



Conversation Skills

Editing Verbal Narratives

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Editing Verbal Narratives

So many of my students on the autism spectrum have trouble editing themselves when they're telling me about a vacation they went on or their favorite video game, as examples, often providing too many details because they're not keeping their listener in mind. I have found that these worksheets work directly and effectively on this issue. Students are provided with a written example of a verbal narrative, and must delete details in order to best serve a given listener and context (employing listener presupposition). We then discuss all the choices made, such as how one portion could be interesting to a listener and therefore kept in, while another portion is redundant or too detailed and should be omitted. Also included are discussion notes for therapeutic intervention, along with a reproducible form with a blank narrative portion. If students agree, we audiotape narratives (theirs or others') in conversations, transcribe them onto the reproducible forms, and then use that content for analysis.

Name _____

Date _____

Remember: When telling a story, you want to make it clear and interesting for your listener. You don't want your listener to be confused or bored.

Who are you telling the story to?

What is the context?

Directions: Cross out irrelevant and unnecessary details.

"Over the summer I went to this camp in the Poconos called Mountain Spring Camp. It was about ten miles past the town of Buckwheat off Route 62. You go down into a valley and then up beyond a bunch of cornfields until you start to climb up a very steep mountain road. I slept in a cabin with twelve other kids, and this one kid, Sam, snored so loudly every night that I had a hard time sleeping. I would always try to fall asleep before the snoring started, but Sam always fell asleep before me. Ughh! That part was awful! Every morning, after getting very little sleep, I would go kayaking on the lake. It was so beautiful, with tall pine trees surrounding the lake and hawks flying overhead, and afterwards we would all jump into the icy, cold water. I'd say the water temperature was like 65 degrees, even though the air temperature was in the 80s. After our swim, we'd all be starving and they always served giant breakfasts, with scrambled eggs or fried eggs, bacon and sausage, banana pancakes, and the most delicious honey-flavored butter. My first counselor was pretty nice, but they got a bad stomach flu two weeks into the session, and they had to go back home to New Jersey, I think they came from a town called Cherry Hill. The replacement counselor was kinda mean and hated being asked any questions so we all tried to keep our mouths shut and not ask any questions. The best part of camp was archery. I got pretty good at it and even won the archery contest! I found out that the feather part of the arrows comes from a special kind of red-tailed cardinal that lives in Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado. It used to live in Utah, but I think there aren't any more there because all the eagles in Utah killed them off or chased them into the other states I guess. So that's what I did over the summer."

Discussion for Summer Camp Verbal Narrative

Note: Of course choices regarding what to include and what to omit depend in part on the listeners' interests. As one possible guideline, I have crossed out phrases and sentences I recommend my students omit, followed by a discussion in parentheses, and recommend keeping the remaining phrases and sentences, followed by the rationale in parentheses.

Who are you telling the story to? My speech therapist

What is the context? During my first individual session of a new school year she says, "so tell me all about your summer!"

"Over the summer I went to this camp in the Poconos called Mountain Spring Camp. (good beginning, includes basic information) ~~It was about ten miles past the town of Buckwheat off Route 62. You go down into a valley and then up beyond a bunch of cornfields until you start to climb up a very steep mountain road. (I tell my students that these details are not of interest, unless I lived near to the camp and then perhaps I'd be interested in how far past the town of Buckwheat the camp is located)~~ I slept in a cabin with twelve other kids, (paints a picture for your listener) and this one kid, Sam, snored so loudly every night that I had a hard time sleeping. I would always try to fall asleep before the snoring started, but Sam always fell asleep before me. (this is interesting and comical!) Ughh! That part was awful! (I tell my students that emotions make a story impactful) Every morning, ~~after getting very little sleep, (unnecessary/obvious)~~ I would go kayaking on the lake. It was so beautiful, with tall pine trees surrounding the lake and hawks flying overhead, and afterwards we would all jump into the icy, cold water. (Nice description) ~~I'd say the water temperature was like 65 degrees, even though the air temperature was in the 80s. (too much detail)~~ After our swim, we'd all be starving and they always served giant breakfasts, ~~with scrambled eggs or fried eggs, bacon and sausage, banana pancakes, and the most delicious honey-flavored butter. (too much detail—I have my students guess which specific food items to leave in if they were to leave in any—the answer is the banana pancakes and honey-flavored butter. They are interesting because they are out of the ordinary)~~ My first counselor was pretty nice, but ("but" is a transition word that introduces a contrast, and contrasting or conflicting information is often interesting) ~~they got a bad stomach flu (gross details are interesting!)~~ two weeks



into the session, and they had to go back home to New Jersey, I think they came from a town called Cherry Hill. *(I tell my students where the counselor came from is not an interesting detail, unless they came from someplace unusual such as New Zealand or Peru)* The replacement counselor was kinda mean and hated being asked any questions *(negative experiences are often interesting)* so we all tried to keep our mouths shut and not ask any questions. *(redundant)* The best part of camp was archery. *(best and worst features are usually interesting)* I got pretty good at it and even won the archery contest! *(noteworthy)* I found out that the feather part of the arrows comes from a special kind of red-tailed cardinal that lives in Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Colorado. It used to live in Utah, but I think there aren't any more there because all the eagles in Utah killed them off or chased them into the other states I guess. *(too much detail unless your listener is an ornithologist)* So that's what I did over the summer." *(even though this is redundant, it's an appropriate way to end a story)*



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