

Course: DMED 540: Visual Storytelling - Selling Ideas, Shaping Narratives (3 credits)

Term: Summer 2026

Instructor: Tiz Beretta

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Acknowledgement of Coast Salish Peoples and Land

We respectfully acknowledge the x̱m̱əθḵʷəy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̱x̱w̱ú7mesh Úx̱wumixw (Squamish), səliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples on whose unceded traditional territories our campus resides.

Course Description

Ideas are fragile. Even the strongest concepts can fail if they are not communicated clearly, strategically, and persuasively. We've all seen good ideas, poorly executed and bad ideas with production value. In creative and technical industries, the ability to shape narrative is as critical as the quality of the work itself.

This course explores visual storytelling as a professional skill: how to frame ideas, design presentations, communicate decisions, and shape narratives that resonate with diverse stakeholders. Students will examine foundational story structures and apply them to pitches, proposals, case studies, digital artifacts, portfolio presentations, and team communications.

Through hands-on workshops, critique sessions, and real-world examples, students will develop practical tools for presenting their work with clarity, confidence, and strategic awareness. Emphasis will be placed on audience awareness, ethical storytelling, and adapting narratives across creative, technical, and industry contexts.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Apply foundational narrative structures (e.g., Three-Act Structure, Hero's Journey, Problem–Solution framing) to professional pitches and presentations
- Analyze audience needs and adapt messaging for different stakeholder groups
- Design visual storytelling materials (storyboards, slide decks, one-pagers) that clearly communicate value and impact
- Deliver and refine presentations using peer and instructor critique
- Integrate ethical, inclusive, and culturally aware approaches into storytelling practice
- Construct a cohesive professional narrative suitable for portfolio or career advancement context



Format of the Course

The course will run for 13 weeks with one 3-hour weekly session. Classes will be workshop-driven and practice-oriented, with brief lectures introducing key concepts followed by applied exercises, peer critique, and iterative project development. Students will actively develop narrative materials throughout the term, applying frameworks directly to their own work. Participation, experimentation, and constructive critique are central to the learning process.

Project-Based Approach

Students are encouraged to apply course frameworks to their own ongoing creative, technical, or professional projects whenever possible. For those without an active project, or when alternative perspectives are beneficial, the instructor will provide structured industry scenarios and case study based briefs that simulate real-world and professional contexts.

This flexible structure allows students to build meaningful portfolio material while also experimenting beyond their primary discipline.

The majority of weekly exercises are exploratory and developmental, designed to support major assignments rather than function as standalone graded submissions.

Course Schedule

The course will run on Wednesdays, 4:00pm – 7:00pm, May 13 – August 5, 2026. There is a statutory holiday on Wednesday, July 1st. A make-up class will take place on Friday, July 3rd from 4:00pm – 7:00pm. The following schedule outlines most of the topics covered during the course. *Some topics may be added or modified during the semester at the discretion of the instructor.*

Class	Topic
Week 1 (Wednesday, May 13)	<p>Frameworks for storytelling in creative work</p> <p>Focus: Introduction to storytelling as a professional tool; overview of core narrative frameworks and why they work in industry contexts.</p> <p>Objective: Students will identify and compare major storytelling structures and apply a basic framework to a simple creative or technical concept.</p>
Week 2 (Wednesday, May 20)	<p>How narrative theory shapes pitches and presentations</p> <p>Focus: Narrative theory translated into real-world pitch environments; understanding stakes, tension, and audience engagement.</p> <p>Objective: Students will adapt a narrative structure into a short pitch outline tailored to a defined audience.</p>

<p>Week 3 (Wednesday, May 27)</p>	<p>Using story structure across media Focus: Understanding how narrative frameworks operate across formats, including presentations, visual media, and interactive or digital work. Objective: Students will explore foundational storytelling structures and apply them to a range of contexts, examining how narrative progression, user experience, and interaction shape meaning within both linear and digital artifacts.</p>
<p>Week 4 (Wednesday, June 3)</p>	<p>Visual and interactive storytelling Focus: Examining how visual design, structure, and user interaction communicate narrative in presentations, prototypes, games, and other digital artifacts. Objective: Students will analyze how design choices, interface structure, and user journeys contribute to storytelling within interactive products and digital experiences, and apply these principles to their own work.</p>
<p>Week 5 (Wednesday, June 10)</p>	<p>Communicating the value behind products, features, and creative choices Focus: Articulating value; moving from “what I made” to “why it matters.” E.g. What problem does this solve? What business goal does this achieve? Objective: Students will reframe a project feature or design choice in terms of user impact, business goals, or stakeholder priorities.</p>
<p>Week 6 (Wednesday, June 17)</p>	<p>Crafting memorable portfolio stories and boosting personal branding Focus: Professional narrative building; connecting past experience, and current strengths into a cohesive story. Objective: Students will draft a portfolio presentation narrative that clearly communicates skills, growth, and direction.</p>
<p>Week 7 (Wednesday, June 24)</p>	<p>Multimedia and interactive ways to share narrative Focus: Digital storytelling tools; interactive decks, prototypes, video, and hybrid formats. Objective: Students will experiment with one multimedia or interactive format to enhance narrative delivery.</p>
<p>Week 8 (Friday, July 3)</p>	<p>Strategies for inclusion and ethics in stories Focus: Representation, power, bias, accessibility, and responsible framing. Objective: Students will evaluate a narrative example for ethical considerations and revise it to improve inclusivity and clarity.</p>

<p>Week 9 (Wednesday, July 8)</p>	<p>Peer-led critique and developing stories through feedback Focus: Constructive critique methods; separating personal identity from project feedback. Objective: Students will deliver structured feedback and revise their own narrative based on critique.</p>
<p>Week 10 (Wednesday, July 15)</p>	<p>Audience Psychology and Stakeholder Dynamics (Professional Power & Influence) Focus: Reading the room; understanding stakeholder priorities; anticipating resistance and adjusting narrative strategy. Objective: Students will analyze stakeholder perspectives and adapt their narrative strategy to address competing priorities or skepticism.</p>
<p>Week 11 (Wednesday, July 22)</p>	<p>Strategic Framing and Persuasion Focus: Framing techniques, positioning, sequencing information, and shaping perception. Objective: Students will revise an existing pitch using advanced framing techniques to improve clarity and persuasive impact.</p>
<p>Week 12 (Wednesday, July 29)</p>	<p>Final Narrative Refinement Workshop Focus: Iterative refinement of narrative, structure, and clarity; incorporating feedback to strengthen final presentations. Objective: Students will refine their project narrative through focused iteration and peer feedback, improving clarity, structure, and persuasive impact.</p>
<p>Week 13 (Wednesday, August 5)</p>	<p>Final Presentations: Integrated Narrative Delivery Focus: Final presentations integrating storytelling, visuals, audience awareness, and strategic framing. Objective: Students will deliver a refined professional presentation demonstrating integrated narrative and visual storytelling skills.</p>

Course Assignments

Note: Assignments, due dates, and weighting are subject to instructor revision if deemed necessary

Assignment	Weight	Due Date	Details
Assignment #1	15%	Week 4	<p>Narrative Analysis & Framing</p> <p>Focus: Understanding how narrative shapes the communication of ideas.</p> <p>Description: Students will analyze how storytelling principles operate within a chosen project, product, or creative work. This may include the student's own ongoing project or an external example. The analysis should identify narrative structure, audience positioning, and the strategies used to communicate value, purpose, or transformation.</p> <p>Objective: To develop the ability to critically evaluate how narrative framing influences how ideas, products, and creative work are understood.</p> <p>Outcome: A short written or visual analysis that maps the narrative arc, audience perspective, and key communication strategies of the chosen example.</p>

Assignment #2	25%	Week 8	<p>Storytelling in Visual or Interactive Work</p> <p>Focus: Applying storytelling principles to a visual, experiential, or digital artifact.</p> <p>Description: Students will develop a narrative framework for communicating a project, concept, or prototype through visual or interactive means. This may take the form of a presentation deck, visual case study, storyboard, prototype walkthrough, or other structured narrative artifact.</p> <p>Students may apply this assignment to their own ongoing work (such as a graduation project) or select a provided scenario.</p> <p>Objective: To translate storytelling principles into visual and structural communication within presentations, prototypes, or other digital artifacts.</p> <p>Outcome: A structured narrative artifact demonstrating how design, sequencing, and interaction support the communication of the project's story.</p>
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<p>Assignment #3</p>	<p>25%</p>	<p>Week 11</p>	<p>Narrative Revision Through Feedback</p> <p>Focus: Using critique to improve storytelling</p> <p>Description: Students will revise their project narrative based on peer and instructor feedback from Week 9.</p> <p>Objective: To demonstrate the ability to interpret feedback, identify communication gaps, and improve clarity and impact.</p> <p>Outcome: A revised version of their narrative (deck, script, or artifact). A short reflection: what feedback they received; what they changed; why?</p>
<p>Assignment #4</p>	<p>35%</p>	<p>Week 13</p>	<p>Final Presentation</p> <p>Focus: Integrating narrative, visual communication, and audience strategy.</p> <p>Description: Students will deliver a final presentation that communicates a project, concept, or prototype using the storytelling frameworks explored throughout the course. Projects may be original work, an existing creative or research project, or a provided scenario.</p>

			<p>The final presentation should demonstrate thoughtful narrative structure, clear audience awareness, and effective communication of the project's value and impact.</p> <p>Objective: To synthesize course concepts into a compelling and coherent presentation of an idea, product, or creative work.</p>
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Recommended Readings:

- Design Is Storytelling, by Ellen Lupton

Attendance and Participation

Regular attendance is expected of students in all their classes (including participation, group work, tutorials, seminars, online etc.). Students who are unavoidably absent due to illness or disability should notify their instructors of their situation.

- Students are expected to attend every class on the schedule (based on their assigned group) and be fully present. While sickness is sometimes inevitable, understand that due to the experiential nature of the material, classes cannot be made up.
- Lateness also informs grading. Classes start punctually every week according to the schedule. Instructions will not be repeated, nor will it be tolerated if a latecomer bothers another student for instructions. If arriving later than half an hour into a class, a student may be marked as absent.
- Due dates: Assignments granted an extension beyond the due date will have no extended comments; assignments handed in late without prior permission will be returned with a grade only, no comments, and 2% per day late, including weekends (i.e., 4% for Saturday and Sunday), deducted from the grade assigned to your paper. Assignments submitted after the assignment has been returned to the rest of the class will not normally be accepted.

<https://www.sfu.ca/students/enrolment-services/policies-and-procedures/academic-concessions.html>

Grading Profile

A+	95-100	Exemplary expectations
A	90-94	Exceeding expectations
A-	85-89	Meet expectations
B+	80-84	Approaching expectations
B	75-79	
B-	70-74	Below expectations
C	60-69	Far below expectations
F	0 – 59	Fail (Students must retake the course).

A student in a master's or doctoral program must maintain a CGPA of 3.0. Under no circumstances will a student whose CGPA is below 3.0, be awarded a graduate degree.

<https://www.sfu.ca/students/advising-resources/calculators/gpa-calculator.html>

Laptops & Cell Phones

The use of laptops and cell phones during class is at the discretion of the instructor. *Please respect your classmates and instructors and refrain from text messages, social media, games and videos during class and workshop times.* Please note you should always bring pen and paper to class.

Written & Spoken English

English is the official language of the school and all communication (written and spoken) is expected to be conducted in English. SFU and the MDM Program provide a wide range of free language support for those who need and it's up to each learner to seek that support.

Accommodations

The university accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. Please let your instructor know in advance, preferably the first week of class, if you will require any accommodations on these grounds. The Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) will make every effort to assist students with disabilities so that they achieve their educational goals. <https://www.sfu.ca/students/accessible-learning/establishing-accommodations/accommodation.html>

Academic Integrity: Your Work, Your Success

SFU's Academic Integrity website <http://www.sfu.ca/students/academicintegrity.html> is filled with information on what is meant by academic dishonesty, where you can find resources to help with your studies and the consequences of cheating.

Each student is responsible for their conduct as it affects the university community. Academic dishonesty, in whatever form, is ultimately destructive of the values of the university. Furthermore, it is unfair and discouraging to the majority of students who pursue their studies honestly. Scholarly integrity is required of all members of the university. <http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student/s10-01.html> .

Inappropriate use of technology in coursework

If you are using any technology, including generative AI, to produce or edit content that will be part of your graded work in the course, you must be transparent about the tools that you use. Undeclared use of the tool/technology will be considered a violation of the academic integrity policy. Be aware that any tool used will require you to evaluate the output for accuracies and be responsible for making the appropriate corrections.

Graduate Studies Notes

Important dates and deadlines for graduate students are found here: http://www.sfu.ca/dean-gradstudies/current/important_dates/guidelines.html.