

# 20 DATA STORYTELLING

# KEYS FOR SUCCESS

A guide for turning your data into compelling narratives that help you grow your business and career.



DATA STORY  
ACADEMY™

[datastoryacademy.com](https://datastoryacademy.com)

# The importance of developing data storytelling capabilities.

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to help hundreds of individuals and businesses learn to communicate clearly with data. I continue to see people who develop data storytelling capabilities land better jobs, get paid higher salaries and advance their career more quickly. The **20 Data Storytelling Keys for Success** is your guide to understanding and developing data storying skills of your own. These keys are often what separates a clear message or data story from a confusing one. The keys cover three critical categories that are often missed . . . how to effectively find, design and present the most important stories in your data. I encourage you to read each key and the supporting explanation then apply what you learned to the next data story you create.

Enjoy and all the best in your career,

**Zack Mazzoncini**  
Founder, Data Story Academy LLC

# 1

## Focus on valuable priorities by finding the most important stories in your data.

*FINDING YOUR DATA STORY*

The amount of data and information available to us is increasing at an exponential rate, thus creating a major challenge in identifying what matters most. Always ask the question, what are the most important stories in my data? Answering this question before beginning our data discovery and analysis allows us to eliminate useless information and focus our time and energy on the most valuable priorities.

# 2

## **Use questions as a frame for your visuals and deliver back to your audience insights they care about most.**

*FINDING YOUR DATA STORY*

Questions are the framework for your visuals and help ensure you deliver back to your audience the answers and insights they care about most. Oftentimes, we jump right into designing our visualizations and never stop to think about the questions we are trying to answer. We want to validate that the visuals we create are actually answering the questions our audience wants to see and understand. Use a question as the title for your visualization to increase the clarity and understanding for your audience.

# 3

## Reduce time and save money by identifying what data is needed in your story.

*FINDING YOUR DATA STORY*

If you've done the work to identify key questions your audience wants to answer, you can now use the questions as a guide for preparing the data. Work to focus your time and energy preparing only the data that is needed to deliver visual answers at the level of granularity your audience needs.

# 4

## **Ensure your data story is successful by understanding what actions your audience plans to take.**

*FINDING YOUR DATA STORY*

It is important to understand how your data story will be used to make decisions. Identify what actions will be taken once the visual insights are revealed. Understanding how the data story will be used ensures you design features and functions that allow your audience to take action and make decisions.

# 5

## Identify expected results to ensure everyone knows when the data story has been successful.

*FINDING YOUR DATA STORY*

Results are what your audience cares about accomplishing. How will your data story create value and make a positive impact? Understand what success looks like and define it to ensure the main goals of your data story are achieved.

# 6

**Lay out your visuals in a purposeful way to help your audience clearly understand what story you are telling.**

*DESIGNING YOUR DATA STORY*

Your data story should follow an intuitive path. It should take your audience through a clear path or narrative that you've thought out for the specific story you are telling. Purposeful layouts create connection, flow and correlation in the data story you are designing.



# 7

## Choose intuitive visuals that create quick clear insights for your audience.

*DESIGNING YOUR DATA STORY*

Intuitive visualizations achieve the goal of creating clear cognitive insights for your audience. When someone looks at the visuals you create, the signals and critical information should almost instantly stand out. Oftentimes we think more complex visuals will create a richer experience. However, what we find is simple visuals are often more effective. The increased complexity of a visualization can be confusing to our audience so work to keep it simple and select intuitive visuals.



# Use color in a purposeful way.

*DESIGNING YOUR DATA STORY*

Color is one of the most important tools we can utilize to communicate clearly with data. It can also be distracting and detrimental, if used incorrectly. Your color choice should be purposeful. Ensure you always have a reason for why you are using specific colors in your data story.

# 9

## **Design flexibility in your data story to allow for additional questions from your audience.**

*DESIGNING YOUR DATA STORY*

People sometimes think additional questions from our audience are a negative thing. However, these questions are often a sign that our audience wants to do some additional data discovery. Work to design flexibility in your data stories by anticipating the additional questions your audience might ask before they ask them. When you create flexibility, you allow your audience to self-serve and answer important questions on their own.

# 10

## **Remove distractions, noise and clutter and allow your audience to focus on the visuals.**

*DESIGNING YOUR DATA STORY*

Oftentimes, distractions are referred to as non-data ink. What is data-ink? Data-ink is the pixels within the visuals themselves. The goal is to remove as much of the clutter and the noise as possible from the background of your data story. Removing distractions allows your audience to focus on and see the insights being revealed in the visualizations.

# 11

## Use text to create visual clarity, consistency and different levels of focus.

*DESIGNING YOUR DATA STORY*

Text is often overlooked when designing our data stories. Thoughtful text allows you to create a more professional feel. Choose a font, format and size that create a theme and balance for your data story. Use text as a visual design element to draw your audience's attention to key values and focus areas.

# 12

## Optimize your data story for sharing by designing multiple versions.

*DESIGNING YOUR DATA STORY*

Understanding how your audience will access and use the data story is important. Will they view it from a desktop or mobile device? Is the data story being used as a static image or will it need to be printed? Depending upon the answers to these questions, you may want to design multiple versions of your data story.

# 13

**Your audience will decide in the first 30 seconds whether or not you're worth listening to.**

*PRESENTING YOUR DATA STORY*

What do you want to communicate with your data story? What impact, emotion or change do you want to occur within your audience? Is there an action you want them to take after listening to your presentation? The opening of your presentation frames the entire story. Therefore, it is important to take some time to plan your opening and ensure it accomplishes the impact you hope to achieve.

# 14

## Pause to regain your audience's attention when they lose interest or get distracted.

*PRESENTING YOUR DATA STORY*

One of the most overlooked parts of telling a successful data story is regularly checking in with your audience. Pausing at natural points throughout the presentation to engage your audience and ensure they are still listening can make a huge difference. Use regular check-ins, if the form of a simple pause, to regain your audience's attention when you see they are starting to lose interest or get distracted.



# 15

## Engage your audience in a way that feels as though you are discovering insights with them.

*PRESENTING YOUR DATA STORY*

Often our personal discovery in the data happens before we actually get to the presentation. Therefore, we run the risk of presenting in a way that lands flat. We don't bring the same excitement around the insights we once had when we discovered them. However, often our audience is seeing these insights for the very first time. The more we can engage our audience in a way that feels as though we are discovering with them, the more enticing and interesting our data story becomes.

# 16

## **Work to identifying and eliminating bad habits from your data story presentations.**

*PRESENTING YOUR DATA STORY*

Stopping bad habits in your data story presentations is a lifelong pursuit. You must continually work towards identifying and eliminating bad habits. A few bad habits to watch out for are speaking with demo language vs. telling your data story, distracting movements with your cursor vs. only making purposeful movements and surprising unplanned pauses in your presentation due to applications running in the background. Working to remove these bad habits and others allows your audience to stay focused and engaged in what you have to say.

# 17

## Create positive moments that leave a lasting memory in your audience's minds.

*PRESENTING YOUR DATA STORY*

Work to prepare and deliver a presentation that is positively remembered by your audience. The goal is to inspire your audience and provide them with valuable answers they didn't have before. Plan for two or three impactful moments in your presentation. You know you have been successful when your audience shares and talks about the specific moments you created for them.

# 18

## Bring emotion to your data story presentation.

*PRESENTING YOUR DATA STORY*

The audience's response to your data story is directly tied to the emotion you bring as a presenter. The energy and emotion you bring are contagious. The audience will feel your emotion, whether or not they show it externally. Therefore, you want to narrate with emotion as much as possible. Doing so will draw your audience in and keep them interested in what you have to say.

# 19

## Practice to reduce your nerves and fully engage your audience.

*PRESENTING YOUR DATA STORY*

It is important to train for the data story presentations you are giving. The more you practice, the more natural your presentations become. Your willingness to discipline yourself and practice prior to presenting is directly tied to reducing your nerves, connecting with your audience and delivering a successful data story.

# 20

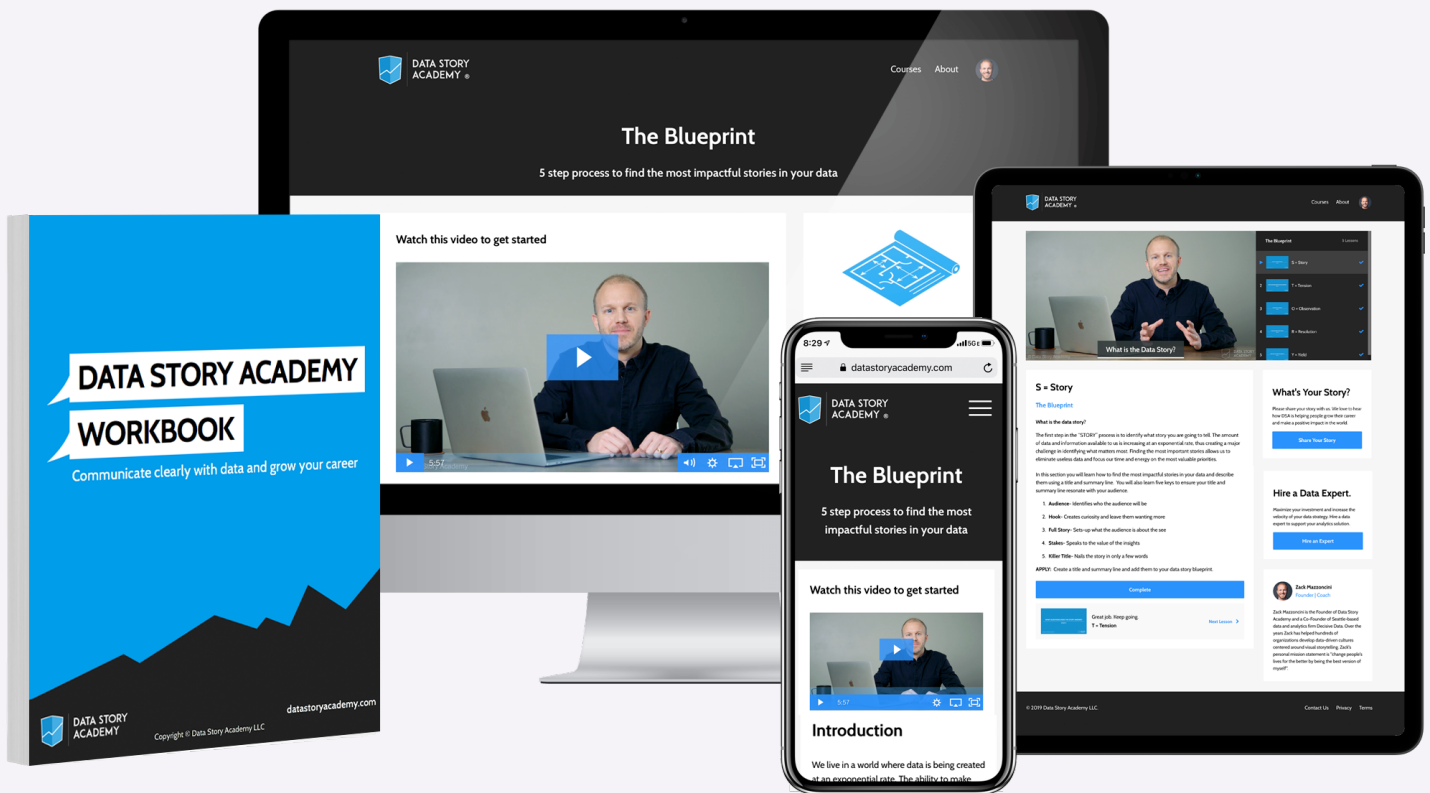
## Review and implement data storytelling keys 1-19.

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Review and implement what you just learned in keys 1-19. We all enjoy reading new keys and techniques to increase our knowledge, but rarely do we do the hard work of implementing what we've learned into our daily routines and disciplines. Make a conscience effort to review and implement these data storytelling keys for success. As you do, you will see a significant increase in your ability to communicate clearly with data.

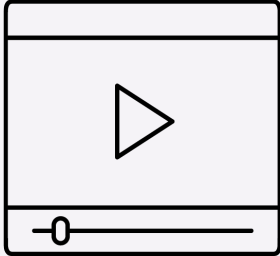
# Unlock your data storytelling skills with our online courses.

Data visualization expert Zack Mazzoncini is the founder of Data Story Academy™, Co-Founder of Seattle-based data and analytics firm **Decisive Data** and Co-Creator of the **Art + Data** initiative. Over the years Zack has helped hundreds of organizations and individuals develop data-driven cultures centered around data storytelling.



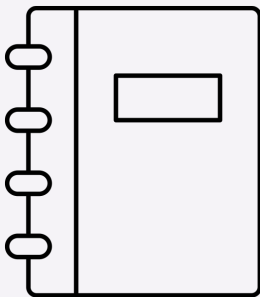
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# What's inside the courses?



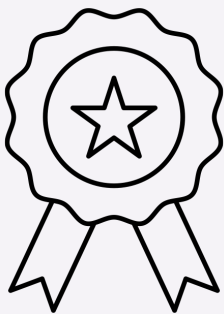
## 22 Video Lessons

In these courses, data visualization and storytelling expert Zack Mazzoncini teaches you how take any data set and transform it into a compelling, visual narrative that captivates your audience.



## 100% Exclusive Content

Enroll today to get access to exclusive materials including a 60 page workbook, course worksheets and our visualization placemat. Learn at your own pace on mobile or desktop.



## 50 Keys for Success

Unlock your creativity and confidence as a data visualization expert and storyteller with over 50 keys for success. Watch your career grow as you make a greater impact with data.

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# What are people saying?

" I am not exaggerating; my audience was on the edge of their seats and clapped at the end. They were so wowed by my revenue dashboard. Thank you, Zack! "

**VP of Analytics**

" That was hands down the best course I've seen in years! I love your approach and want to find more ways for my team to collaborate with you. "

**Enterprise Executive**

" Zack is a role model in many ways but one thing trumps them all, He is deeply sincere and cares more about people than how the outcome will benefit him or his company. "

**Business Leader**

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