On Story Telling

Charles Yang
Penn
Patrick Henry Winston
How to Give Talks

William Thurston
On proof and progress in mathematics

Have a story

- Rehearse the story in your head many many times over before even writing a word
- Must have a narrative: you need to build suspense, have “near misses”, and then the reveal
- “And you give them a zinger at the end.” - Morris Halle
Books, Papers, Audiences

• Book: If it’s a long story, the plot is too elaborate, there are lot of moving pieces, the idea is sufficiently novel (and the reviewers hate it)
  • Books may be more influential (advice from Steve Anderson), possibly books are more like to be theoretical

• Papers: Don’t try to put everything you know in it

• Talk to people outside your area/field: Why your work matters, how to explain it in the most accessible way, and how to unpack a complex idea in layers
  • Similar to giving a (job) talk: Make 80% of audience understand 80% of your story
Have role models

- Read literary magazines
- Lots of similarities between good fiction and good non-fiction: all about story telling
- Read good linguistic writing
  - Chomsky: clarity and forceful authority
  - Halle: plain language, accessibility, and zingers
  - Labov: a narrative weaving complex data and wide-ranging ideas
You have to love it

The New York Times

WORK FRIEND
Your Job Will Never Love You Back
TBH it's pretty rude that your work causes you endless stress and never even goes to couples' therapy with you.

Be an advocate!