

I can tell a story and interact in interviews

› How to be a good storyteller

We all have to 'tell stories' at times in our daily lives. Very often this means telling friends or family about places we have been to, events we have taken part in, people we have met, conversations we have had, etc. We can define these 'true stories' as **anecdotes**. As a student, you may be asked in some exams to tell an anecdote.

Since it is almost always part of conversations, **storytelling** is a skill that we can all acquire and get better at communicating effectively and connecting with other people. Learning how to tell your story in an organised and easy to understand way will help you to make your listener visualise what happened through your words.



READING Read the following tips for telling a good story or anecdote during an exam or an interview.

Ten examples have been removed from the tips. Choose the correct phrases (a-j) to fill in the gaps (1-10).

- | | |
|---|--|
| a Before that happened... | f ... minutes/hours/days later |
| b It all happened when I was... | g I think this taught me that... |
| c To begin with... | h Out of the blue... |
| d When I was in my last year at Middle School | i When I finally got to the party, ... |
| e And what do you think she said about that? | j Yesterday |

TIPS FOR TELLING A GOOD STORY

Take time to think about what the examiner or interviewer is asking you to do and the story you are going to tell.

Use opening phrases to start your story.

- It all started when...

1 _____

- It all began when...

Provide a background to the story:

- At that time I was living in...

2 _____

- I was going to..., when...

Use sequencing words. Help your listeners to follow the events by marking out their chronological order.

- First of all...

3 _____

- Next...

- Soon after that...

4 _____

- Finally... / In the end...

Use time expressions to help your listeners know when the events took place (recently or in a more distant past)

- Last week/month/summer

- A few days/weeks/months/years ago

5 _____

- On Saturday

6 _____

Interrupt the account and **add new events** to add suspense.

- Suddenly... / All of a sudden / All at once...
- Unexpectedly...
- 7 _____

Add phrases to involve your listeners and **stir** their curiosity:

- You'll never guess what he did then...
- Well, what would you have done if you'd been in my shoes?
- 8 _____

End your story well. Don't just stop but signal to your listeners that the story is coming to an end.

- After all this excitement, in the end...
- 9 _____
- Anyway, it all ended well when...

Add a comment about **how you felt** or **what effect the episode had on you.**

- I realised later that I had...
- 10 _____
- One lesson I learnt is that...

➤ How to give impact to your story

There are a few more techniques we can use to give impact to our story.

> Keep it real(istic)

- Talk about real events and real people.
- Relate events that you experienced personally.
- Don't invent things that will seem unreal.

> Stick to the point and keep the action moving

Choose only relevant content and don't provide excessive details which will make your story long and perhaps difficult to follow.

> Describe emotions

Your listeners are interested not just in what happened but also on what effect it had on you. Use strong adjectives to convey your feelings:

- I was absolutely speechless...
- The news was shocking...
- It came as a great relief.
- I was very overjoyed...
- I had never been so terrified/surprised/angry in my life.

> Involve the senses

Don't limit your story to what you could see: describe sounds, smells, feeling (touch), even taste if this is relevant.

- She sounded very distressed.
- There was a strange, burning smell in the room.
- My hand touched something cold and hard.
- It tasted quite bitter and I didn't like it very much.

> Report what was said

You can combine direct and indirect speech in your story.

- Peter said: 'I don't think I can help you.'
- Peter told me (that) he couldn't help me.

Look for variation in speech verbs. Specific verbs can give an idea of how people spoke and the emotions involved.

- He/She said / explained / shouted / whispered / muttered / burst out / asked / demanded...

> Look at your listeners while you are telling your story. If you look interested in them, they will be interested in you! Don't look down or look around the room.

> Your voice also communicates interest. **Vary your tone of voice** and don't use a flat, monotonous style.

> Don't take too long telling your story or your listeners will become bored.



Choosing tenses

The choice of suitable verb tenses is fundamentally important in narration and storytelling.

Tense	Uses	Examples
Present simple	telling jokes	'A bear walks into a bar and asks for a beer...'
	describing an episode in a film	'The man walks into the room, smiles at the pretty girl who offers him a glass of wine but doesn't see his girlfriend standing behind him...'
Past simple	relating a series of events or actions in the past.	'I got up earlier than usual, had a quick coffee, left the house and walked quickly to the underground station on the corner of the road.'
Past continuous	giving background information and for setting the scene	'I was living in Italy when I received this invitation.'
	combined with the past simple to show how events interrupt an action	'I was having a shower when the lights suddenly went out.'
Past perfect	introducing events and situations that happened before our story	'I had never been interested in French cinema, but I decided to go and see the film with my friends.'

READING 1 Caroline has been asked to tell a story about a happy surprise. Look at the table above. Then read her story. Put the verbs in brackets in the right tenses. You can use the past simple, the past continuous and the past perfect.

This ¹ _____ (happen) to me last year at the beginning of the school year in September. I ² _____ (receive) an email from a student who ³ _____ (attend) a 'scientific school' in Bologna. This was part of a partnership study programme with my high school. Anyway, to cut a long story short, my family ⁴ _____ (agree) to host this girl (her name was Andrea) for a couple of weeks. To be perfectly honest, I ⁵ _____ (be) a bit disappointed – I ⁶ _____ (hope) my guest would be a boy! There was no photograph, not even a Facebook contact, but Andrea's mail said: 'You'll recognise me at the airport – I'll have a red and blue Bologna FC shirt on'. Bologna FC – its full name is Bologna FC 1909 – is not one of the most famous teams in Italy, but it is in Serie A, which is the equivalent of the Premier League. I ⁷ _____ (think) this ⁸ _____ (sound) a bit strange, but I know lots of girls are into football nowadays. On the day in question, I ⁹ _____ (wake up) much earlier than usual. My dad wanted to leave the house before the rush-hour traffic so that there was no risk of getting to the airport late. My mum ¹⁰ _____ (decide) to stay at home – she wanted to prepare the spare bed in my room and make sure everything was clean and tidy for our Italian guest. As we ¹¹ _____ (drive) to the airport one of my classmates ¹² _____ (send) me a text. Siobhan is really hopeless at maths. She said they ¹³ _____ (do) a really tough maths test. I felt quite happy not to be there! About 15 minutes later, we ¹⁴ _____ (get to) the airport. I ¹⁵ _____ (go) into the arrivals hall, while my dad ¹⁶ _____ (park) the car. A few minutes later we ¹⁷ _____ (drink) a coffee at Costa's, when the screen announced the arrival of the flight from Bologna. So off we went and ¹⁸ _____ (stand) at the sliding glass doors. I ¹⁹ _____ (hold) a sheet of paper from my notepad, with 'Andrea Conte' written in big black letters. You'll never guess what happened next! Five minutes later this tall guy with a Bologna shirt ²⁰ _____ (come up) to me with a big smile. 'Hi, you must be Caroline. I'm Andrea, nice to meet you. Hello Mr Collins.' I ²¹ _____ (never feel) so embarrassed (but happy) in my life. 'But I thought you were a girl!' 'Ah,' he said. 'Actually in Italy Andrea is a boy's name! Sorry to disappoint you!' My dad was laughing. 'I think I'd better call your mum,' he said.

READING 2 Read Caroline's story again and answer the questions.

- 1 What two elements from pages 44-45 does Caroline include in the first section?
- 2 Can you identify any details that make the story seem real?
- 3 Caroline's story is too long. Can you find two sentences that give unnecessary detail and that you can eliminate?
- 4 What sentence does Caroline use to involve listeners?
- 5 Where does she use direct speech?
- 6 How effective do you think this is?
- 7 What emotions does Caroline describe?
- 8 What mark would you give Caroline? Why?

› Telling your own story

PRACTICE Choose one of the following topics. Take a few minutes to prepare your ideas, using the tips given on pages 44-45, then tell your story to your classmates and teacher. You should speak for about 2-3 minutes. Ask your classmates and teacher for their comments when you have finished.

Tell me about a:

- special holiday you have had;
- difficult journey you have had;
- perfect day you have had;
- special event in your life;
- time when you lost something important;
- time when you gave someone a surprise.

› How to interact in interviews

READING Read the following tips about preparing for an interview in an exam. Then complete the text using the words/phrases given below.

- and watch • comments or • Don't think that • don't try to • find a word
 • Give yourself a second or two to • Prepare yourself
 • trying not to give information



PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

In many English exams you will take part in an interview, either answering questions posed by an examiner or in dialogue with another candidate/student.

Here are some tips.

- Listen to ¹ _____ as much English as you can: songs, Podcasts, films, TV series, etc.
- Speak as often as you can during lessons.
- ² _____ think about what you are going to say.
- Use expressions that you know and ³ _____ translate directly from Italian.
- If you can't ⁴ _____, think of another way to say it – if you can't remember 'boring', for example, say that the film wasn't very interesting.
- Look at the examiner or the other candidate when you are speaking or listening to them.
- Show interest in what the other candidate is saying and make ⁵ _____ follow-up questions.
- If you don't hear or don't understand a question say 'I'm sorry, could you say that again?' or 'I'm not sure that I understand'.
- If you realise that you have made a mistake, correct yourself. ⁶ _____ the examiner didn't hear it!
- Remember to smile and greet the examiner (and your partner) at the beginning and end of the session.
- Try to develop your answers. You are not a secret agent ⁷ _____. 'Ye's and 'No' answers do not help a conversation to flow.
- ⁸ _____. You can be ready to talk about yourself, your family, your town, your interests, your ambitions, which are topics that frequently occur in exams.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS Read the answers (a-l) to six of the following questions (1-8). Then match the answers to six of the questions (two answers for each question).

Put the better answer first. Why is one answer better than the other?

Then write your answers to the other two questions. Try to give as much interesting information as possible.

- 1 ☐ ☐ Can you tell us a little about your family?
- 2 ☐ ☐ Are you interested in sports?
- 3 ☐ ☐ Do you like the place where you live?
- 4 ☐ ☐ How do you like to spend your holidays?
- 5 ☐ ☐ Can you cook?
- 6 ☐ ☐ What do you do in the evening?
- 7 ☐ ☐ What are your plans for your future?
- 8 ☐ ☐ Could you spend a week without a mobile phone?

- a I can't say I'm an expert but I can make simple meals and I have learnt to make some great cakes and sweet dishes. I'm learning how to cook risottos and fish dishes, 'cause I think it's important to be able to look after yourself and help your family.
- b I come from quite a large family. My father and mother both work in a hospital in the city and I have a big sister called Giulia. She's 20 and she's studying biology at university.
- c I don't know yet. I will decide when I finish school.
- d I like football and skiing in winter.
- e I'm not really a very sporty person but I like to keep fit so I go to the gym a couple of times a week and ride my bike when the weather is nice. I don't watch a lot of sport on television, except for big events like the World Cup or the Olympics.
- f I'm not sure. I'm good at maths but I think I would like to do something where I can help others so I'm considering studying medicine or nursing or something like that.
- g It's OK but a bit too small and boring.
- h My family is normal. There are four of us.
- i No, I'm useless! My mum can cook quite well and my grandma makes us really nice meals on Sundays.
- j There isn't a lot for young people to do, just a church youth club and a park where little children play. At the weekend my friends and I often take a train into town where there are plenty of things like pubs, cinemas and pizzerias.
- k We always go to Rimini for a few weeks in August.
- l Well, I really like seaside holidays with my friends where you can relax and sunbathe and then go dancing in the evenings but I also really enjoy visiting historical cities with my family. Last year, for example, we spent a week touring Umbria and I'd love to go to Rome again.

