



**MULTISENSORY**  
STUDIO

# ACCESSIBLE Digital Storytelling

A Toolkit for Organizations

## Prepared By

Kathleen C. Sitter  
Brooke Allemang  
Mica R. Pabia  
Scarlet Jaxen  
Carly-Ann Haney  
Fiona Schick

# THANK YOU

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# INTRODUCTION

In May of 2021 our team, led by Dr. Kathleen Sitter, began a research study titled **My life. My story: The Youth Digital Storytelling Project**. Our goal was to use digital storytelling to learn about major life transitions through the lived experiences of adults (ages 18+) with developmental disabilities.

Three important findings from this study are:

- To create accessible designs that support first-person accounts of disabled people, we must crip the digital storytelling process (more on this topic to follow).
- Accessible digital storytelling centres disabled perspectives and experiences.
- More opportunities to share and discuss digital stories from the perspectives of disabled people are needed (Sitter et al., 2022).

To learn more about the study, you can read the **Final Report** by visiting the link below:

<https://multisensorystudio.ca/project/youth-digital-storytelling>

# WHAT IS DIGITAL STORYTELLING?

Digital storytelling uses images, music, narration, and sound to create personal stories that can be viewed, heard, felt and experienced (Sitter et al., 2022).

Digital stories engage audiences and translate lived experiences to inspire transformation. Whether your organization hopes to raise social consciousness, influence public policy, or help people within your community feel connected and united, digital storytelling is a creative and impactful method for sharing knowledge.

## TOOLKIT OVERVIEW

In this toolkit, we draw on findings from **The Youth Digital Storytelling Project** that can be used to promote and prioritize accessibility in digital storytelling, such as:

- Tips for designing and implement accessible digital storytelling sessions.
- Principles and skills to help prioritize accessibility and diversity.
- Tips for organizing digital story sessions in a way that promotes connection and well-being.

Our goal at the Multisensory Studio is to change how research is done, one story at a time. We respectfully request that the Multisensory Studio, its partners, and funders be acknowledged when any part of this toolkit is used or modified to conduct digital storytelling.

# HOW TO PRIORITIZE ACCESSIBILITY

## CRIP THE PROCESS

"Crippling" is a term used within the disability community to represent disability pride. The term comes from crip theory, which combines disability studies and queer theory to question why some bodies and minds are normalized, while others are excluded. Crippling digital storytelling means celebrating non-dominant ways of being, doing, and acting. For example, by moving away from normative ideas about time and what stories *should* be like.

## BE FLEXIBLE & ADAPTABLE

it is crucial to learn participants' needs and adapt your approach accordingly. For example:

- Design your Digital Story Session tutorials with more visuals and less text, captions when meeting in zoom, and breaks to avoid participant fatigue.
- Offer participants the chance to experiment with different methods of story development, such as drawings or images, sound exploration, interview-style formats, and discussion.

## FOCUS ON COLLABORATION

Facilitators should be focused on how to best support participants throughout the creative process. Relationship-building and connection are key to effective collaboration. Encourage participants by highlighting their strengths and celebrating their ideas--as well as doing regular check-ins. .

## MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE AT

Meeting participants where they are at is crucial for digital storytelling to be made accessible. Facilitators can:

- Ask questions about pronouns and whether participants prefer identify-first or person-first language.
- Inquire about what devices or technology the participant is familiar with and invite them to incorporate those into the story making process.
- Be curious about how participants want to use their strengths and interests to create and share their story.

## ENCOURAGE DIVERSE WAYS OF COMMUNICATING

Instead of ascribing to ablest norms that prioritize speaking, encourage participants to communicate how they wish, such as through signing, written words, visuals, emojis, and sounds.

Facilitators should:

- Give participants the option of using the chat feature or emojis (if meeting online).
- Offer to narrate a story, pose questions to participants, and work collaboratively to arrange sound or images for each response.

# PREPARING FOR YOUR DIGITAL STORY SESSIONS

## ① RECRUITMENT

When preparing for a digital storytelling project, consider who will *create* a digital story as a participant and who will *facilitate* the digital storytelling process for/with participants.

**Facilitators** play a pivotal role in digital story session delivery. Below are six facilitator qualities/skills that help to prioritize accessibility:

**ACTIVE  
LISTENING**

**AUTHENTICITY**

**SERVICE  
ORIENTATED**

**EMPATHY**

**STRENGTH  
FOCUSED**

**CREATIVITY**

Facilitators are primarily responsible for helping participants create and share their digital stories. Therefore, the style of assistance offered must meet the needs and preferences of individual participants.



Next, identify criteria for participating in creating a digital story (**who do you want to include in the project?**) Once you know who your creators will be, you can share about the opportunity with your community.

We recommend including the information outlined below in your recruitment materials:

- Briefly describe what digital storytelling is
- List the criteria for participating
- Identify the goals you have for the digital stories that are created
- Indicate the potential benefits for participants
- Outline any details about when and how long the process will take and
- Include a way to contact your organization

Consider how you want to compensate participants for their time. If you plan on facilitating digital story sessions in-person, we suggest providing refreshments.

## ② ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### **Lead Facilitators**

A lead facilitator or facilitators should be identified prior to the start of your story sessions. The lead/s can then meet with interested participants prior to beginning the story sessions, which allows for the preferences and needs of participants to dictate any necessary format adaptations. In this initial meeting, explain the story development process and review participants' options for sharing their story. Lead facilitators/coordinators can also be assigned to:

- **Schedule & Host Zoom Meetings**
- **Develop Resources including Forms & Tutorial Slides**
- **Send Session Email Reminders to Facilitators & Participants**
- **Facilitate Tutorials on How to Use Software & Technology**
- **Identify Tasks for Facilitators based on Strengths & Interests**

All facilitators should meet before any Digital Story Sessions to identify strengths within the team and assign roles. We recommend meeting before and after each Digital Story Session to debrief and identify any changes needed to support participants. This is key to being flexible and responsive in a collaborative way to meet participants “where they are at.”

As a facilitator, your main role is to support participants in creating their stories. If digital stories are to be created in a group, facilitators and participants should be paired up during the first session.

Experiment with different ways of providing support, such as offering encouragement, asking questions to facilitate story development, and following direction from the participant to search for images and audio samples, record video, or add subtitles. At the end of each session, facilitators should offer to complete any edits the participant would like done before the next session.

In addition to working 1:1 with participants, facilitators can also guide group activities. This includes jokes and icebreakers at the beginning and end of each session as well as tutorials on how to use technology and develop a story.

### 3 DESIGNING DIGITAL STORY SESSIONS

A lead facilitator or project coordinator should design a preliminary format for the Digital Story Sessions. Remember, the format should depend on the preferences and needs of participants. We recommend including the following in your design:

- Use a 1:1 ratio of facilitators to participants
- Schedule 3 hours for sessions and incorporate breaks + pauses
- Schedule time for screening and discussing stories
- Limit the size of group to 4-6 participants
- Schedule at least 6 sessions
- Use jokes and icebreakers

## ④ SETTING UP TECHNOLOGY

Digital story sessions can be facilitated online or in-person. For online sessions, we recommend setting up an account through Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meets in advance. Be sure to review the account settings to ensure accessibility options are turned on.

### **Zoom, Teams, or Meets**

If you are working with a group, assign a lead facilitator as the meeting host. The meeting host can organize breakout rooms and respond to questions in the chat as needed. Make sure your first session includes an orientation to zoom/teams/meets and instructions how to use closed captions, chat functions, and reactions.

### **Video Editing Software**

Participants will need to use video editing software to create their digital stories. We recommend using **Wevideo**, which is free and includes an extensive stock media library of images and video, sound clips, internet cloud storage, and collaborative video editing features. Purchasable video editing software and options for online or downloadable content are also available. Facilitators should be familiar with whichever video editing software you choose to use prior to starting any Digital Story Sessions.

### **Internet**

If you are hosting sessions online, facilitators and participants will need a reliable internet connection to participate. We recommend using your initial meeting with participants to assess the strength of the internet connection. If participants have an unstable or limited internet connection you may need to set up a secondary venue.

### **Session Slides**

When explaining how to use technology to develop a digital story, a slideshow with images, videos, and music can be helpful. We recommend limiting the amount of text used on slides, using large font sizes, and using high colour contrast ratios to prioritize accessibility.

## **5** CREATING AGREEMENTS

We suggest creating consent, confidentiality, and release forms to ensure expectations and limitations are clear.

### **CONSENT:**

Outline options for participants to give consent for their stories to be shared within a group and/or with broader audiences. Let participants know they can change their minds. Include a list of resources with contact information for counselling organizations in the event that a participant requires additional support.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY:**

Ensure that everyone participating (including anyone providing support to participants throughout the sessions) signs a confidentiality agreement. Discuss the limits and agreements of confidentiality at the beginning of each Digital Story Session.

### **RELEASE:**

If a participant wants to use personal photographs capturing other individuals, have these other individuals sign a photo consent form.

### **SENSITIVE OR ACTIVATING CONTENT:**

Explain to participants that the content shared among group members during the Digital Story Sessions or Screenings may be activating. Invite participants to debrief at the end of each session with a facilitator or to opt out of any portion of the sessions and return when they feel ready.

### **STORY OWNERSHIP:**

Participants should have complete ownership over their digital story. Let them know they will be invited to share their digital stories at public screenings but there is no expectation or pressure for them to do so.

## 6

# ORGANIZING COMMUNICATION



We recommend sharing details about what to expect ahead of time so folks can arrive prepared. We recommend assigning a lead facilitator or project coordinator to organize and send out information through email before the project starts and the day before each session. Some of the information we recommend sending out in advance is listed below:

Send a welcome email to both participants and facilitators with the following information:

- Dates and times
- Location (or a login link if meeting online)
- Schedule (what will be covered in each session)
- Instructions for getting set up (including how to create an account and how to login to an online meeting if applicable)

If you are working in a group, the lead facilitator can send an email to all facilitators well in advance with dates, times, materials, and who will cover each section of all the sessions. Facilitators should also receive an email the *day before* each session with the following information:

- Each facilitator's role
- Schedule and relevant resources for the session
- Tutorial slides (if applicable)

Also, we recommend sending participants an email the *day before* each session with the following information:

- Time and location of session
- Schedule for the day

# DIGITAL STORY SCHEDULE

We recommend scheduling at least six sessions for participants to create their digital stories. In this section we outline a recommended schedule for the digital story facilitation/creation process.

## SESSION 1: Preparation

Introductions  
Icebreakers  
Guidelines  
Project Overview  
Storytelling Elements  
Digital Story Examples  
Joke



The first session is all about building connection and introducing participants to the elements of storytelling. You can invite participants to share their name, pronouns, and what they want from participating in this project. Then, do an icebreaker to start building rapport before discussing guidelines and consent options. We recommend using Would You Rather questions as an Icebreaker activity.

If you are facilitating digital storytelling in a group, cover expectations for participation, which should include:

- Respecting differences
- Listening actively
- Providing encouragement
- Keeping personal and identifying information confidential

If you are meeting online discuss the following etiquette:

- Muting microphone when not speaking
- How to use reactions (emojis)
- Using the raised hand function to ask a question
- Camera options
- Turning on closed captions

Remind participants of their options to share their stories and how they can change their mind at any point during the process.

In the second part of this session, discuss the **elements of storytelling**:



## POINT OF VIEW

Invite participants to consider the focus and perspective of their story. Facilitators can help participants explore their personal point of view by explaining how the same situation can be experienced in different ways.



## EMOTION

Discuss the power of emotions to engage and connect viewers with the experience of the storyteller. Invite participants to consider what feelings are associated with the story they want to share.





## VOICE

Encourage participants to consider *how* they want to communicate their story. Do they want to use still or moving images? Will they incorporate text and/or add their voice? Would they like to use music or record movement? Do they want to blend different ways of communicating? Spend time exploring creative ways of communicating voice.



## IMAGE

Let participants know they will have access to a library of still and moving images. You can also invite participants to use personal photographs or video footage.



## SOUND

Discuss the power of sound to support a storyline. Let participants know they can choose from a library of audio clips to incorporate sound effects and music into their digital story. Depending on the time available for your project, participants could also create their own music to use.



## PACE

Encourage participants to consider the pace or rhythm of their story. Explain how sound and music can influence the speed of the story as well as their voice.

## USE THE STORY CHECK IN TOOL TO KEEP TRACK OF PROGRESS

Once you have reviewed the elements of storytelling, screen some examples of digital stories and provide time for participants to ask questions.

Next, introduce the **Story Check In tool** (pictured below) which can be used either at the beginning or the end of each session to keep track of the progress of story development.

Name	Story Title	Story Board	Images	Voice	Sound	Closed Captions	Splash Page	Final Review

If you are facilitating digital storytelling with a group, pair up facilitators with participants before wrapping up the session with a joke.

## SESSION 2: Story Development

Icebreakers  
Story Development  
Production Time  
Check In  
Joke



- **Sharing in the storytelling Circle**
- **Mapping story elements with the storyboard**

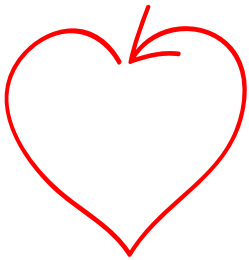
Start with an icebreaker and ask if any questions have come up since the last session. Use this session to start mapping story ideas and creating a plan for how to use different senses to share the story (sight, sound, voice, movement, etc.).

You may need to review the elements of storytelling. Once participants develop an initial idea, they can share it either during a Storytelling Circle (if you are facilitating a group) or individually with a facilitator. Help participants consider what kind of support they require by asking questions, such as:

- Do they want help narrowing the focus?
- Do they want feedback on which ideas to use?
- Do they want suggestions of images or sounds to use?

If you are facilitating a group, give each participant 10-15 minutes to share their ideas and receive input from the rest of the group. Remind participants to keep feedback positive and encouraging. A facilitator can document ideas provided from the group for participants to consider afterwards.

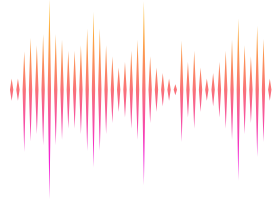
# A STORYBOARD IS WHERE YOU CAN LAY OUT/PLAN THE STORY ELEMENTS:



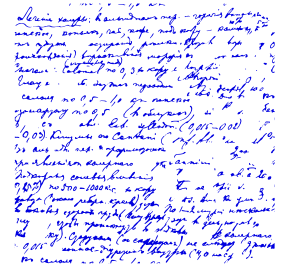
**EMOTION**



**IMAGE**



**SOUND**



**SCRIPT**

Next, facilitators should work individually with participants to determine how they want to communicate their stories. This can be done using a storyboard. Make sure participants know that digital stories do not require words or a verbal or written script and can be created with or without sound.

Facilitators can ask questions about how to provide support through this first stage of story production. Support at this stage can include:

- Asking the participant questions to evoke the story
- Transcribing or taking notes
- Offering suggestions about what images or sounds could capture the feeling or experience the participant wishes to share

Before concluding this session, fill in any of the sections on the Story Check In that have been completed and wrap up with a joke.

## SESSION 3: Video Editing

Icebreakers  
Video Editing Tutorial  
Production Time  
Check In  
Joke



### SOUND

Show participants how to search for sound effects and music within the editing platform. You can also help participants record sounds or their voice using a personal device such as phone or iPad.



### MEDIA

Demonstrate how to access stock media using the video software and how to upload personal photos and videos.



### TIMELINE

Demonstrate how to add images, videos, and sound to the timeline within the video editing software. Make sure to explain how to extend and shorten the length of time for each image and/or audio clip that is used.



### SAVE VIDEO

Show participants how to save their video and remind them to save their work throughout the creative process.

Once participants learn how to use the relevant technology, they can work individually with a facilitator to produce their own story.

Facilitators can ask participants how to best provide support at this stage of production. Options can include:

- Searching for images or sound
- Recording voice or video
- Organizing the timing of images, videos, and sound

Before concluding this session, fill in any of the sections on the Story Check In that have been completed and wrap up with a joke.

## SESSION 4: Transitions

Icebreakers  
Adding Transitions  
Production Time  
Check In  
Joke

TRANSITIONS    CAPTIONS    SPLASH



Start the fourth session with an Icebreaker and ask if any questions have come up since the last session. In this session demonstrate how to add transitions, a title page, and a splash page (ending page) before working individually with participants to finish creating their digital stories. Make sure to keep checking in with participants about how to offer support.


Before concluding this session, fill in any of the sections on the Story Check In that are complete and wrap up with a joke.

## SESSION 5: Review

Icebreakers  
Storytelling Circle  
Production Time  
Check In  
Finalize Videos  
Joke

**WHERE ARE  
YOU AT?**

**WHAT DO  
YOU NEED?**



Start the fifth session with an Icebreaker and ask if any questions have come up since the last session. Invite participants to share (either in a Storytelling Circle if you are facilitating a group, or individually) about: **a) their progress, b) what they need to feel complete with their digital story, and c) any support they require.**

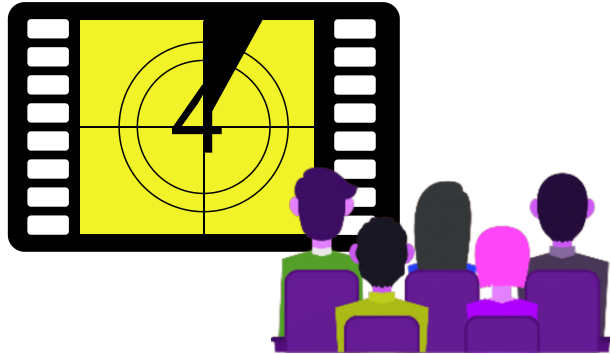
Spend the remaining time working 1:1 with participants to complete their digital stories. Use this stage of production to:

- Finish adding images and sound
- Complete any audio or visual recordings
- Adjust the timing of audio or visuals
- Add subtitles
- Incorporate transitions
- Add a title and an ending page

During the last 20 minutes of this session, complete the Story Check In. Invite participants to communicate whether their story needs any edits to be completed before the final session. Facilitators should schedule between 1-2 hours to complete these revisions.

If you are including an opportunity for participants to share their digital story during a **Screening Session**, check in with participants to see if they want to have their story shared. Encourage participants to ask questions and communicate what they need feel supported in sharing their stories. In doing so, make sure they know there is no pressure to participate in sharing. Finally, wrap up the session with a joke.

## SESSION 6: The Screening





Icebreakers  
Digital Story Screening  
Sharing Discussion  
Joke

Welcome participants to the final session with an Icebreaker.

If you have been facilitating digital storytelling individually and have organized a Screening Session for participants to share their stories with a broader audience, explain the project and briefly describe the process of creating a digital story.

If you are meeting online, make sure to review online etiquette with the group including staying muted during the screening and withholding comments until the end. If you have more than six participants sharing their stories, you may need to create two screening groups or incorporate breaks.





Before the screening, spend time celebrating the participants for their effort and talent.

Invite participants to share their stories during the Screening Session. Schedule at least 10 minutes of group discussion after each screening so that participants can share about their experiences of both sharing and viewing the stories.

If the content in any of the digital stories shared may be activating for the audience, discuss options for turning off their sound/video or taking a break and returning when they are ready. You can also refer the audience to a list of resources should they require further support.

At the end of the Screening Session, invite participants to identify and discuss any changes they would like to have made to their digital story with their facilitator.

Wrap up the session with a joke and indicate when participants will receive a final copy of their digital story. Remind participants that they have complete ownership over their digital story and can decide if and how they want to share their story moving forward. You can also review options for participants to share their stories with broader audiences including within your organization and/or social media.

# DIGITAL STORY COMPLETION

Once their digital stories are complete, send each participant a link for accessing their file. We also recommend providing certificates of completion to acknowledge and celebrate participants for their involvement in the project.



## RESOURCES

### Video Software Tutorials

You can use this link <https://www.wevideo.com/academy> to access video tutorials with instructions on how to navigate wevideo (the video editing software we recommend using).

### Extra Tips and Recommendations

Below we provide some extra suggestions for accessibility, based on findings from **The Youth Digital Storytelling Project**:

**Use more visuals and less text for tutorials**

**Offer the option to be led through tutorials 1:1 rather than in a group**

**Make sure participants get to decide if, when, with whom, and how, their story is shared**

**Listen to participants to learn how to support their process**

**Be available for participants to debrief their experience**

# WANT TO GET INSPIRED THROUGH EXAMPLES?

Visit our digital story bank at [multisensorystudio.ca](https://multisensorystudio.ca)

To access it, you will need a password. Email us at [multisensory@ucalgary.ca](mailto:multisensory@ucalgary.ca) or through the "contact us" tab on the website to request the password for access.



Image of Digital Story "A Journey of Words" by Artemis

# LEARN MORE

If you would like to learn more about how to prioritize accessibility in digital storytelling, please visit [www.multisensorystudio.ca](http://www.multisensorystudio.ca).

You can also follow us online for news about screening events and digital story making opportunities.



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