

The Most Important Thing

Tell your story to a helping listener (someone who has agreed to listen for your sake). Ask for appreciations.

Now have your listener ask you, "What do you most love about the story you just told?"

If you prefer, answer any of these alternate questions:

- What do you most value about the story?
- What would you like your listeners to get from this story?
- What is this story about for you?
- What effect would you like this story to have?
- What draws you to this story?

Your answer to any of these questions is your "Most Important Thing" (MIT). All future decisions about telling your story need to be based on your MIT.

Thus, when you ask yourself the question, "How should my story end?" you will need to ask in turn, "What ending is required by my MIT?" Or if you are trying to decide whether to change something in your story, ask yourself, "Will this change further my MIT or hinder it?"

You can have many things about a story that are important to you, but you must rank them. Suppose you do something to make your "second most important thing" work better, but that makes your MIT work less well. This will actually create confusion in the mind of your listeners; they won't get a clear sense of what is important.

Lack of clarity or consistency about a story's MIT is the single most prevalent cause of stories that don't seem to make sense or "hang together."

Ironically, your listeners will create their own interpretation of your story's meaning. But the clearer you are on your story's meaning, the clearer your listeners will be on their own version of the story's meaning - no matter how different it is from yours.