

Why Composite Stories?

Why Hedegreen Research sometimes constructs scenes, records and fictional futures—and the rules that stop those constructions from becoming evidence.

DRAFT PREVIEW DENNIS HEDEGREEN BUILD DRAFT-LOCAL

[HTTPS://HEDEGREENRESEARCH.COM/ARTICLES/WHY-COMPOSITE-STORIES/](https://hedegreenresearch.com/articles/why-composite-stories/)

A constructed scene can make several documented mechanisms visible at once. It cannot prove that the scene occurred.

A machine stops while a child's project is still clamped inside it.

The lights remain on. The ventilation works. The file is saved. Freight continues outside. The display offers another interval at a price the adult can technically pay.

Nothing has failed.

The scene did not happen.

It was constructed for a Hedegreen Research article about a future in which automation returned working hours while access to the electricity, machines, cooling and continuity needed to use those hours remained separately allocated.

Why would a publication concerned with evidence begin by writing something that did not occur?

Because the system being examined did not exist in one place either.

Its components did. Time-varying electricity prices, demand response, prepayment protections, public workshops, storage, long-term power agreements and automated freight can all be researched separately. But no single present-day case contains the full institutional question:

What happens when a society treats returned time as a public achievement while treating the practical capacity to use it mainly as a purchasable service?

A constructed story can place those mechanisms in the same afternoon.

That does not make the afternoon evidence.

One Case Cannot Always Carry the System

A documented case is usually the strongest place to begin. A real person, institution or event imposes resistance. The facts refuse to line up perfectly with the argument. Dates conflict. Motives remain uncertain. A programme works for one person and fails for another.

Hedegreen Research should not escape that resistance merely because a cleaner story would read better.

But one case can also be asked to carry too much.

A household may show the effect of a tariff but not its interaction with employment schedules, care obligations, public access and private storage. A workshop may show a booking rule but not the allocation system around it. An observation may show a behaviour but not the slow change in the category used to describe that behaviour across generations.

Sometimes the analytical object is not one event. It is the meeting between mechanisms that normally appear in different laws, datasets, contracts, institutions or periods.

A constructed story is one way to make that meeting visible.

It should be used only when a documented case cannot perform that job.

The Scene Is Where the Evidence Meets

A constructed story can show sequence.

It can show that a nominally free afternoon may still be fragmented by an employment-response window. It can place a warm apartment beside a discretionary-services budget. It can show that a machine interval, a care visit and a cheap electricity period do not necessarily occur at the same time.

A table can list those components. A story can show the coordination burden created when they meet.

That is the legitimate use.

The scene is not a witness. It cannot testify that this person existed, that these words were spoken or that this exact combination occurred. It is closer to a model in narrative form: a controlled arrangement of inputs used to expose a consequence, conflict or missing question.

The arrow runs from evidence into the construction.

It does not run backwards.

A plausible scene cannot become proof of the mechanisms used to build it.

Three Public Labels

Hedegreen Research uses three public labels for constructed narrative methods.

A **composite story** is assembled from more than one real observation, account, case or recurring pattern. No single person, event or sequence necessarily corresponds to the whole story.

A **constructed record** is a fictional record, log, archive or longitudinal sequence built to examine how an observation, behaviour or classification might change. An imagined primate archive, for example, could move from “curiosity” to “culture” to “dependency risk.” The archive could make a classification problem visible. It could not provide evidence that the observations occurred.

A **controlled fictional future** builds a scene or institution that does not currently exist from mechanisms that do. The Hedegreen Research twins about returned hours and electrical continuity use this form. One future lets continuity follow contracts and assets. The other adds a bounded civic claim, public queues and compensated commercial flexibility. Neither is a forecast. They are different rule sets applied to a constrained physical world.

Two other disclosures remain separate.

An **anonymised real account** is real. Identifying details have been removed or changed to protect a source. It must not be confused with a composite person.

An **illustrative hypothetical** is a smaller invented example, signalled with words such as *consider*, *imagine* or *suppose*. It does not need the machinery of a full narrative method unless it becomes the article's main evidentiary surface.

These are Hedegreen Research labels. They are an internal editorial standard, not a universal publishing taxonomy.

Existing Practice Is Not Permission

Composite narratives have an established, bounded use in some qualitative research.

Rebecca Willis (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794118787711>), combined material from several interviews with British politicians into individual composite narratives. Her method preserved contextual detail and anonymity, but it also required a transparent route back to the interviews. Willis warns that merging accounts can produce simplification or caricature and places a substantial interpretive burden on the researcher.

Zoë McElhinney and Catherine Kennedy (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-022-00723-x>) describe composite narratives as a way to combine participant experiences, retain context and make qualitative findings accessible. They also make the researcher's role part of the problem: trustworthiness depends on explaining the research design, the transformation from individual accounts to composites and the researcher's own interpretation.

Those methods do not grant permission to invent unsupported mechanisms, quotations or events. Interview-derived composites are not the same as controlled fictional futures.

Strict news reporting may reject the form entirely. The Associated Press (<https://www.ap.org/about/news-values-and-principles/telling-the-story/>) prohibits fabricated details and composite characters in its news reports.

That rule makes sense.

A reader encountering a factual report should not have to wonder whether its central person is an assembly of several people, whether a quotation was created from a theme or whether a date was moved to improve the sequence.

The relevant lesson from the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics (<https://www.spj.org/spj-code-of-ethics/>) is not that a label authorises construction. It is that ethical choices and processes should be explained, facts and context must not be distorted, and illustrations or re-enactments must be clearly labelled.

The genre must be visible before belief forms.

The Rules

A method becomes credible by limiting what the writer is allowed to do.

First, the construction must be labelled near the point of encounter. A footer link can explain the method, but it cannot repair an opening that presented fiction as observation.

Second, factual mechanisms must remain auditable. If a story combines a public workshop in one jurisdiction, a demand-response contract in another and a legal protection in a third, the article must state that the integration is fictional. It cannot quietly turn scattered analogues into an apparently existing programme.

Third, a composite quotation must never be presented as the verbatim words of one person. Quotation marks create a specific factual claim.

Fourth, construction cannot manufacture prevalence. A scene may show how a mechanism could operate. It does not establish that the mechanism is common, likely or representative.

Fifth, the story must retain relevant resistance. If flexibility genuinely benefits some households, the dark version must allow that. If a public capability floor creates queues, errors and costs, the hopeful version must show them.

Sixth, Hedegreen Research must keep an internal assembly record. Each material component should be marked as documented, inferred, assumed or fictional. The public article need not expose every drafting note, but the publication should be able to reconstruct how the scene was built.

Seventh, AI changes none of these obligations. A language model can produce a coherent person, quotation, archive or institution in seconds. Coherence is precisely the danger. Hedegreen Research remains responsible for every claim the generated scene appears to make.

Finally, construction should be used sparingly. A more dramatic story is not sufficient reason to invent one.

A Label Cannot Make a Bad Composite Good

Suppose the machine scene is assembled only from the longest queues, the most expensive continuation windows and the households with the least flexibility.

Each component might be documented somewhere.

The combined afternoon could still be misleading.

It could make an exceptional alignment appear ordinary. It could collapse incompatible jurisdictions. It could hide a cheaper option that would change the outcome. It could begin with the desired ending and select only the mechanisms needed to reach it.

A clear label would tell the reader that the scene was constructed.

It would not make the construction fair.

That is why the source trail matters. So do counterexamples, jurisdictional boundaries, uncertainty and the willingness to abandon a scene that makes a better story than the evidence can carry.

The reader should be able to ask:

- Why was construction necessary?
- Which parts are documented?
- Which parts were inferred or assumed?
- What was omitted?
- Could another arrangement of the same evidence produce a different result?

Why Use the Form at All?

Because systems often hide in separation.

The working-hours report sits in one place. The electricity contract sits in another. The public workshop has its own booking page. The cooling rule appears in emergency guidance. A care obligation may appear nowhere in the formal system.

A constructed story can put them on the same table.

It can reveal that the difficult question is not whether each component works as designed, but what kind of life appears when they work together.

That is what the machine scene was built to do.

It was not evidence that a child once left an unfinished wing joint inside a public cutter. It was a controlled way to ask whether returned time counts as freedom when continuation remains a separate purchase.

This method statement is not retrospective permission for that story.

It is a restriction on what the story is allowed to claim.

The story may be constructed.

The mechanism may not be smuggled in.

And the reader should always be able to tell the difference.

RELATION MEMORY

MATURES FROM [How to Read Hedegreen Research](#) · Turns the earlier distinction between source, observation, inference and model into a specific standard for constructed narrative.

MATURES FROM [An Article Is Not a Document](#) · Turns editorial resistance into explicit construction, source-boundary and assembly-record rules.

NEARBY [Watch Out for Water](#) · Connects the method statement to an existing declared composite field story without treating that article as documentary reporting.

CANONICAL URL: [HTTPS://HEDEGREENRESEARCH.COM/ARTICLES/WHY-COMPOSITE-STORIES/](https://hedegreenresearch.com/articles/why-composite-stories/)
PDF VIEW GENERATED: 2026-07-28T15:04:47.831Z