

How to Tell a Story Well

The tempo of storytelling should usually be faster than the normal speed of conversational delivery. Listeners like to feel the story is progressing. Action must take place. You can emphasize this feeling of progress by telling the story briskly. To use a rule of thumb, if it takes you four minutes to tell the story the first time you try, work until you can tell the same story in only three minutes. Practice the Story Stories improve as they are told and retold. Needless details drop out. Interesting additions are included. The fables, the folk stories, and the fairy tales that compose so much of our good literature, are very old and have been passed along by word of mouth from generation to generation. Do not think that it is possible to tell a story just the way you want it told on the first attempt. Not until about the tenth telling will you reach proper efficiency. Avoid Unimportant Details Do not clutter up a story with side issues, unimportant characters, and general confusion. Keep the story to its lowest common denominator. One woman would begin a story by saying, "I want to tell you about my visit to my sister in Chicago. She's my youngest sister (not needed for the story) - has a brother-in-law who works in Salt Lake City (way off the point). He's rich, believe you me. We want to go see him next year, if he's home (you are lost completely by now), but he may be taking his vacation in Alaska (as if you care). Oh, yes, I started to tell you about Bertha (by this time, you are looking for a way out). She's my youngest sister, did I tell you that? (You cannot remember and do not care.) If one says he is a poor storyteller, what he is saying is that he does not know how to tell stories. Practice here makes perfect. Be Enthusiastic About Your Own Story We all know the storyteller who begins, "I guess you've already heard this one, haven't you?" Or the storyteller who appears so uninterested in his own story that we can't work up much enthusiasm ourselves. You do not wish to go too far and laugh too loudly at your own jokes or take yourself too seriously, but, as the stimulus, you cannot expect a response from your group unless you radiate enough energy to cause a reaction. Half of the success in storytelling lies in the power of suggestion. If you suggest to your audience that this particular story is a good one, then you have won half the battle. Summary Remember that you will have to "borrow" most of your stories from someone else. Shakespeare borrowed nearly all of his plots and yet was very successful. If you hear someone else tell a particularly interesting story, jot down the essentials and then practice telling it yourself until you have put it into your story repertoire. The communicator who has a story to illustrate his point will never be at a loss to explain himself.

About the Author

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