

COMMUNICATION

# Telling an anecdote

**LEVEL**

Intermediate (B1)

**NUMBER**

EN\_B1\_2043X

**LANGUAGE**

English

## Learning outcomes

- I can narrate a memorable experience I've had using a range of techniques to keep the listener interested.
- I can accurately use sequencing words to show the order of events when telling a personal anecdote.





# Warm-up

Read the **definition** of an anecdote, then **answer the questions** in the red boxes.

**An anecdote is a short, funny or interesting story about real people and events**

What kind of stories do you like to hear?

When was the last time someone told you an anecdote?

When was the last time you told someone an anecdote?



# Structuring an anecdote

Read the parts of an anecdote below. Keep these elements in mind as you read the text on slides 5-7.



## **Introduction:**

What is your story going to be about?

## **Background information:**

Give some context about the situation.

## **Action:**

What happened, and when?

## **Conclusion:**

How did it end? What did you learn from your experience?



# Reading

Read **Joel's anecdote** then **answer the questions** in the red box.

Have I ever told you about my awful trip to the lake? Well, this happened last year, at the end of summer. We were cycling to this lake that my friend Sarah wanted to check out. It was quite far out of the city - a proper adventure. The sun was shining, we were feeling fantastic.

Then things started to go downhill. First of all, we realised that the lake was much farther away than it looked on the map. Then we noticed a shortcut through the woods and decided to take it. That was our first mistake. About an hour later, I got a flat tyre.



1. When did the events described in the anecdote happen?
2. Who else does Joel mention?
3. What was the first mistake that they made?

# Reading

Read Joel's anecdote then **answer the questions** in the red box.

All of a sudden, it started to rain heavily, so we ran under a tree to stay dry. The rain stopped eventually, but by this time we were completely lost and our phones were dead. We were just walking around in circles for ages – wet, cold, totally miserable...

After a while, we got back to a main road. A woman was driving past and took pity on us. She gave us a lift to the nearest town, and we caught the next train back to the city. I don't think we spoke a word for the entire journey home.

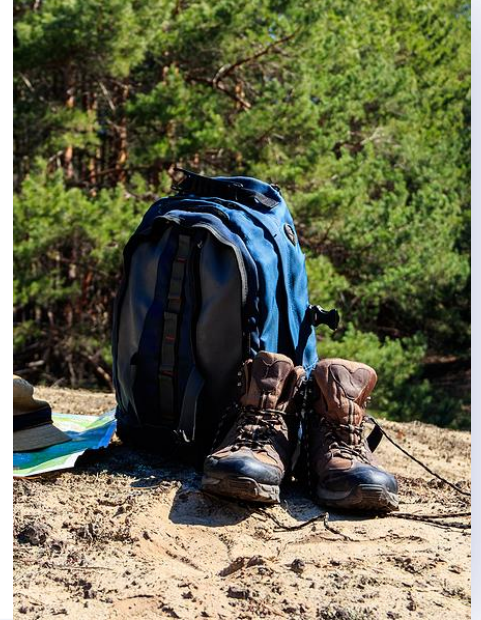


1. What did Joel and Sarah do when it started raining?
2. Find three adjectives that describe how Joel and Sarah were feeling while they were in the woods.
3. Did Joel and Sarah find the lake?

# Reading

Read Joel's anecdote then **answer the questions** in the red box.

We laugh about it now, but honestly, I thought we'd never find our way back to civilisation again! If I've learned anything from the experience, it's that you should never try an unknown "shortcut", and always pack a portable battery pack!



1. What did Joel learn from his experience?
2. Did you enjoy Joel's anecdote? Why or why not?



## Discuss

**Were you able to identify  
the different parts of  
Joel's anecdote?**

**Did you feel it had a clear beginning, middle  
and end?**





# Match the phrases

Match these phrases from the text with their explanations.

1

*My friend wanted **to check out** a lake.*

2

***Things started to go downhill.***

3

*We decided **to take a shortcut** through the woods.*

4

***to get a flat tyre***

5

***to take pity on someone***

a

to get to a destination by going the way that takes less time

b

when you see that someone is in a bad situation and try to help them

c

to visit or explore something new

d

we use this to say that a situation got worse

e

when the air goes out of a tyre



# Sequencing words

We use these words to show the order of events. **Can you think of any others** to add?

**First of all...**

**By this time...**

**Then...**

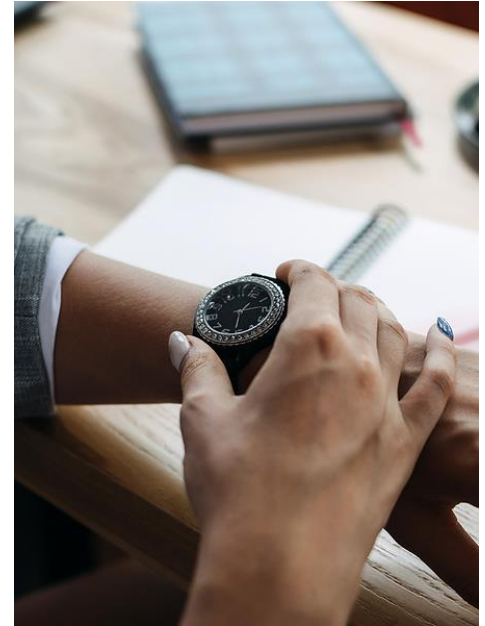
**Eventually...**

**All of a sudden...**

**About (an hour)  
later...**

**After a while...**

\_\_\_\_\_



# Using the past continuous

Read these sentences from the text and complete the blue box.

We **were cycling** to this lake that my friend wanted to check out...The sun **was shining**, we **were feeling** fantastic.

... We **were** just **walking** around in circles for ages – wet, cold, totally miserable...

- **Identify** the examples of the past continuous in the sentences.
- What is the **auxiliary** verb? What are its two forms?

How is the **main verb** formed?

- The past continuous describes an action that was happening **over a period of time in the past**.
- It can be used to give **background information** or **context** as well as for **descriptions**.



# Categorise the phrases

Complete this activity **in breakout rooms** or **in the main classroom**.

If using breakout rooms, **compare** your answers with the rest of the group afterwards.

I was driving at night...

So, first of all...

Have I ever told you  
about...?

I'm going to tell you  
about...

At the time, I was  
living...

When I look back on it  
now...

After a while...  
All of a sudden...

This happened a long  
time ago...

This taught me that...

## Introduction

What's your story about?

## Background information

Give some context about the situation.

## Action

What happened?

## Conclusion

How did it end? What did you learn from the  
experience?

# Tell an anecdote

**Choose one of the prompts** from the red box. Take two minutes to **make some notes**, then **share your anecdote** with the class. Remember to use the structure and the vocabulary you have learned in the lesson.

- a perfect day you had
- a terrible day you had
- an unexpected event
- a very special event you attended
- a time when you lost something important
- a time when you gave someone a surprise
- a trip that didn't go as planned

*So, I'm going to tell you about the time...*

*I was living in... when this happened...*

*First of all...  
Then...  
All of a sudden...*





# End of the lesson

Idiom

***to make a long story short***

**Meaning:** to get to the point – to leave out any unnecessary details

**Example:** Anyway, *to make a long story short*, I missed my flight and had to pay €400 to get home!



# Additional practice



# Multiple choice



1 All of a \_\_\_\_\_, a man walked out of the forest in a pair of swimming shorts. It was the middle of winter!

- a. while                      b. happen                      c. quickly                      d. sudden

2 First of \_\_\_\_\_, we realised that we didn't have a map!

- a. round                      b. all                      c. it                      d. thing

3 \_\_\_\_\_ this time, it was getting dark and really cold.

- a. For                      b. By                      c. To                      d. On

4 When I look back \_\_\_\_\_ it now, I don't know why I was so scared.

- a. on                      b. for                      c. up                      d. down



# Setting the scene

**Fill in the gaps** using the **adjectives and adverbs** in the red box. Note that there might be more than one possible answer in some cases.

- 1 The sun was shining, the birds were singing. It was a \_\_\_\_\_ day for a picnic. But then things started to go downhill...
- 2 I was driving at night. The weather was \_\_\_\_\_. It was raining \_\_\_\_\_, and I couldn't see the road very well...
- 3 We were living in Spain at the time. It was midsummer, and \_\_\_\_\_ hot that day.
- 4 I was \_\_\_\_\_ looking forward to this party. I was wearing a \_\_\_\_\_ white dress and feeling \_\_\_\_\_...
- 5 The day didn't start off \_\_\_\_\_. I was really \_\_\_\_\_ when I woke up that morning. I had an \_\_\_\_\_ headache and I just wanted to stay in bed!

really  
terrible  
awful  
perfect  
extremely  
heavily  
well  
good  
gorgeous  
fantastic  
tired





# Ordering the actions using sequencing words

Read these **parts** of the text from the lesson, paying close attention to the words in bold.

a.

But **then** we noticed a shortcut through the woods and decided to take it.

d.

**All of a sudden**, it started to rain heavily. We ran under a tree for shelter.

b.

The rain stopped eventually, but **by this time** we were completely lost and our phones were dead.

e.

**First of all**, we realised that the lake was much farther away than it looked on the map.

c.

**About an hour later**, I got a flat tyre.

f.

**After a while**, we got back to a main road.

Can you now **put the events** from Joel's anecdote **in the correct order**?



# Order the text

Put the anecdote in the correct order.

1

2

3

4

**A**

Then, I was asking my partner which rides he wanted to go on and he said no to everything. He was frightened of rollercoasters and he never told me!

**B**

So I'm going to tell you about the time my partner and I went to a theme park for the first time. We were living in Florida at the time and there are some amazing theme parks there.

**C**

Finally, we went to a restaurant and ate a burger that wasn't very tasty and then went home. We spent \$200 to eat a bad burger! When we look back on it now it's funny but it wasn't at the time.

**D**

First of all, we went on a public holiday so it took a long time to find somewhere to park and there were big queues to enter. My partner was annoyed before we even got inside.



# Telling an anecdote

Tell your classmates another **anecdote** using one of the prompts below.



a time you met someone  
important or famous

your best or worst job  
interview

a birthday you remember  
from your childhood

a time when you bought  
something that you  
regret



# Writing about a trip

Write a short description of a trip you went on.

Then **rewrite your sentences**, using **adjectives** and **adverbs** to make them more interesting!

I went to Malaysia. It was hot.

I tried durian. It tasted bad.

It was **extremely** hot... It tasted **terrible**!



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# What makes a good anecdote?

**Take a moment to reflect** on the way we tell stories, and what makes some story-tellers better than others!



- **Structure**
- **Language**
- **Tone of voice**
- **Content**

How can we **keep the listener interested?**

Do you know anyone who is **very good at telling stories?**





## Answer key

**P.5:** 1. Last year, at the end of summer/ last year/ last summer 2. Joel mentions his friend Sarah 3. They took a shortcut through the woods

**P.6:** 1. They ran under a tree (to stay dry) 2. wet, cold, miserable 3. No

**P.7:** 1. He learned that you should never try an unknown shortcut, and always pack a portable battery pack

**P.9:** 1. (c) 2. (d) 3. (a) 4. (e) 5. (b)

**P.11:** 1. We were cycling...; the sun was shining...; we were feeling...; we were walking...

**P.12:**

**Introduction:** I'm going to tell you about... Have I ever told you about the time...? This happened a long time ago

**Background information:** I was driving at night... At that time, I was living...

**Action:** So first of all... After a while... All of a sudden...

**Conclusion:** When I look back on it now... This taught me that...



# Answer key

## Additional practice:

**P.17:** 1. (d) 2. (b) 3. (b) 4. (a)

**P.18:** 1. perfect/good/gorgeous 2. terrible/awful; heavily 3. extremely/really 4. really; gorgeous; fantastic 5. well; tired; awful

**P.19:** Order: 1. (e) 2. (a) 3. (c) 4. (d) 5. (b) 6. (f)

**P. 20:** 1. (b) 2. (d) 3. (a) 4. (c)



# Summary

## Structuring an anecdote:

- An anecdote should have a clear beginning, middle and end, and can follow the structure below:  
**introduction – background information – action – conclusion**

## Past continuous:

- The past continuous describes **an action that was happening over a period of time in the past**.
- It can be used to give **background information** or **context** as well as for **descriptions**.
- **Form:** subject + auxiliary (*was/were*) + verb (*-ing*)

## Sequencing words:

- We use these to put events in order: what happened and when
- Here are some examples: *First of all; then; after a while; by this time; about (an hour) later*



# Vocabulary

to check (something) out

adventure

Things started to go downhill

shortcut

to take a shortcut

to get a flat tyre

miserable

to take pity on someone

portable battery pack

first of all

then

all of a sudden

by this time

after a while

about an hour later

