

Tell Personal Stories

Stories and anecdotes are very common in normal, informal human speech, no matter what culture. An appropriate anecdote recounting something you have done or that has happened to you or someone you know can demonstrate your vocabulary range, confidence and fluency.

General tips

- Choose a story that you like that enables you to use words you enjoy, and communicate enthusiasm to your audience.
- Keep the story simple and direct without too many complicated details or many different characters.
- It is good to describe the events and also your personal reaction to them.
e.g: He insulted my work which made me very angry.
- Don't memorize the story. You can use certain words for special effect, or repeat something if it adds to the story, but keep the events moving in your own words.
- Record yourself telling personal stories, jokes or anecdotes aloud and listen to the tape several times.
- Practice telling your story to a live audience (family, friends, pets) until it comes naturally.

Language tips

- Stories and anecdotes are usually related in the past tenses, as they have already happened. (Jokes are often told in the present tense however, e.g "A man walks in to a bar...").
 1. Generally, individual and sudden actions are in the past simple tense;
e.g: She ran around the corner and jumped into a passing taxi.

2. Actions happening over a long-ish period of time are usually in the past continuous / progressive tense; e.g: I was studying at the PolyU and working on my final year project when she came into my life.
3. Events happening prior to the past time the story is set in use the past perfect tense; e.g: Before coming to university, she had had a very hard life.
4. Events which started in the past but still have a bearing on the present use the present perfect; e.g: I've lived/been living in NY for 3 years now.

If in doubt about tenses, go here:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/verb_tenses/index.html

<http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/cill/exercises/choosing-verbs.aspx>

Generally, use active rather than passive voice and colloquial rather than formal language.

- Conversations or dialogues can be more dramatic if you repeat the words used rather than using more formal reported speech. Use direct speech rather than indirect.
- Make your stories more vivid by using adjectives and adverbs to describe nouns and verbs (but don't be too excessive!); e.g: The hotel was gloomy and grey, with damp, cold rooms and a melancholic atmosphere.
- Think about intonation and stress, emphasize important words, pause to create a dramatic effect.

Reference:

IELTS online practice materials (2022). Telling stories and anecdotes. Retrieved from:

https://elc.polyu.edu.hk/ielts/sp_tell_story.htm