

STORYTELLING GUIDE: RESOURCE 7

Storytelling Warm-Ups

Stories come more naturally to some than others, but everyone can benefit from getting their brain going with some targeted warm-ups.

Preparation is designed to be very limited to practice getting away from the desire to have everything be perfectly planned and written out. Any notes should be limited to a few bullets or sketches and storytellers should remind themselves to resist perfection.

A few adaptations depending on group size:

- If practicing individually, find some way to make the prompts spontaneous (i.e. drawing topics or objects out of a bag).
- If practicing with a group, make sure people are split up into pairs or groups of 3. Larger than that will take longer, but it is sometimes a useful bigger activity for everyone to hear everyone's stories. As a warm-up, it is more important for the speaker to practice than for everyone to hear every story. A middle ground can be to take volunteers at the end to practice for the whole group.
- To make the exercise more difficult, all of these warm-ups can be adapted to make the next storyteller say something that relates to the previous story before they go on to tell their story (i.e. "my story is similar to...", "speaking of...", "my story is completely different because..."). This helps people practice making connections and listening actively.

Warm-up Activity	Goal and Timing
<p>What am I?</p> <p>Tell a 2-minute story describing an object in the room in great detail without saying what it is. The listener gets 3 guesses to figure out the object. A more difficult version is to describe something not in the room.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice describing specific detail.• For pairs: 8 minutes total—2 minutes per story, 2 minutes of guessing time, plus some transition time, ideally no preparation time
<p>Tell Me About a Time When...</p> <p>Tell a 2-minute story describing a memory of an event. Prompts should be concrete and short (i.e. it was cold, it was raining, you were lonely, you lost track of time) and stories should be true.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice remembering specific moments• For pairs: 8 minutes total—2 minutes per story plus transition time, plus 2 minutes of preparation time
<p>Twist It</p> <p>Take a prompt and add on to it to create your own twist. For example, the original prompt might be, "Tell me about a time you were a leader..." and your twist might be "I am going to tell you about a time I was a leader....but didn't feel like one." Tell a 2-minute story about that twist. To come up with twists, it can help to think about the opposite of the prompt or an unexpected way of thinking about it. Note: this warm-up works best when the original prompt is a sentence starter, rather than a word.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice remembering specific moments AND thinking about prompts in unexpected ways to engage the audience• For pairs: 10 minutes total—2 minutes per story plus transition time, plus 4 minutes of preparation time



<p>Ordinary into Extraordinary</p> <p>Tell a 3-minute story about something really mundane and unremarkable and make it dramatic, suspenseful, or intriguing (i.e. what you had for breakfast, your journey to class, putting something in your bag). Prompts can either be given or generated by the speaker and should be true (even if there is some exaggeration).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice making something special and interesting, even when it doesn't seem like it.• For pairs: 14 minutes total—3 minutes per story plus transition time, plus 5 minutes of preparation time. Keep these stories on the longer side to achieve goal
<p>Portraits</p> <p>Tell a 2.5-minute story about a person you've encountered in your life. The story should be true and at least 1.5 minutes of the story should be spent describing them (i.e. what they look like, what they said, what they smelled like, how they made you feel). The conclusion of the story should be 2 or 3 sentences max about why they stand out in your memory. The person doesn't have to be especially important.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice bringing people to life and using the 5 senses to engage listeners.• For pairs: 9 minutes total—2.5 minutes per story plus transition time, plus 2 minutes of preparation time. Make sure the bulk of the time is spent on the person and not why they are important.
<p>Tour Guide</p> <p>Guide a group or a partner around the room, telling brief stories inspired by objects in the room (like a tour guide in a museum). The story doesn't have to be a specific length, but can be loosely inspired by the object or a literal story about a personal relationship with that object.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice relating a story to something specific and concrete.• Can be any amount of time and can be done in pairs or as a group, either with one person leading or switching off and taking turns.
<p>Three Words</p> <p>Get the group (or a partner) to brainstorm three words. These can be three unrelated concrete words (i.e. cactus, roller coaster, spaghetti) or three unrelated abstract words (i.e. bravery, fear, hope, awe). Tell a 2-minute story inspired by one of those three words. Do not combine the words and it isn't important to necessarily mention the chosen word.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice coming up with a story based on a theme or using simple words as symbols for something deeper.• For pairs: 12 minutes total—2 minutes to brainstorm words, 2 minutes per story plus transition time, plus 3–4 minutes of preparation time. To save time, words can be decided ahead of time.
<p>Camp Fire</p> <p>In a group circle, ask the audience to select: 1) a main character; 2) a setting; and 3) a problem. Have the storyteller tell a 2-minute fictional story involving the audience choices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice telling a story in front of a group in a low-stakes, fun environment.• Can be any amount of time, depending on the number of storytellers selected.



<p>Group Story</p> <p>In a large circle, create a group story by going around and having each person state a word or phrase that comes next in the story. Saying one word each will result in a more random story, while saying a phrase each can help practice story structure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice listening and relating to earlier ideas and laugh about something silly.• For one group: 4–6 minutes. There is no set time because you can end the activity whenever you want, but it should be long enough to create a viable story and short enough so it doesn't get old.
<p>Speaking of...</p> <p>Have people go around and tell a story about something themselves. The next person has to say "speaking of..." and relate back to the storyteller before them. Prompts can be adapted to be more specifically about certain events or details about a person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Practice relating and connecting to people as opposed to only thinking about what you are going to say next—also, get to know one another.• For one group: timing depends on the group size, but don't spend longer than 10 minutes total. Timing can be shortened by splitting up into smaller groups or even working in pairs.

