



# IIT Madras

## BSc Degree

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**English – 1 (Basic English)**  
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**Art of Storytelling**

Welcome. Today we are going to look at a very interesting aspect of communication skills. A very old, old, old, ancient form of communication that has lived on ever since human beings understood and gained the knowledge of speech. If you can guess what I am talking about, it is the art of oral storytelling, narrating stories, orally.

The oral tradition of storytelling is as old as speech itself. And as relevant today, in our contemporary times, we might think that digital technology has taken over. There is mobiles, there is internet, there is a laptop, and so many other gadgets that catch our attention. It is a multimedia inundated world that we live in today.

Nevertheless, we all love to tell and listen to a good story. Well, let me give you a very simple example. When is the last time you or your friend or a family member said, you know what happened? What follows after that is a story right? A very simple personal story that the person wishes to share, and you or others around wish to listen to.

In such a simple way, in our daily lives, and existence, storytelling as a communication tool plays a really significant and important role. And why not for us, who are learners of the language, who wish to improve our competency in the language, if we do learn the art of storytelling, or if we polish our art of storytelling, then we basically sharpen our communication skills, in many ways.

It is a known fact that mostly in the regular professions that people are in, and in the kind of world and interactions that we have. A large part of our communication is through speech. Of course, the other skill of writing, reading, listening is also important. But speaking, takes on a very big role. Oral storytelling is really about powerful and effective speech, both in terms of the content of our speech, and in terms of the presentation of our speech.

So, let us look at it. Speaking of presentation. Again, a lot of research tells us repeatedly that 90 percent of our communication is not what we say. It is how we say it, which means the nonverbal aspects of our communication are really significant. The tone we use, the expressions of our face, the gestures of the hands, the entire body language itself, is saying as much or perhaps even more than the actual words. But let us take a simple word like hello, for example.

Just the word hello by itself, what meaning does it have? But if you are going to say, Hello or Hello, or Hello, the meaning can change just by our tone, just by our facial expression. I am slowly building the case for storytelling, and the presentation aspects of our communication. Now, speaking of content, if someone were to give you some historical information, or a series of data put together or someone were to tell you a story, which would be interesting and appealing to you.

More often than not, my guess is it would be a story. It is the nature of a story, to engage us to capture our imagination, to take us into that world through words to some other time to some other place. And in reality, a story is also a sequence of information. But the content is sealed together and strung together in such an interesting manner, that it hooks our attention.

And not only does it hook our attention long after, we surely remember a good story. If not the story, we remember the experience of listening to it. Think about it. In your childhood, if you have ever heard stories from your mother or father, grandmother, grandfather, some relative and elder brother or neighbour, you are likely to remember the story. Or definitely remember the experience of listening to the story.

So, when we become storytellers, when we improve our skill of telling stories, then we are really becoming much more engaging and powerful communicators. We are learning to use the whole body to communicate and capture the other person's attention, without entire presence, not just our words, or Ursula Le Guinn, the science fiction writer spoke about how there have been civilizations that did not have the wheel. But there have been no civilizations that did not have storytelling.

It is true, every, every civilization that has existed on Earth, whether it is in the context of our country, India, the continent of Africa, Australia, the Middle East, anywhere across, they have always had a rich culture, of telling stories. In fact, that is how knowledge was passed on from generation to generation. Just through oral storytelling. As we are aware, print text script is very recent in the history of humankind. It was through storytelling, that knowledge was transmitted and kept alive in every civilization.

There certainly must be something more to it. I like to call the storytelling as licensed and channelized daydreaming. Why? Well, before I explain why, let me tell you a story. So, would you like to listen to one? I am quite sure the answer must be a yes. So, here we go. For a small story.

Come, come, listen, listen, everybody. Just for you I have a story. Sometimes nice and sometimes scary. Just for you, I have a story, come come, come come. So, inspired by the oral traditions of India. This is a story that has a little bit of music in the narration. Just to spice it up to another level. Well, this is a story of a festival. It was the festival of harvest. A little boy was very excited. He was there at home with his mother and he was singing away.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:35)



(8:35- 8:45 Singing in regional language)

He was very excited that he is going to celebrate the festival, eat good food, wear new clothes. And any remember, oh, Amma has not bought me new clothes. He went to his mother and said, Amma Amma, can you get me a new shirt for Pongal? And Amma said, oh no beta I will not be able to come with you to the shop. No new shirt for me. And Amma said, I did not say that. I just said that. I will not be able to come to the shop with you.

Huh, what does that mean Amma? That means beta. I am putting 200 rupees in your pocket. You go to the shop and buy a shirt for yourself. The boy was excited and scared and he said but Amma I never gone to the shop alone. I do not know how to buy a shirt. And Amma said, do not you worry beta. It is very simple. Go with a lot of confidence. Walk right into the shop. And whatever price the shopkeeper quotes, you just quote half the price. Okay Amma.

Now, that he had learned that tips and the tricks. The boy was extremely excited to go shopping on his own and buy his shirt. So, off he went.

(10:08- 10:13 Singing in regional language)

I am off to buy a shirt, all by myself, all by myself. And he reach there just in time when the shopkeeper was still opening the shutter, he was opening and he saw a little boy, he looked and he could not see the parents was quite surprised and impressed a little child all by himself.

Yes. What do you want beta? I want a shirt. Okay, and the shopkeeper began to show him the pink and the blue and the yellow and the green, the checks and the spots and the floral and the stripes. And the little boy said, Uncle I want the plain white shirt. Okay. The shopkeeper pulled out the plain white shirt, held it out for the boy and said 100 rupees. And what did our little boys say immediately? 50. The shopkeeper was quite impressed. And he said all right, just for you. I will give it for 80. 40!

Now, the shopkeeper was confused. This is not how negotiation is done. Okay, 50 just for you, 25. What! How give a shirt for 25, 30 and the boy said 15. Just take it for free. I want 2 shirts. So, the shopkeeper finally, since he was his first customer, the bony customer, shopkeepers. All right, two shirts for you, my bony customer. Thank you, uncle. And the little boy took the 2 white shirts, and his 200 rupees still in his pocket and went back home happily to his mother.

That is the story of buying shirts. I hope you enjoyed listening to it. As much as I enjoyed narrating it. Coming back to a little definition that I was sharing about storytelling. I like to call it storytelling as licensed and channelized daydreaming.

What really did we do in the last couple of minutes, just like in a daydream, where you travel across space and time. You are right there in that situation, you are there on the stage, or they are holding your trophy or there among the crowds receiving your medal. Whatever it may be. It is all so real as it is happening now. That is the same with storytelling, except it is licensed. With listening to stories you have permission to listen.

Perhaps if you are caught daydreaming, some adult might come and say, what are you doing? Stop that. But with storytelling, it is licensed, you have the permission to daydream. However, it is not random daydreaming. Because it is the storyteller, the narrator of the story, who is channelizing, the daydream. The storyteller is sticking you with him or her to that particular world, to that time to that land to that character to that situation and that experience.

So, storytelling, is licensed and channelized daydreaming. What it also is, is a connection. There is a saying that goes, the shortest distance between two humans is a story. Think about it. Just by virtue of me telling the story and you listening. We are connected through this web of the story. The storyteller, the listener, and the story get interconnected. As Doctor Brian Strump calls it the web. There is a web created between us. We are now known to each other through this common familiar story.

Another definition of storytelling in this context about connection is a stranger is someone whose story you do not know. And consequently, a friend is one whose story you know. A friend is one whose story you know, these are very simple quotations that really highlight for us. The Beauty and the significance of such a simple art of oral storytelling. It appears to be just mere entertainment or something that is meant for children to put them to sleep.

However, its possibilities and potential is way beyond that. Storytelling is what triggers creativity and imagination. Storytelling is a powerful communication tool. Storytelling is what offers connection between two people. Storytelling is what brings a cooperative thread for a community to share, to learn, to grow together, I could go on about the various trends and possibilities and potential of storytelling.

But for here, for now, for the context of being learners. Let us definitely remember that telling stories, and using the medium of storytelling to communicate our ideas is a very powerful way to reach another person. Because at the end of the day, each of us when we communicate, we do so to influence the other. It is either to convince them of our idea, to sell our thought, or to be pushing someone else into a certain form of action that we desire, and which is probably mutually beneficial. For all of these, the seed, purpose of communication storytelling can truly serve a deep purpose. And I urge each one of you to begin to explore more, the telling of stories, the sharing of stories, collecting of stories, receiving of stories, and giving them away. Thank you.