positive qualities?

Show What You Know

How can you SHOW these qualities in your real life?

Subplots

Movies don’t just have one big story and that’s it. They usually have at least one (and frequently many) subplots. An action movie will frequently have a romantic subplot. (In fact, most movies have a romantic subplot.) A romantic movie might have a subplot centered around the lead character’s friends or family. An intense drama might have a humorous subplot.

These subplots often reinforce the main plot although they might run counter to it in order to add depth. Subplots can reveal different aspects of the protagonist’s personality. Or they might just lighten the mood of an otherwise relentlessly serious film.

So far we’ve focused primarily on your main plot the Big Picture or “A” story of your life but there’s clearly much more to you. You’re not just a one-dimensional character. You have many sides, many experiences, and many stories...major ones as well as subplots.

For instance, maybe you’ve discovered that your “Big Picture” story concerns success and sabotage. Maybe you used to get in your own way just as you were approaching a breakthrough, but now you’ve rewritten your story so that you sail smoothly to the finish line...and beyond! Your business booms, and your confidence skyrockets!

But that doesn’t mean that there’s nothing else going on in your life. You still have stories (or subplots) surrounding your relationships, health, creativity, and other areas of your life. And you can apply the same storywriting/ rewriting principles to these areas as you did to your “A” story.

As we’ve already explored, many of your anecdotes and other elements may be connected by the same theme. Others, however, might be independent bound together only by the fact that they’re all part of YOU.

Some parts of you might even seem to contradict other parts. For instance, maybe you see yourself as confident and capable in almost all areas. But you’ve told yourself (and others), “I can’t parallel park.” And you’ve believed it. And so you’ve lived it and made it true for you.

Now, this one liner may not have much impact on your life as a whole. Maybe your primary story has to do with your romantic relationships or with your finances or with expressing yourself creatively.





So the parallel parking detail only really comes into play when you're trying to fit into a tight space. And even then, the worst that happens is that it takes you a few tries before you end up in the space.

Or maybe you get honked by an impatient driver behind you. Or, worst case scenario, you drive around the block and find a head on parking space. No big deal. You may be perfectly content to live with this detail. Or you may want to rewrite it.

Just as an author might change a line here or there that doesn't significantly alter their story as a whole, you have the ability to make line-by-line edits in your story.

This has benefit in and of itself. In the above example, it might mean that you're able to park more easily. This skill could save you a little bit of time and perhaps some embarrassment.

But it might have a much bigger impact in a different way: It could serve as training for other life-story revisions.

For instance, you might decide that you do want to "edit this line" to change this detail of your life. So you walk yourself through the same process you'd use for any change large or small:

1. You start by realizing that you CAN change.
2. You recognize that the story probably came from long ago. (In this case, maybe someone told you "You're not a very good parallel parker" when you were first learning to drive, and it became imprinted in you it stuck.)
3. You realize that although this mini-story might be your truth right now, it doesn't have to be. It's not necessarily true forever.
4. You set the intention to change it.
5. You decide what you'd like to change it to (e.g., "I am a good parallel parker").
6. If you don't yet believe this goal-story, you can come up with an interim truth (e.g., "I'm improving my parallel parking").
7. You ACT according to this new truth (e.g., practicing your parking and noticing your improvement).
8. You get within striking distance of your goal-truth and start acting as if it's already true. (You start to tell yourself and possibly others that you're a good parallel parker. You park with steadily increasing confidence...and competence!)
9. If you have any doubts or reservations about this truth or if your inner critic debates or rebuts you (e.g., No you're not! You're a lousy parker!) you ask yourself a "What if..." question (e.g., What if I were a good parallel parker?). And you stay open to the possibility. You entertain this notion, this possibility. You keep in mind that you're moving toward this emerging reality.

10. You arrive at the truth.

11. You document your progress (e.g., writing down the story of your transition or maybe do a photojournalism by taking pictures of your perfectly parked car).

12. You now have evidence of your ability to effect concrete change in your life. And you know that if it worked before, it can and will work again! So you'll be able to bring even more confidence to the table the next time you'd like to edit another one of your subplots...or your main story!

This example may not seem like a significant part of your life (even for a subplot) and it probably isn't! However, going through the process of rewriting small details of your life can give you practice and confidence, so that when you do address a bigger challenge, you have experience...and evidence that the system works!

What subplots, one-liners, or other details of your life would you like to edit?

Write out the process you'd like to go through and then DO it... and check off each step as you accomplish it! (Feel free to write it in your own way, or use the condensed step-by-step process below.)

Subplot/detail that you'd like to rewrite:

What you'd like to change it to (your "goal-truth"):

Interim truth (that you can/do believe NOW e.g., "I'm improving my parallel parking"):

What actions will you take to act inline with your new emerging truths?

Declaration (or what-if question) to reinforce this truth:

Once you've made the change in your actual life (beyond the page), come back here and document your progress—giving yourself confidence and evidence that you're able to rewrite your story...and LIVE the new story!

Blessed Be

