

Telling an anecdote

Gabrielle Jones

Age:	Adults
Level:	Intermediate (B1–C2)
Time:	90 minutes
Aim:	To learn language related to telling anecdotes; to practise telling an anecdote
Key skills:	Reading and speaking
Materials:	One copy of worksheets A and B per student; one copy of the teacher's resource sheet per student, cut into strips

have seen in the class, and should attempt to use some of the language that was introduced in task 3. Make it clear to the students that they must not attempt to write down their anecdote word for word, but rather just make some notes. Set a time limit for preparation – up to ten minutes.

- 6. Share your anecdote** – When the students have finished preparing, they can share their anecdotes in pairs or in small groups. You can offer feedback on language performance at the end of the activity.

Procedure

- 1. Lead-in** – Hand out Worksheet A. Students discuss the questions in pairs or small groups.
- 2. Stages of an anecdote** – Students read the stages of an anecdote and what the speaker says at each stage. They match the two columns, then check answers in pairs or as a whole group.

Key: 1. d; 2. b; 3. a; 4. e; 5. c

- 3. Language analysis** – Hand out one set of cut-up strips per student. Now that students know the structure of an anecdote as presented here, they can read through the strips of paper and put them in the correct order. When they have finished, check the correct order with the class.

Next, they should read the re-ordered text a second time and identify the language that a. creates excitement, emotion or interest (e.g. *Oh, here's a good story*); b. shows the stages of the anecdote (e.g. *Firstly*); and c. speaks to the audience directly (... *you see*). (Note: Students will be provided with some suggested answers in the next task.)

- 4. Useful language** – When they have finished the task above, students can compare what they have noted with the Useful language section on Worksheet B. Hand out one copy per student.
- 5. Plan your own anecdote** – In this task, students will plan their own anecdote. Students use either one of the prompts given or an idea of their own to plan an anecdote that they can tell in class. Ideally, they should follow the structure that they

1 Lead-in

Discuss the following questions with a partner.

1. Do you know any jokes or funny stories? If you do, tell one.
2. What is easy and/or difficult about telling jokes and stories?
3. In what kind of business/social situations would you tell jokes or stories?
4. What purpose do the jokes and stories serve? Why do we tell them?

2 Stages of an anecdote

When you tell people an anecdote, it is useful to think of its 'stages'. Match the stages on the left with what the speaker says at each stage on the right.

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1. introduction | a. Tell the main events in order. |
| 2. beginning | b. Explain how the story started. |
| 3. story | c. Make a final comment about the story. |
| 4. the end | d. Give the background to the story – explain why people will find it funny or interesting. |
| 5. moral | e. Tell the listener what happened or how things are now. |

3 Language analysis

Your teacher will give you an anecdote that has been jumbled up. Read the strips and put the anecdote back into the correct order.

When you have finished, read through a second time and identify language that:

- a. creates excitement, emotion or interest
- b. shows the stages of the story
- c. speaks to the audience directly.

4 Useful language

Here's some language for telling an anecdote. Choose at least two from each section that you would like to remember.

1. Create excitement, emotion or interest

- Oh, here's a good story ...
- I'll never forget the day ...
- What a nightmare!
- Funnily enough, ... / Unbelievably, ... / Coincidentally, ...

2. Stage the anecdote

- First(ly), ... ; Second(ly), ...
- So, ...
- By the time ...
- In the end, ... / Finally, ...

3. Speak to the audience directly

- ... you see.
- You won't believe it ...
- Can you imagine it?
- Believe me, ...

5 Plan your own anecdote

Prepare to tell your partner or group an anecdote. Here are some ideas.

- a time when something went wrong
- a time when you forgot something important
- a surprise
- a mistake you or someone else made
- an embarrassing situation

6 Share your anecdote

Tell your anecdote to a partner or your group!

Oh, here's a good story to show why you shouldn't leave things to the last minute!

I'll never forget the day I had to hand my first company report in to my new boss – what a nightmare!



He called me at 7 am to say he needed the report by 10.30 – could I email it to him?

So, I got to work at 7.30 am and read through my report one more time.

Then I logged onto my email account to begin uploading it – my boss was at a conference, you see, and he needed it for a presentation he was giving.

You won't believe it, but the file was far too big. I decided I'd better save it to a USB stick and then have it couriered to him.

Funnily enough, all the USB sticks in the office were too small and I didn't know where to find one with a bigger memory – so I dashed out to buy one and came back to the office.

After I had saved the file to the USB, I called the courier company and arranged for them to pick up the USB immediately.

Can you imagine it? By 9.45 they still hadn't arrived. In the end, I just got into my car and drove to the conference.

My boss was not very happy when I arrived with the report just five minutes before his presentation. Believe me, I'll never rely on last minute checking again!