

Effective Storytelling in Research Translation Worksheet: **Ladder of Abstraction**

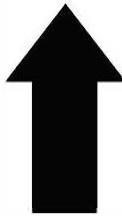
This form allows you to clarify your thinking about developing and organizing your story. It is adapted from Hayakawa's Ladder of Abstraction. Please include your story concepts as labels in the form below along a continuum from abstract to concrete. For a complete example, please see the learning module on Effective Storytelling in Research Translation.

For the story Dr. Jim Kelly was telling in the learning module, he started by wondering why busy people would spend their time going to a workshop with a scientists they did not know and who did not have ties to the community.

It was not simply to learn for the sake of learning. They wanted to achieve prosperity so they could put food on the table, pay school fees, and live a bit further away from the poverty line. Prosperity is a pretty abstract concept.

At the other end of the Ladder, he posited a threat to that prosperity: a dead cow that had starved. That's a pretty concrete concept.

Why style questions



More abstract



How style questions

More concrete

Using one of your recent research articles, reports, or findings, type in a label for the biggest of the "why" questions you had at the start of the investigation. What would the results lead to? This is probably somewhere in your conclusions.

Next, type in a label for something very concrete. This is possibly something from your experimental stimulus or perhaps the problem statement. It is "how" you conducted the research.

Type in labels between these two extremes that bridge the gap. Look in your methods section for the more concrete notions and into your discussion and conclusions for your more abstract notions. Rearrange to make the transition smoothest.

Finally, study your ladder because these are your story elements. You may or may not explicitly state any of them in your narrative, but you can use them as organizing elements that help your reader see concrete relevance in their own lives and connect that to the abstract concepts that represent their hopes and aspirations. It is a thought exercise that helps you see relationships between theory and action, in your research and in the story about your research you will tell others.