



University of California
San Francisco

How to craft a story that turns evidence into action

A guide for clinicians and other health professionals

Daphne Miller, MD Leadership

Faculty, Lifelong Family Medicine Residency Program Clinical Professor,
University of California San Francisco, Department of Family &
Community Medicine

The Power of Story

“Story, as it turns out, was crucial to our evolution -- more so than opposable thumbs. Opposable thumbs let us hang on; story told us what to hang on to.”

Lisa Cron, Author of *Wired for Story*

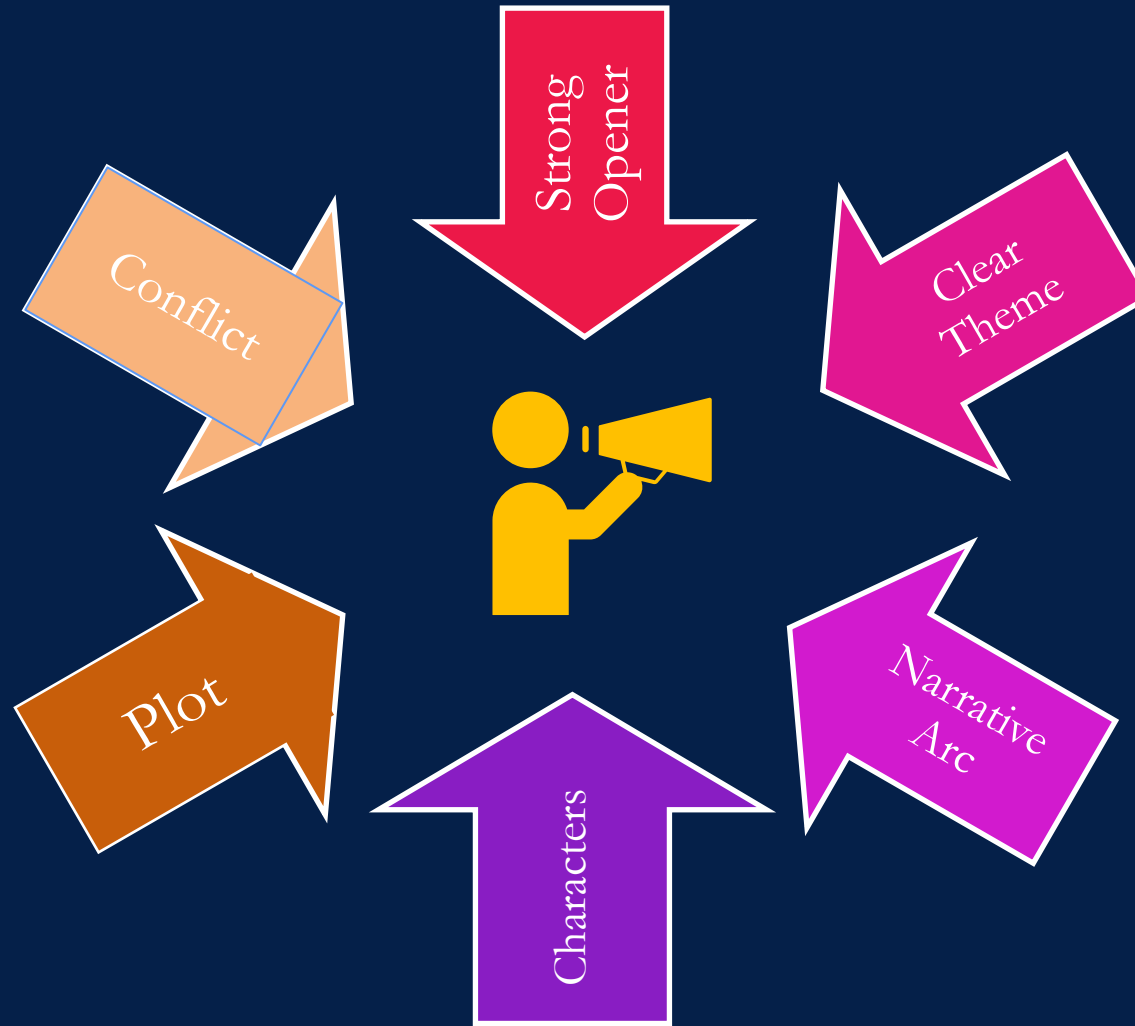


Why tell your story?



- ✓ Fund a project
- ✓ Advance a new policy or program
- ✓ Change a cultural norm
- ✓ Promote behavior change
- ✓ **Turn evidence into action**

What makes a great story?



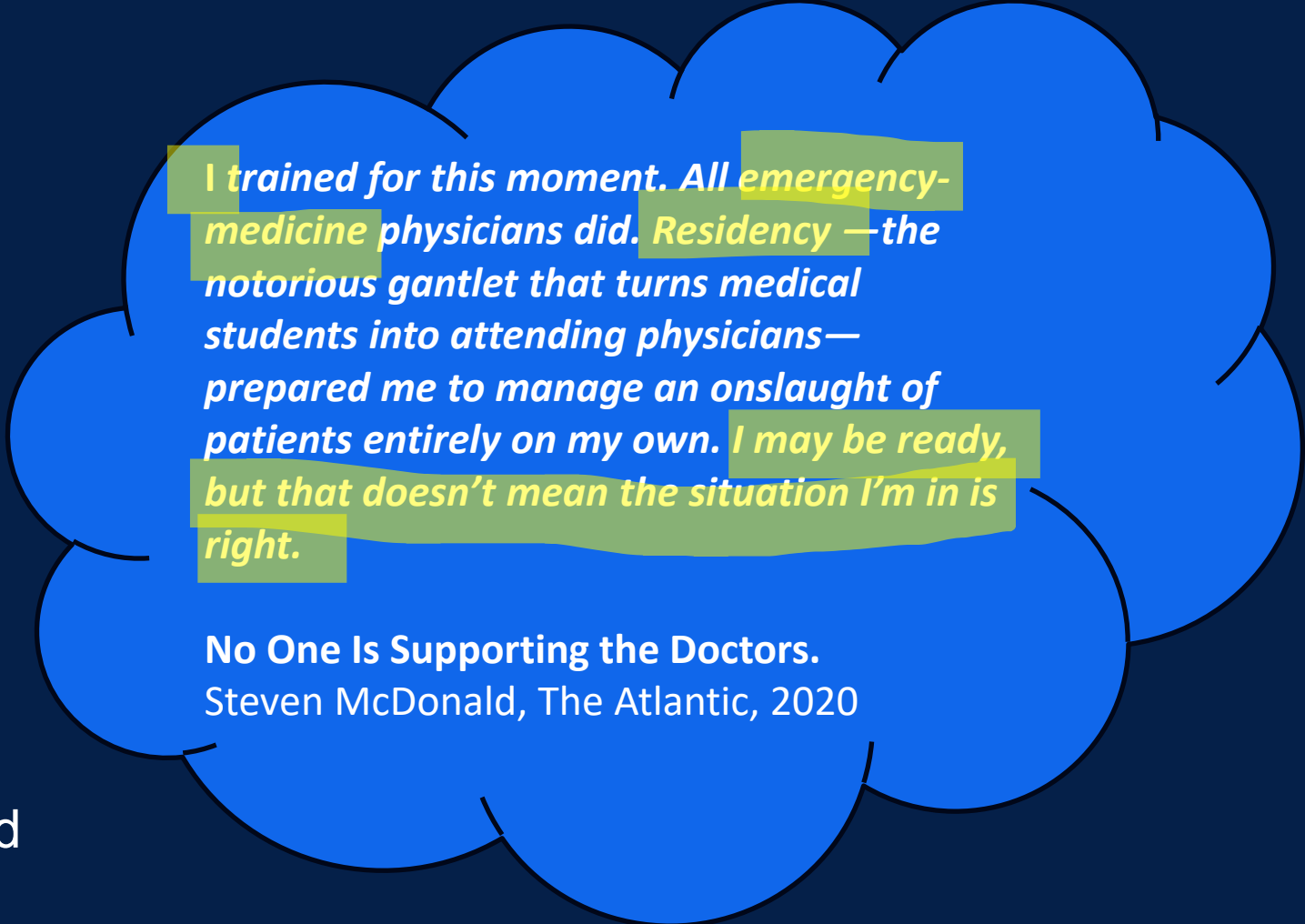


Strong Opener

AKA “Lede”

Catches your audience’s attention and includes some (or all) of the 5 W’s

who, what, where, when, why



I trained for this moment. All emergency-medicine physicians did. Residency —the notorious gantlet that turns medical students into attending physicians— prepared me to manage an onslaught of patients entirely on my own. I may be ready, but that doesn’t mean the situation I’m in is right.

No One Is Supporting the Doctors.
Steven McDonald, The Atlantic, 2020



Clear
Theme

What is your point?

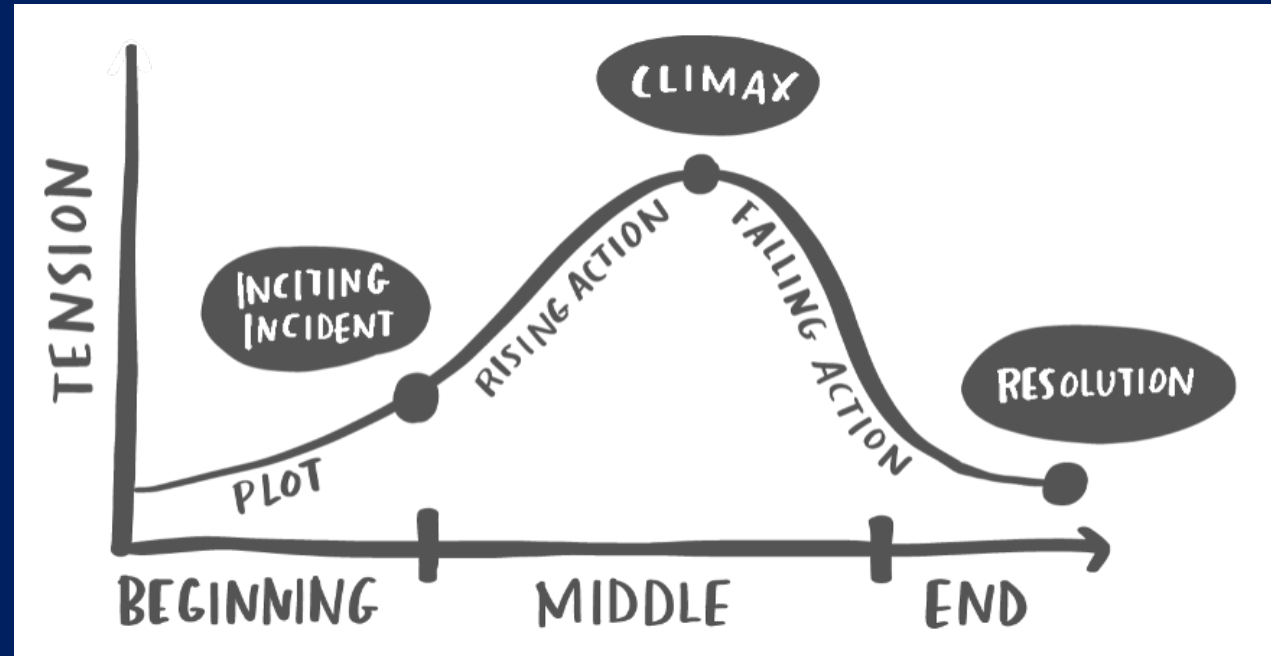
"I have a StairMaster right in my own basement, but honestly it's been there for years gathering dust and making me feel guilty," said Miriam, one of my patients. "It wasn't until I started walking the three-mile trail in the park near my house that I got serious about exercising"

I have heard enough variations on Miriam's story that I have started to make formal "park prescriptions" and it turns out I am not alone. Doctors around the country are medicating their patients with nature in order to prevent (or treat) health problems ranging from heart disease to attention deficit disorder.

Take a Hike and Call Me in the Morning.

Daphne Miller, The Washington Post, 2009

Narrative Arc



<https://www.storytellingwithdata.com/>

Ethical story telling...things to consider.



Who are the winners and losers?



Who holds the power?



Whose perspective is this?



Whose voice is left out?



Is there consent that you need?



Are you the right messenger?

Crafting your
story...



Step 1.

Get an idea

What is the important message
that you feel others should hear?

Is it new information or click-bait?

“I’m obsessed with giving the audience something
they don’t see coming.”

Jordan Peele, writer and director of *Get Out*

Step 2.

Do the research

What are others saying? (Peer-reviewed and popular media)

Is there “confirmation bias”?

How do other stories relate to your narrative?

Which stories inspire you?

If your story is part of a bigger movement, what is that movement called?



Step 3.

ID Your audience

What are their values?

Where do they live?

How old are they?

What is their socio-cultural background?

How do you want them to feel and think?

What actions do you want to take?

How might they perceive you as a messenger?



Step 4. Make a brainstorm map

Key players

Setting

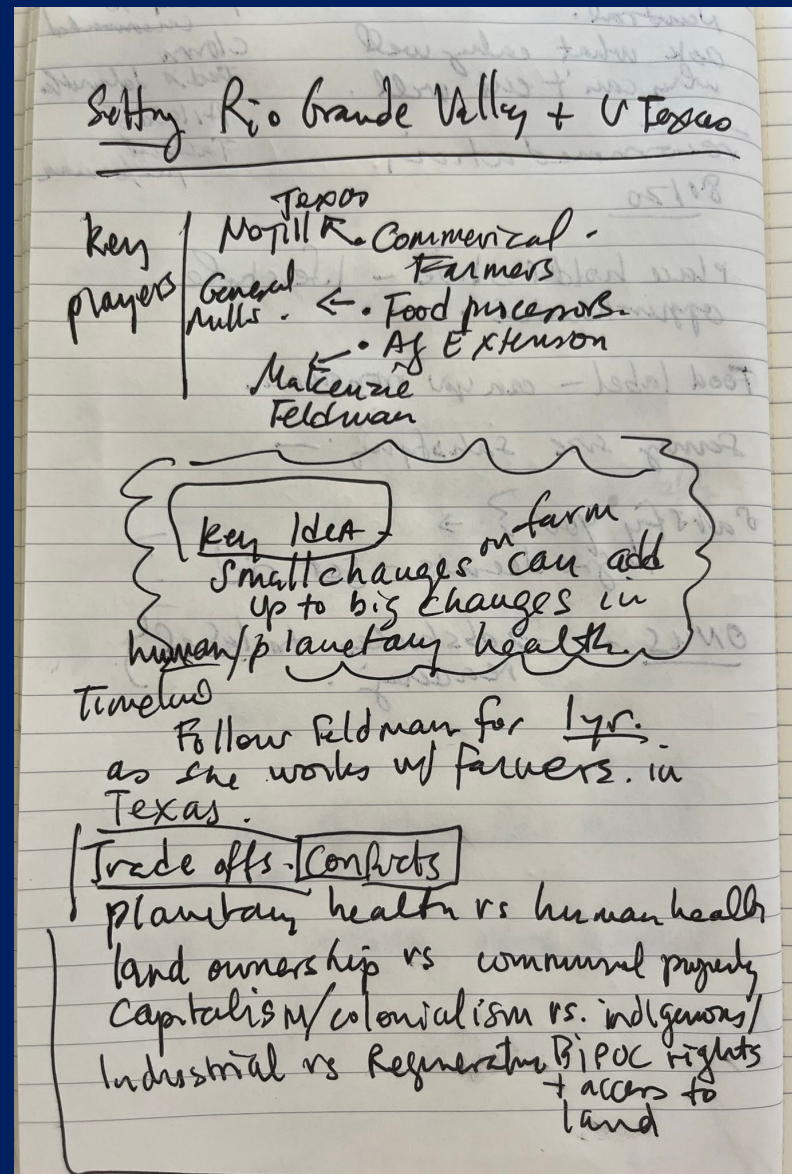
Main points

Timeline

Anticipated conflicts and trade-offs

Doodles

Just get it out on paper!



Step 5.

Write/Create...Share...Rewrite

Step 5. Write/Create... Pencil Share early...Rewrite

“I have rewritten — often several times — every word I have ever published. My pencils outlast their erasers.”

— **Vladimir Nabokov**



Pointers...



**Avoid jargon and
“medicalese”**



Keep it simple



**Use data and dialogue to
support your story**

*“But moving more to
compensate for excess
caloric intake is
challenging for most
people... it takes approxi-
mately 1 mile of walking
or running to expend 100
calories— the amount in
2 small Oreo cookies.”*



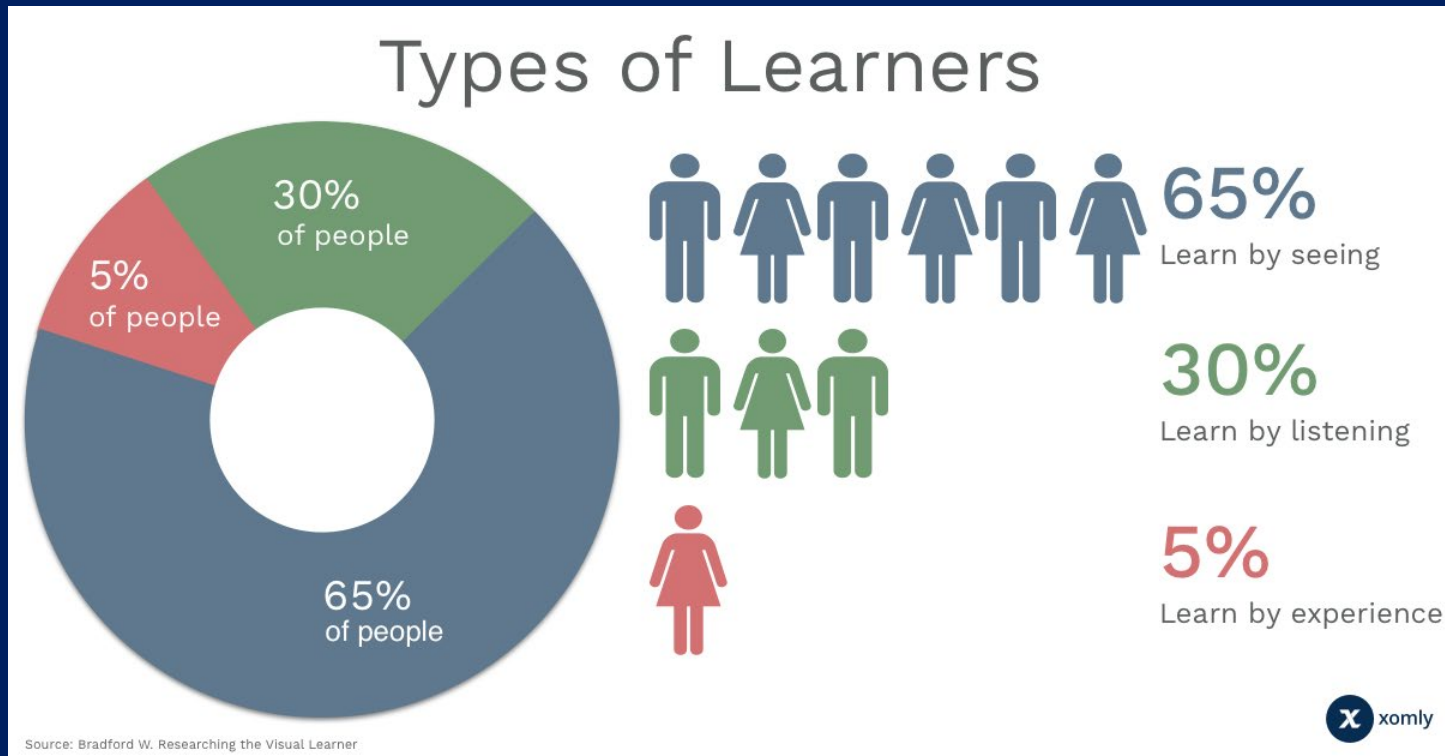
**Continually ask yourself:
“What response do I
want from my
audience?”**



**Don’t shy away from
uncertainty, nuance, or
contradictory evidence—
this builds trust.**

*“No vaccine in the world is
without the occasional adverse
event, but this vaccine is
extremely safe and has been
used to protect millions of
children.”*

A picture is worth 1000 words...



Examples of persuasive stories...

The New York Times

OPINION

Medical Schools Have Historically Been Wrong on Race

While the blatant horrors of the past are gone, the ideas that fueled race-based medicine stubbornly linger. We can change.

July 27, 2020



Delcan & Company

Share full article

By Damon Tweedy
Dr. Tweedy is a psychiatrist at Duke University School of Medicine.

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Health Health Care Medical Mysteries Science Well+Being

Food as medicine? It's not as simple as it sounds.

Research shows food prescriptions by medical professionals can improve well-being. But food isn't a pill and knowing what to prescribe is complicated.

Perspective by Daphne Miller
January 8, 2023 at 7:00 a.m. EST

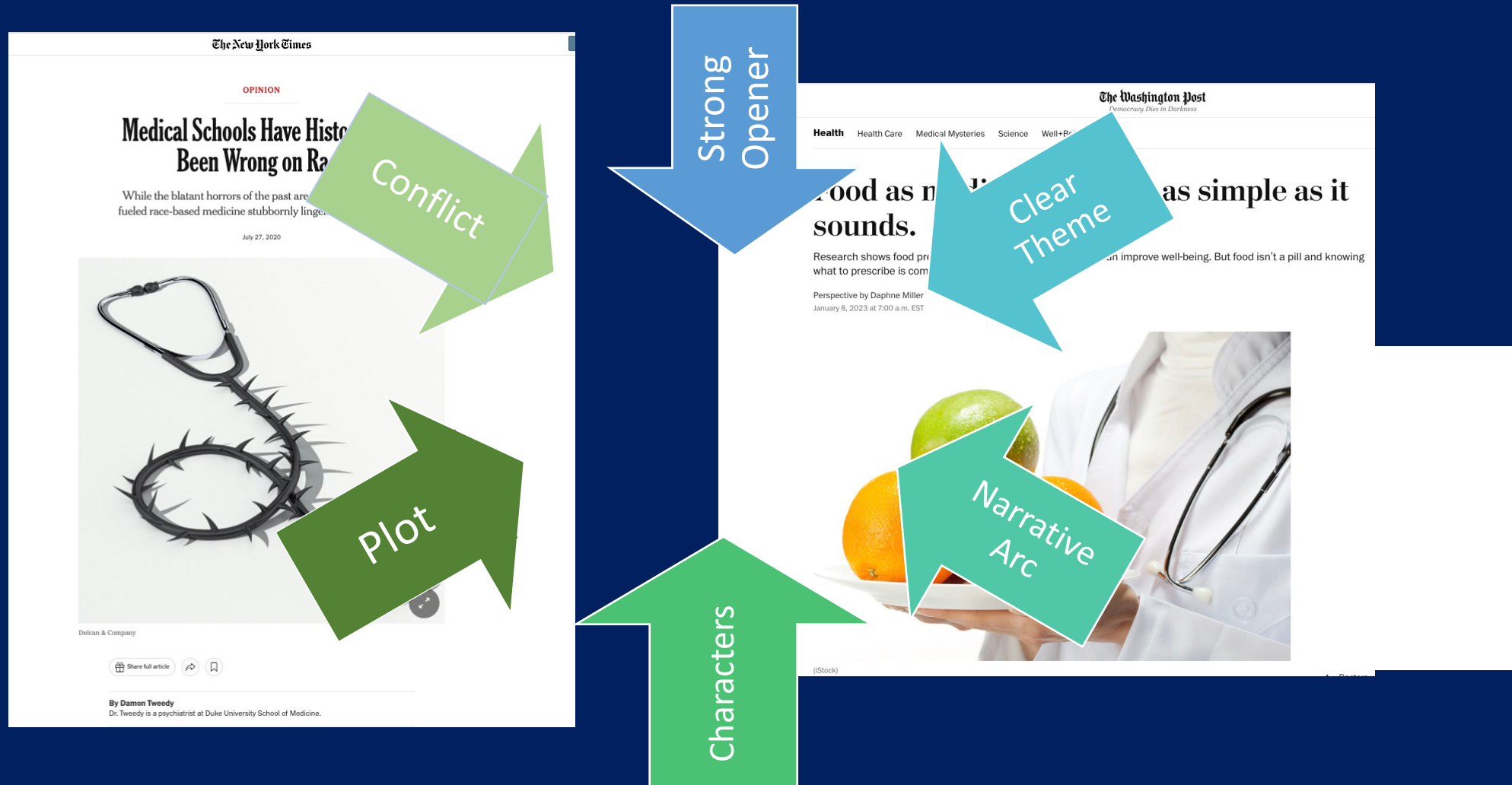


(iStock)

3 patients effects of loss drugs

4 Patients

Examples of persuasive stories...



Where to Publish?

Local papers

Medical journals

Stat, KevinMD

Medium.com

LinkedIn.com

Guest blogger

Substack.com



“...publication is not all it is cracked up to be. But writing is. Writing has so much to give, so much to teach, so many surprises. That thing you had to force yourself to do---the actual act of writing---turns out to be the best part. It's like discovering that while you thought you needed the tea ceremony for the caffeine, what you really needed was the tea ceremony. **The act of writing turns out to be its own reward.**”

— Anne Lamott



Just get your story out there!!!!