

feedback

To the Editor:

Carl Clinton's article [*Writing a Good Narrative*, September 2017], and your editorial supporting the article's thesis, make eminent common sense. Although I wondered how such a journalistic lesson could be needed when the proposal was so obvious, I realised why when I recalled my own early experiences with ancient barebones contracts that left me scratching my head over what the parties originally intended, and how the words on the paper meshed (or didn't) with those now-lost premises.

I am an attorney rather than a surveyor, but I take a different tack from most in drafting agreements. As I am also a writer, I like to tell a story right from the start. After the customary recitation of the parties' names, addresses, and business identities, along with the effective date of the document, the first numbered paragraph of the

agreement is a statement couched in ordinary conversational language that describes what the parties have come together to accomplish and how they intend to reach that goal. If the project is complex and involves others who are not privy to this contract, I identify them and describe as simply as possible how they will be involved. This initial provision (which can be several grammatical paragraphs long), contains nothing technical or legal. Its intent is to *set the stage*, and to give context to the facts and figures that follow. It's a *narrative* that *tells the story* of the contract for the benefit of the judge who may encounter it for the first time when the parties are at each other's throats when things go south, or for the parties themselves before they get to that point, just to remind them why they got together in the first place.

I have found that negotiating contracts is much simpler when the first draft I present

is immediately understood by the other side. And when the project takes an unexpected turn and new people get involved, having that narrative helps everyone to make the directional shift unimpeded. Surely there are direct parallels between the advantages of a project narrative in a legal setting and one in the context of a boundary survey. After all, we all respond to a good story, well told. What works for our grandkids at bedtime works equally well in a business setting.

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