

# NARRATION (STORY-TELLING)

## True Stories & Fiction

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# PART SIX

**P**ART SIX focuses on narration, or story-telling. In what situations and for what purposes might we need or want to *narrate a story*?

1. To tell the truth about an event that really happened—to the police or in a court of law; to someone in a position of authority; to a reporter; and in other situations.
2. To make good conversation by sharing our real experiences—to reveal something about ourselves, to make a point, or to help someone else avoid danger or a mistake.
3. To entertain someone—perhaps a sick person, a child, a friend, or a new acquaintance at a party.

To be effective, the language of narration should be *well-organized*. To be as clear, we should probably tell stories in *time order*—beginning with the setting or situation and then describing the events one after another as they happened. We should check that our listeners are following our sequence of events.

The best stories make a point, communicate a message, or “teach a lesson.” So that our listeners get our point, we should be careful not to leave out any significant events. On the other hand, we shouldn’t include *irrelevant* details—those not pertinent or unimportant to the sequence of the narrative or its significance. A story with too many words—or with a lot of repetition—will confuse listeners. They’ll get lost—or miss the message.

There are several kinds of stories:

- A TRUE STORY. When we narrate a sequence of events that really happened, either a true story from the news or a personal experience, we should be truthful and accurate in our description. Unless it’s clearly for exaggerated entertainment purposes, “fake news” can be damaging or destructive.
- A FICTION STORY. When we tell a story to please people, we can change or add details. We can also use our voice—and our timing—to make the story more exciting or funnier.
- A JOKE OR AN ANECDOTE. An amusing story with a punch line is the most difficult to tell successfully. That’s because each *detail* is important, and good timing is essential—if we want listeners to laugh.

Do you want to be a good story-teller? Here are some pointers from “the experts.”

- Narrate your story for your *listeners*, not for yourself. As in all speech-making, consider your audience. Are you talking to adults or to children, to native or to non-native speakers of English? In any case, tell the events in a style that they will understand. If your listeners are not following your narrative, go back to clarify some points. Otherwise, your point or “punch line” (joke) will “fall flat.”
- Use your voice skillfully to make your meaning clear. If your story is exciting, speak with enthusiasm or emotion. If it is serious, tell it in a calm or serious tone. Raise and lower your voice, speed up or slow down, and pause before an important event or point—in order to get your audience more involved in your narrative. But don’t laugh at your own joke while you are telling it!
- Especially if you are talking to children, use facial expressions and gestures to “punctuate” the story. Mere *words*, especially when spoken in a monotone, may put listeners to sleep. To keep your listeners interested, “tell” your story with more than just your mouth moving.

## Where can we hear examples of Story-Telling?

- EVERYDAY CONVERSATION: ordinary or unusual events (an accident, an emergency, a crime, etc.)
- SOCIAL EVENTS: speakers’ or other conversational anecdotes and jokes
- STORY-TELLING sessions for children, at schools, in public libraries, at book fairs
- TELEVISION: documentaries like “survivor stories,” the news, talk shows, interviews about people’s experiences, stand-up comedy routines that include jokes
- VIDEO: Stories, usually for kids, often animated or acted out.
- RADIO: news and news feature programs, story-telling shows (for children) and book readings.
- AUDIO: Full or condensed readings of fiction (podcasts)—for children or adults: computer downloads of short stories, science fiction, mystery, horror, classic retellings.

