On its own, data means nothing. Tying the evaluation data together with a good, coherent story makes for a compelling narrative. It imprints the information on the minds of our audience in a way that's precise and indelible.

Here are six key factors to keep in mind when planning to tell a story with our evaluation data.

1. Setting the Context

Why has the evaluation been undertaken? What's the data that's being presented? What information are we trying to uncover? Being clear with our answers to these questions early in the evaluation process is important – even before data collection and analysis begins.

2. Defining the Framework

Thinking through exactly how we'll analyze our data and create a story around it can help us anchor our process throughout the entire cycle of data collection, interpretation, and packaging. Spending time and thought at this stage can help minimize confusion later in the evaluation process.

3. Guarding Against Bias

Analytical work with even the slightest degree of human involvement can't be completely free of bias. We'll likely need to make many assumptions in our evaluation journey. Although bias can't be entirely weeded out, being aware of it can help us identify and balance these tendencies.

4. Acknowledging Uncertainty

Statistical analysis in a social setting naturally yields results with a degree of uncertainty, which can have major implications on decision making. Acknowledging this uncertainty along with any 'known unknowns' can help strengthen the authenticity of our narratives and build trust with our audience.

5. Adding Value to the Narrative

People don't simply want to see the numbers. They want to know what they mean. Sharing why our evaluation data are significant help our audience understand what the information means in the larger scheme of things. We need to create a compelling narrative that puts our analysis in perspective. Moreover, what are the high points and the low points in our findings? What was surprising or unexpected in the evaluation data that we can weave into our narrative?

6. Identifying our Audience

Tailoring our analysis to suit the preferences and expertise of our audience is a critical step. Structuring the presentation around what the listeners know, don't know, need to know, and don't need to know is a good way to begin. A talk about the genetic diversity in the Amazon rainforests would look very different when we're speaking to a group of senior biologists rather than students in secondary school having their first taste of the subject.

Following these six simple steps will help us package our analysis effectively and create a story with impact.

Adapted from:
https://blog.socialcops.com/academy/data-storytelling-tell-compelling-story-data/

Bonus resource:

The following provides an example of how evaluations are described through story-telling:
https://evaluationstories.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/evaluations-that-make-a-difference-en_21sep15.pdf