

The Narrative Arc



JOE FERGUSON, PhD

PhD Clinical Psychology, Fielding University
MBA, Wharton School of Business

Human brains have evolved to fill in the blanks as well as they can when any interesting picture, problem or puzzle is presented to them. Our ancestors would not have survived to propagate if they had not been able to make up their minds quickly and take decisive action on the basis of partial information. Even if you don't know the predator's true intentions, you still have to make your best guess and then fight, flee or take her out to dinner. This adaptive requirement is manifested in the inexorable literary arc of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. You know the shape and timing of the narrative arc like you know your own breath from every story, sermon, speech and pitch you have ever heard. The legendary stories of sports, religion, science, business and politics all conform to the sequence and timing of the narrative arc, as do the personal stories and gossip that we tell about each other and ourselves. People just don't want to hear a story without all those elements, and if some of them are missing they will simply make stuff up to fill in the blanks.

There I was, minding my own business or not, when he or she suddenly did or said this incredible thing and I had to respond, so I said or did something dramatic and it did or didn't work, so now I am happy or depressed. We reinvent our life stories continually as we move from one chapter to the next within a nested series of narratives that we try and fail to keep consistent with one another. It is not surprising that others fill in the blanks about us if we leave them in the dark about important things, and the pictures people draw in the dark will probably reflect their fears rather than your hopes. In this light you might want to fill in a few more of the blanks for your most important people. Trust me. Call me.

Concise Personal Counseling

\$150 per 70-minute session

332 Forest Avenue, Suite #17, Laguna Beach, CA 92651
(949) 235-2615 ~ DrJoe@Fergi.com ~ www.Fergi.com