
How to Tell a Good Story

Some Guidelines

Know your audience.

Use things you've always done to reinforce your story – gestures, expressions, turns of phrase.
Be believable.

Look for ways to pull the listener into *your* story. Use what they expect, and twist it. For example:

*"You remember how Dad loved to dress well. Well, even when he couldn't carry on much of a conversation, he still wanted to hear you say he *looked good*."*

Start with a hook.

Use a **formula opening**, if need be, to set a tone.

For example, create the mood of a fairy tale to frame a reality.

"Once upon a time, in a world far away, there lived a girl who yearned for a boring life..."

Keep moving.

Keep your listeners yearning to know what's coming next.

For example, use repetition (the rule of three):

"And then ... and then ... and then finally, ..."

Leave out the details.

If you put a gun on the wall, so to speak,

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you must make it go off in the story.

Your listeners need to have it all add up.

Catch yourself going off on a tangent. Say something like "*but that's another story.*" Get back on track.

Show don't just tell.

Use posture and gesture and facial expression to emphasize, dramatize, engage.

Make eye contact. Connect with your listeners.

The ending is your payoff.

Know where you're going, and finish!

Practice delivering your punchline in different ways to see whether you're getting the effect you want.

Try something formulaic, such as these **ritual closings**:

- "*And that's the way it is ... on [your street name] these days.*" (**Walter Cronkite**)
- "*And so it goes...*" (**Linda Ellerbee**)
- "*And that's the truth ...*" (Lily Tomlin's character, **Edith Ann**)

Or invent it, such as:

"Forever and ever. Amen"

Practice your timing

After you deliver the punchline pause and count to 3. Let your listeners get it.

Don't hang around.

Once you deliver the punch line, that's it!

- "*Be sincere. Be brief. Be seated.*"
(Franklin D. Roosevelt)