

Presenting an Oral Narrative

Speaking Assignment
Adapt an autobiographical narrative for an oral presentation, and present it to your class.

You have probably already told many true stories aloud, such as what happened when the family car broke down on vacation or how your team won the baseball championship. When you tell a story aloud, you are giving an oral narrative.

Adapt Your Autobiographical Narrative

Try a New Twist Because your audience will be listening to your narrative instead of reading it, you'll need to change it as you prepare for your presentation. Keep in mind the **occasion**—a speech for your class—and follow these suggestions to adapt your narrative.

- **Word Choice** Use **vocabulary** that sounds natural. Avoid words that might be unfamiliar to listeners, who won't be able to stop and look them up in a dictionary.
- **Setting** Locate events in **specific places**. For instance, say "in the cafeteria line" or "by my locker" rather than "at school."
- **Details** Readers have time to linger over language to form mental images of what a writer describes. Listeners don't. Look carefully at the **sensory details** you used in your written narrative to describe the sights, sounds, and smells of the events and people's actions. Read sensory passages aloud, and ask yourself whether your language is vivid enough to create images in listeners' minds.

One writer decided that a more vivid description of starting a fire would interest her listeners. For her oral presentation, she changed "enough air to turn the kindling into bright embers and make flames lick at the larger sticks" to "enough air to turn the little pieces of wood into bright orange coals and make yellow and blue flames lick at the bigger sticks."

- **Organization** Use **chronological order** in your oral narrative, just as you did in your written one. You can even use the same transitional words and phrases you included in your paper to help listeners follow the events of your experience.
- **Conclusion** If you didn't directly state the **significance** of your experience in the conclusion of your written narrative, do so in the conclusion to your oral narrative. Strongly suggesting or indirectly stating the significance is acceptable in a written narrative that readers can re-read, but not in an oral narrative that they have to understand immediately.

**SKILLS
FOCUS**

**Listening and
Speaking Skills**
Present an oral narrative.

Deliver Your Narrative

Show and Tell When you wrote your autobiographical narrative, you expressed the significance of your experience through words alone. Since you'll deliver your narrative orally, you can also use **verbal and nonverbal techniques**—ways of using your voice as well as your face and body—to show how the experience made you feel and what it meant to you.

Use Verbal Techniques How you use your voice can give the audience as much information as what you say. The following chart explains some of the basic verbal techniques you can use.



VERBAL TECHNIQUES

Technique	Uses	Examples
Pitch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• change pitch for different characters• use pitch to show feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a high pitch might represent a young child• a low pitch might show feelings of fright
Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• change volume for different characters• use volume to create mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a loud voice might represent a pushy character• a quiet voice might create a suspenseful mood
Rate, or Pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• use rate to show emotions or create a mood• use a pace that reflects the speed at which various events occurred	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• speaking slowly can create drama and suspense• speaking quickly (but distinctly) can communicate excitement or a quick series of events

Use Nonverbal Techniques You will also use facial expressions and gestures to add meaning to your oral narrative. A gesture such as forming an **A** with the hands can illustrate a method of placing sticks for a fire. Use your eyes to show emotion, and keep your listeners involved by making frequent eye contact with them.

Be sure to tailor your gestures and tone to your audience. For instance, exaggerated facial expressions and a “cutesy” voice might be appropriate for small children, but not for your classmates.

Take Note Sound natural and relaxed by delivering your narrative **extemporaneously**, using **concise notes**—notes that say a lot in a few words. Make note cards with short phrases or single words that remind you of details, and arrange the note cards in the order in which you will present them.

PRACTICE & APPLY 5

Adapt your written autobiographical narrative into an oral narrative. Practice your narrative, and then present it to your class.

SKILLS FOCUS

Listening and Speaking Skills
Use effective verbal and nonverbal techniques.