

STORYTELLING GUIDE: RESOURCE 8

Storytelling Cheat Sheet

It can be difficult to put limitations on stories because they come from our lives—there are endless possibilities of what you can talk about and how you can talk about it, which can be overwhelming.

These tips are designed to jog your brain if you find that you are struggling with telling particular parts of a story, like how to get it started or how to find the right ending.

Ideas for Beginning a Story

- Tips: The beginning should be as specific and concrete as possible, avoiding talking about the story and instead diving into the details of the story itself.
- Examples:
 - Specific time and place (“It was 1989 in Richmond, CA, and I....”)
 - Memory of what someone told you (“My mother always told me to....”)
 - Surprising statement (“You may not know this about me, but I...”)
 - Referencing an object or something tangible (“Whenever I see a bus, it reminds me...”)
 - Describing actions that say something about you (“Every morning, I....”)
 - Introducing something significant (“My life took a completely different path when...”)
 - Asking the audience a related question (“Have you ever.....?”)

When You Reach the Middle of a Story....

- Dive into even more specific detail.
- Bring some action, dialogue, and inner thoughts into the scene.
- Use your senses—tell us what events felt like, smelled like, looked like, sounded like.
- Keep things unresolved. Don’t give us the answer—let us get into the messiness of the story.
- Highlight struggle, conflict, drama, or uncertainty.
- Transition to the ending section by stating what you were thinking to yourself at the time (“In that moment, I thought to myself...”)

Ideas for Ending a Story

- Tips: Don’t use all of these example endings! Work with what you have—try to avoid bringing in new details or developments, unless it is an intentional twist or surprise for the audience. Keep your endings shorter than the middle of the story to avoid sounding preachy or repetitive.
- Examples:
 - State a moral, lesson, or takeaway.
 - Mention something that the story says about you.
 - State how the story inspired something for you.
 - Mention what the story reminds you to do or think.
 - Say how the story is a symbol of something bigger that is relevant to everyone.

Tips for Delivering Stories

- Get into a comfortable position. If standing, shrink the room with your mind and focus on specific people. If seated, get into a position that allows you to feel energized and in the moment (sometimes the edge of your seat helps, unless that makes you more uncomfortable).
- Be conversational—talk to your audience, not at them.
- Use gestures and face to enhance drama or paint the scene. Let us “see” your reactions.
- Establish a speaking style that is most true to you. It’s okay if it isn’t super polished—be you.
- Slow your overall pace. Let us sink into the story.
- Have a clear endpoint for your thoughts. It’s okay to stop. When you stop, commit to the ending, land your voice, and hold your eye contact. Don’t trail or say, “...so yeah, that’s my story.”

