Upon completing this chapter's training, you will be able to:

1. Identify stories from your life to share when giving talks to others
2. Explain the ingredients integral to a story
3. Demonstrate ability in using a variety of language tools
4. Create narratives that motivate and involve others
Everyone has a story. A speaker’s job is to find the story and tell it. Storytelling is both an ancient art form and a valued communication skill. Recently, storytelling has undergone a renaissance of sorts, in part, because of the popularity of podcasts like Serial, which have led us to debate oodles of questions, including if Adnan Syad, the subject of this podcast, actually bears any responsibility for the death of his ex-girlfriend, Hae Min Lee. Because of their ability to engage us, speakers weave stories, similar to Syad’s, into speeches. Suki Kim, for example, delivered a dramatic TED Talk in 2015 titled “This Is What It’s Like to Go Undercover in North Korea.” She started her presentation with these words, using pauses to punctuate her narrative:

In 2011, during the final six months of Kim Jong-Il’s life, I lived undercover in North Korea. I was born and raised in South Korea, their enemy. I live in America, their other enemy. Since 2002, I had visited North Korea a few times. And I had come to realize that to write about it with any meaning, or to understand the place beyond the regime’s propaganda, the only option was total immersion.

Suki’s story fascinated the audience. In this chapter, we explore how to tell stories that invite audiences into your world. Preparing yourself to pass on personal narrations revealing your understandings and dreams, bridge barriers, take hold of others, engender positive feelings, bring receivers psychologically closer, and help them adapt and engage with you strengthens your speaking skills.
Discover Your Inner Storyteller

Effective speechmakers tell a wide range of stories, some based on difficult experiences, others on formative ones. Your goal is to reframe your experiences, learn how to embody and perform them, and then create stories, articulating powerful messages that surmount boredom, inspiring and guiding others, fostering their participation. The more personal and authentic your stories, the easier it becomes for others to identify with and latch onto their themes and the more likely they are to take the action you advocate.

It's time to meet your inner storyteller. Begin with some self-reflection: Using a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 representing “Never,” and 10 representing “Always,” award yourself the number of points you believe you deserve for each of the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I speak to build connections with others.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the time, I tell a story to make my point.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others respond positively to the stories I tell.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it easy to speak in metaphorical language.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I reach others on an emotional level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My words are an apt reflection of me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others remember my words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others find my words motivating.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I repeat what I think is important.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When presenting ideas, I invite audience interaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The more points you award yourself on each item, the more proficient you believe your storytelling skill to be. What do your scores suggest about your readiness to use words to inspire and lead others to a new understanding?

21.1a Find Your Voice

What is a real voice? It is the voice we use when we are being genuine and true to ourselves. To discover this voice, we first figure out who we are and what of our life story can be shared with others. Our potential to affect and influence others emerges from this act. In fact, as the author John Barth noted, “The story of your life is not your life. It is your story.”

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To be an effective storyteller, you need to be adept at using words to tell stories that demonstrate goals. To make an impression that lasts, you’ll want to share the history and motivations of your life because you convey your identity and beliefs as you do so. Because one of the speaker’s tasks is to instill, describe, and communicate a vision, your success depends upon your ability to tell stories that capture your essence, create meanings, and shape others’ expectations—motivating their positive response. If you can use words and narration that resonate with receivers, helping them to imagine new perspectives, then you have a valuable tool in facilitating your personal connection with others.

21.1b Give Voice to Your Goals

Whether our goal is to share knowledge, inspire, remind others of the past, or prepare them for the future, build credibility, or enhance brand recognition, the stories we tell help determine our success.

Storytelling is perhaps the most significant act anyone hoping to influence others can perform. Being able to translate thoughts and ideas into words that others understand and respond to is an essential speaking skill. Through the stories you tell, receivers reflect on experiences designed to capture their hearts and minds, or as executive coaches Richard Maxell and Robert Dickman assert, “A story is a fact, wrapped in an emotion that compels us to take an action that transforms our world.” Stories engage and inspire audiences. They help you shape the reality you seek others to imagine.

For example, if your goal were to convince your audience to take action against bullying, you might consider sharing with them the tragic story of two girls, ages 12 and 14, who were charged with a felony—aggravated stalking—for relentlessly bullying another 12-year-old girl with tragic results. The target of their bullying, Rebecca Sedwick, ultimately committed suicide by jumping off a tower.

21.1c Use a Narrative to Frame Your Goals

A narrative describes what people are doing and why. It is an organized story of a sequence of events, characters or agents, a thesis or theme, and an outcome. Narratives enable you to personalize your speech’s message, provide it with a frame, and reveal an outcome that offers a lesson we can learn from. Such stories reveal your perspective. We all present events in a way that suits our personal interests.

To influence others with a story, first reflect on the purpose(s) you want your story to serve and when to use it. Consider how to reach and tap into the experiences of those whom you seek to influence, how you can build connections that impart information, facilitate learning, and spark the insights you desire.
Five key elements give a story its legs.

1. A good story reflects your passion or a sense of purpose, rallying others to participate with you in creating a better future.

2. A good story supplies a source of conflict—something (or someone) that everyone is able to agree threatens the future.

3. A good story offers up a hero or protagonist who will conquer the villain or offer a solution to the problem.

4. A good story creates an awakening in the hero and audience—an “aha” moment—one that, once taken to heart, will make the world a better place.

5. And a good story reveals a need for change or an opportunity for transformation.

Let’s try it. Pick one of the following story starters, and use it to tell a story from your experience that will teach others a lesson you learned. Tell us who the hero and villain are, describe them and the situation they face, explain the conflict, and reveal the solution or “aha” moment and its impact.

- Once upon a time . . .
- I’ll never forget the first time . . .
- It was the scariest day of my life . . .
- It was the best day of my life . . .
- When I was growing up, my (grandma, grandpa, mom, dad, sister, brother, best friend) told me . . .
- What if . . . ?

After telling your story and actively listening to the stories of others, reflect on how doing so enhances your awareness and understanding of the human experience. According to Peter Senge, when people understand one another, it is easier for a commonality of direction to emerge. By sharing stories, we are able to see through each other’s eyes.
21.1d Remember That Timing Matters

When telling a story, timing matters. When you tell the right story at the right time, it’s as though your words and actions are magical, causing others to respond to and follow you, taking your words to heart. Two examples come to mind:

First, picture this. In May 2019, Kendrick Castillo was just days away from graduating from STEM School Highland Ranch in Colorado when two teen-aged shooters entered his classroom. Kendrick’s father, John, told the story of his son’s heroism, saying that it came as no surprise to he and his wife that Kendrick had acted to disarm one of the shooters. He said that he knew Kendrick was a hero even before he died saving others. “We can all be like Kendrick,” his father noted. “There is risk in love. He knew that. A fellow student echoed the sentiments of Kendrick’s father, saying, “He died for us. Now it’s time for us to live for him.” At Kendrick’s memorial service, 600 Jeeps formed a procession and an honor guard of robots lined the walkway to pay respects to Kendrick, a member of the Robotics team. The images and stories told at Kendrick’s memorial represented the right stories at the right time, offering a protagonist who offered his life to save the lives of classmates.¹¹

Next, try and visualize that which occurred about two years earlier when counter-protestor, Heather Heyer, was killed at a White nationalist demonstration in Charlottesville. In response, President Trump expressed sympathy for the demonstration against the removal of a statue of General Robert E. Lee, defending the White nationalists and noting that counter-protestors deserved at least some of the blame for the resulting violence. The president observed, “You also had some very good people on both sides.” Trump invoked an explicit comparison between Robert E. Lee and the Founding Fathers, saying, “This week it’s Robert E. Lee. And I notice that Stonewall Jackson is coming down. I wonder, is it George Washington next? And is it Thomas Jefferson the week after that? You know, you have to ask yourself, where does it stop?”¹²

When a speaker tells the wrong story or tells a story at the wrong time, it causes us to pause, question the speaker’s performance, and look elsewhere for inspiration.¹³
21.1e Lead With Stories

What kinds of stories do effective speakers tell? According to Stephen Denning, stories can spark action, reveal who the speaker is, transmit ideas, communicate the nature of the speaker’s cause, share knowledge, and lead the audience into the future. For example, if your goal is to spark action, you might tell a story describing a successful change yet leave room for the listener to imagine. You might even say, “Just imagine . . .” or “What if . . .?” If your objective is to share knowledge, your story might focus on a mistake made, how it was corrected, and why the solution was effective. Those listening to you will benefit from thinking, “We’d better look out for that too.”

By using and telling stories others identify with, you engage receivers, inspiring them to accept your message, follow your lead, and act.
Use Language to Connect

When worded effectively, stories cement the speaker–audience connection. When ineffectively worded, however, they precipitate questions and concerns threatening to sever the ties. Should this occur, you are left to clean up the mess made with words.

To be effective and enhance your ability to inspire, heighten your sensitivity to language. Choose words that (a) add vividness and force to ideas, (b) steer others toward your goal, and (c) strengthen a positive image among audience members. Language should function as a credibility enhancer. Your words can help others perceive you as confident and trustworthy or cause them to question your competence and confidence. Though there is no set formula that will ensure your storytelling success—we can’t tell you to add two similes, one metaphor, a moving illustration, and a startling example to a presentation to get others to accept your ideas—we can review some of the language tools at your disposal and how to use them in the stories you tell.

21.2a Develop Language Sensitivity

Avoid using words or expressions that insult, anger, demean, or devalue others. Calling others derogatory names, intimidating them, or using profanity typically produces negative outcomes. For example, calling environmentalists “tree huggers” or labeling people with conservative social and political values “country club fat cats” could reflect badly on a speaker among those who disagree with his or her assessment.

You would also be wise to avoid using clichés—words or phrases that at one time were effective but due to overuse have now lost their impact. For example, asking others to “think outside of the box” has now become cliché; it would be better to ask receivers to view the situation from an alternative perspective.
21.2b Keep It Simple

When insecure, speakers fall back on complex language. The most effective ones, however, forsake “word armor” or speech that cloaks thought or appeals to narrow audiences. Clear speakers use focused and jargon-free language and short sentences.

21.2c Strategize About Word Choices

Remember that audience members are not walking dictionaries. Avoid using words that confuse and alienate. Most will respond to the connotative or subjective meaning of words, not their denotative or dictionary meanings. So recognize the feelings and personal associations that your words might stimulate in others. This enables you to control the perceptions, conceptions, and reflections of receivers so you can steer them toward the response you desire.

21.2d Use Word Pictures

Visionary stories—stories that paint a compelling picture of what things will look and feel like in the future—are powerful and motivating. You can harness visionary language by using metaphors. According to framing theory, when we compare two unlike things in a figure of speech, the comparison influences us on an unconscious level. The metaphor causes us to make an association. Change the metaphor and you change how others think about the subject. Complex metaphors form the basis for narratives or stories. For example, one student compared Twitter to a tracking device when speaking about the hidden dangers of the service:

Using Twitter is an easy way to share information and thoughts. Sounds harmless, doesn’t it? I don’t think it is harmless. Like GPS, Twitter is one big tracking device. Hit the tweet button on websites, and Twitter knows what websites you visit. Tweet a link or share what you like via Twitter, and Twitter knows who you follow, your location, and what you usually tweet about.

Worth a thousand words. Invoking visionary language through metaphors will help your audience make strong connections.
21.2e Repeat/Repeat/Repeat

Ideas fight for attention. They rarely get through the first time. They rely on restatement and repetition. The more you repeat an idea, the more receivers remember it. One of the most famous examples of successful use of repetition is the speech Martin Luther King Jr. delivered in 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial:

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal." ... I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today. ... I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places shall be made straight, and the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. ¹⁶

Because of the repetition of “I have a dream,” the speech has a rhythm that enhanced its memorability and staying power.

21.2f Speak of “I” and “We”

“**I**” language finds you taking responsibility for or ownership of your story. You assume responsibility for your thoughts, feelings, and actions. “**We**” language indicates shared responsibility.

For example, one student speaking about how to respond when you see someone being bullied told the story of freshman goalie Daniel Cui, who was publicly bullied on Facebook after allowing the winning goal in a soccer game. But Cui’s teammates rallied behind him, posting a photo of him making a winning save in another game. The student told the audience, “We can make the difference. We can’t be bystanders to another’s bullying. We need to fight back. We can’t let the bullies have the last word.”

By using “we” language, you build a collaborative climate—a kind of “We’re in this together” story. When receivers feel this sentiment, they won’t forget it.

21.2g Generate Involvement and Participation

A speaker who creates an emotionally charged event captures our interest. Inviting participation accomplishes this. When you connect with audience members, they are more likely to become involved. When you also ask them to do something during your presentation, their engagement increases.
For example, here’s how one student used audience participation to demonstrate the prevalence of lying:

How important is honesty to you? Let’s conduct a class survey to find out. I’d like to start with everyone on his or her feet, so please stand up. I’m going to ask some questions now. If you answer “yes” to any question, please sit down and remain seated.

Have you ever had to lie or cheat?

According to an NBC poll on lying, some 39 percent of those surveyed reported that they never had to lie or cheat. I wonder if they were telling the truth.

Have you lied to anyone in the past week?

According to the NBC poll, only 25 percent of those surveyed admitted having told at least one lie in the past week. I wonder if they understood the question.

Do you think that you can ever justify lying to another person?

According to the NBC poll, 52 percent of those surveyed believe that lying can never be justified.

Have you ever lied to someone to avoid hurting his or her feelings?

The NBC poll reveals that 65 percent of those surveyed have done just that.

Look around. How many members of our class are still standing?

What does that tell us about the role lying really plays in our lives?

The speaker drew receivers in by asking them questions that physically involved them in the speech. The speaker’s visual depiction of the prevalence of lying added impact to the speaker’s message.

Thus, a story can serve as a presentation’s core—its central message. Like a mental movie filled with images that paint pictures and provide movement by revealing personal understanding, growth, and perhaps transformation, a story engages the senses. Besides helping to build tension and heighten emotion, most of all, a story communicates about you, often providing a satisfying experience or conclusion that is memorable and has staying power.

**GAME PLAN**

I Know a Story Is a Good One When . . .

- It is delivered in simple language and is easy to understand.
- It contains rich visual imagery.
- The goal of the speech is easy to discern.
- The goal of the speech is delivered in compelling language.
- The speech engages listeners and encourages them to be involved and participate.
Exercises

STORYTELLING

Though we have told stories to our families, friends, and teachers all our lives, we can become better at telling them to members of different audiences—especially those we hope will follow our lead. The following activities prepare you to do that.

1. Your Day

Pair up with a partner and prepare a short outline that describes a day in your life. Instead of merely listing your schedule of events, tell a story about them. Using the guidelines from this chapter, describe in detail what you had hoped to accomplish, whom you worked with, what you did to motivate or energize yourself and them, and how you felt about the results achieved at day’s end.

2. Unifying Metaphors

Suppose you had to give a speech on what it means to think globally. First, identify the specific points you would make in your talk. Next, identify a unifying metaphor, explaining how you will use it to relate to the audience. Last, choose three additional language tools and describe how you will integrate them into the five ingredients of a story.

3. Analyze the Speech: What Separates Us From Chimpanzees

View Jane Goodall’s speech “What Separates Us From Chimpanzees” on TED Talks. Focus on Goodall’s use of props, sound effects, and stories in the speech.

1. How did Goodall establish a connection with the audience?
2. What purpose do you think that Goodall’s imitation of a chimpanzee’s voice served?
3. To what extent, if any, did Goodall’s integration of stories influence your reaction to the speech?

4. Approach the Speaker’s Stand

According to Marshall Ganz, an expert on public policy at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government, a social movement emerges as a result of the efforts of purposeful actors who assert new public values, form new relationships rooted in those values, and mobilize followers to translate the values into action by telling a new story.¹⁸

For example, in 1962 Rachel Carson published Silent Spring, a book that is widely acknowledged to have launched the American environmental movement. Craft a speech that focuses on a story about a movement of your choice in one of the following ways:

- Make your story a story of self: a moment when you or someone else faced a challenge
- A story of us: a story that expresses shared values
- A story of now: a story articulating an urgent challenge that demands immediate action
RECAP AND REVIEW

1. Identify stories from your life to share when giving talks to others. Finding your authentic voice and sharing stories that motivate others to join you in seeking a goal will make you a more effective speaker and help you bring about the transformations you seek.

2. Explain the ingredients integral to a story. Stories reflect the speaker’s passion or sense of purpose. They supply antagonists or villains that threaten the future. They offer up heroes or protagonists who offer solutions. They create an awakening or “aha” moment. They reveal a need for change or a transformation opportunity.

3. Demonstrate ability in using a variety of language tools. Effective storytellers have language sensitivity. They make strategic word choices, use word pictures or figures of speech, understand the value of repetition and restatement, employ both “I” and “we” language, and generate audience involvement and participation.

4. Create narratives that motivate and involve others. Stories make words memorable. They challenge us to make the speaker’s dream of the future a reality.

KEY TERMS

- Framing theory 460
- Storytelling 455
- “I” language 461
- “We” language 461

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