EPISODE 390

How to Tell a Story in English

Full transcript · point of view · vocabulary review

Hi everybody! This is the Speak English Now Podcast.

Today, I want to help you **tell simple stories in English** without getting stuck. In this episode, there are many **new expressions**. So, make sure you get the transcript at: SpeakEnglishPodcast.com/podcast

Maybe you know this feeling. You start telling someone what happened yesterday, and your brain suddenly asks, "What tense do I need?" And then... silence.

Usually, you are trying to make every sentence perfect. But when you tell a story, your first job is simply to help the listener follow what happened.

Give one small piece of information, then the next. "Yesterday, I went to the supermarket. I wanted to buy milk. When I got there, I realized I had left my wallet at home."

You do not need long sentences. Just move from one event to the next.

Sometimes learners **get sidetracked**. Something else takes your attention, and you stop following the main idea.

A simple order helps: First... Then... After that... Finally...

Use **in the meantime** when two things happen around the same time.

Out of nowhere means suddenly and unexpectedly.

If something is different from what you expected, you can say it **turned out** differently.

You may **lose track of** a detail, and that is okay. You can **piece together** the story with simple words.

With practice, you will **get the hang of** it.

You can **keep someone in suspense** for a moment: "I opened the refrigerator... and you will never believe what I found inside."

Then **wrap it up** clearly. You can say: "**In the end**, everything was fine."

Now let us practice with a Point of View story. I will tell almost exactly the same story twice: first in the past, and then with the conditional. Listen to how the grammar changes while the story stays almost the same.

Point of View

Grammar in Context

Read the same story in two different points of view and notice how the verbs and pronouns change naturally.

First, the past.

One morning, Emma was getting ready for work. She was already a bit late, but she was not too worried.

She wanted to leave the house, but suddenly she could not find her phone.

First, she checked her bedroom. She looked under the bed, on the nightstand, and under a pile of clothes, but the phone was not there.

Then she checked the bathroom. She looked next to the sink and behind the towels, but she still could not find it.

After that, she looked inside her bag, inside her coat, and even inside the car.

But the phone was nowhere to be found.

While she was looking, Emma found a box of old photos in the hallway.

She opened the box, saw a picture from a vacation five years earlier, and **got sidetracked** for a few minutes.

Soon she realized she was looking at photos instead of looking for her phone.

She closed the box and tried to remember what she had done earlier that morning.

She remembered making breakfast in the kitchen. She had her phone in one hand and a bottle of orange juice in the other.

So she went back to the kitchen. She checked the table, the counter, and the floor. Nothing.

Then, almost as a joke, she opened the refrigerator.

And there it was. Her phone was sitting next to the milk.

Earlier that morning, Emma had put the orange juice on the table and had accidentally put her phone in the refrigerator.

It turned out that the phone had been in the kitchen the whole time.

In the end, Emma found her phone, laughed at herself, grabbed her bag, and finally left for work.

Now, the same story with the conditional. Imagine that Emma lost her phone again.

If Emma lost her phone again one morning, she would be getting ready for work. She would already be a bit late, but she would not be too worried.

She would want to leave the house, but suddenly she would not be able to find her phone.

First, she would check her bedroom. She would look under the bed, on the nightstand, and under a pile of clothes, but the phone would not be there.

Then she would check the bathroom. She would look next to the sink and behind the towels, but she still would not be able to find it.

After that, she would look inside her bag, inside her coat, and even inside the car.

But the phone would be nowhere to be found.

While she was looking, Emma would find a box of old photos in the hallway.

She would open the box, see a picture from a vacation five years earlier, and **get sidetracked** for a few minutes.

Soon she would realize she was looking at photos instead of looking for her phone.

She would close the box and try to remember what she had done earlier that morning.

She would remember making breakfast in the kitchen. She would have her phone in one hand and a bottle of orange juice in the other.

So she would go back to the kitchen. She would check the table, the counter, and the floor. Nothing.

Then, almost as a joke, she would open the refrigerator.

And there it would be. Her phone would be sitting next to the milk.

Earlier that morning, Emma would have put the orange juice on the table and would have accidentally put her phone in the refrigerator.

It would turn out that the phone had been in the kitchen the whole time.

In the end, Emma would find her phone, laugh at herself, grab her bag, and finally leave for work.

Very good. The story stayed almost the same, but the grammar changed. Listen to both versions again and notice the changes. You do not need to analyze them. Just listen and let your brain notice the patterns.

That is all for today.

When you tell a story in English, do not try to make every sentence perfect. Keep moving from one idea to the next.

And remember: repeated listening helps these sentence patterns become more familiar, so speaking becomes easier.

See you next time!

Review

Vocabulary from This Episode

Review the most useful words and expressions before listening again.

01 **get sidetracked** stop following the main idea because something else gets your attention.	02 **piece together** build or understand something from small parts.
03 **go off on a tangent** start talking about something that is not closely connected to the main topic.	04 **get the hang of** begin to understand how to do something.
05 **in the meantime** during the same period of time.	06 **keep someone in suspense** make someone wait to know what happens.
07 **out of nowhere** suddenly and unexpectedly.	08 **wrap it up** finish something.
09 **turn out** be discovered to be true or different from what you expected.	10 **eventually** after some time, especially after delays or problems.
11 **lose track of** stop remembering or following something clearly.	12 **in the end** finally, after everything has happened.

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