

## Elements for a Believable Story

- ❑ Geography - Locations give credibility to your story. Stories happen in real locations. Locations that can be verified. Locations that are familiar make the listener feel comfortable in the story.
- ❑ Real names - My high school principal Dean Brown has far more believability than “this guy I knew”. Real names invite verification. If the person is living, they could be asked. If they have died, there can still be verification especially if other factors are included.
- ❑ Dates - Just like locations stories happen at a moment in time. 1973 is better than years ago. July of 1973 is even better. At about dusk on July 7th, 1973 is something that can be verified easily.
- ❑ Non-related facts - every story contains more details than necessary. Including one or two of those details adds believability. “She was wearing a blue sweatshirt.” Has nothing to do with the matter pertaining to the facts in evidence, but such details adds to the credibility of the story. As those things

would have only mattered to the person who was actually there.

- ❑ Emotion - For a story to “connect” with the listener it must appeal to their emotion(s). This is the primary reason absurd (wildly unreasonable, illogical or inappropriate) stories fail to engage the listener.

Example: If I want to illustrate a bad business decision I don't tell a story about gluing feathers to my arms and jumping off the roof of my house trying to fly to the baseball field. Instead I talk about taking a second mortgage on my house before I prove the validity of my business plan. The first illustration lacks emotion because most any sane person knows better. The second connects because too many entrepreneurs have done so.

Failing to connect at the emotional level is the biggest mistake storytellers make.

- ❑ Related - Your story can nail all 5 elements above, but if it doesn't relate to your purpose it's only a distraction. Your story should serve the powerful purpose of illuminating your message. It should shine

light in the darkness not leave the listener wondering what you were trying to do.

Personal Note: When I first began speaking I knew the power of stories. I wanted to incorporate them into everything I did, but I knew they had to be related or no one would care.

So I did this, as I thought through my story/illustration, I would imagine some annoying middle aged (jerk) in half glasses sitting on the front row. When I finished my story he would either hold up a large sign that read “SO WHAT” or he would look over the top of those half glasses and nod in approval.

This visualization exercise illustrates a couple of important things about storytelling:

- Stories should be carefully thought through
- Stories should be practiced
- Stories should be evaluated by their impact on the listener not how much fun you have telling them

❑ Humor - humor in a story is healthy. A joke can be fatal. Humor is about me. A joke is about someone else. Do you see the danger here? A laugh at someone's expense is never funny. Let that happen at the comedy club, but not in your stories.

You can be entertaining. You can even invite people to have a good laugh at your expense, but never at someone else's expense.

Here's a simple rule for mastering the art of good humor Don't take yourself seriously, but you take what you do seriously!

These elements for a believable story are loosely based upon the Rules of Evidence used in our legal system.

<https://corporate.findlaw.com/litigation-disputes/summary-of-the-rules-of-evidence.html>

Print out the page below and memorize the elements that make for a believable story.

## Checklist for a Credible Story

- ☐ Geography
- ☐ Real Names
- ☐ Dates
- ☐ Non-Related Facts
- ☐ Emotions
- ☐ Humor