

## USING STORIES IN YOUR ORAL PRESENTATION

### Stories:

- Engage the interest of your audience with narrative and word images
- Help explain the idea you are communicating
- Can be change of pace for the listener in a closely argued presentation
- Are part of a long tradition in communication and teaching. Think of the fables of Aesop (*The Hare and the Tortoise*, *The Lion and the Mouse*) and the parables used by Jesus of Nazareth (*The Good Samaritan*, *The Prodigal Son*).

### What kind of stories?

- The best stories are true ones from life perhaps your own experience or a news item. Stories from literature or film work well too. Always say where your story came from.
- Your telling will concise and concentrate on the point you are making. How much you need to say partly depends on whether the audience already knows about the story. So if you referred to an incident from Shrek or the Lion King you would be confident that a college audience would know the background. (This is the special value of children's stories – we all know *Cat in the Hat* and *Peter Rabbit*.)
- Create an image. In an episode of *West Wing* a lobbyist was getting nowhere with a request for aid money until a one line story communicated the need: "The mothers in the Sudan carry their dead babies because they have nowhere to put them down".

### What part of the talk is best for a story?

- The imbedded story must fit with the flow and purpose of the whole talk.
- Starting with a story can engage the interest of the audience and introduce the main ideas of your talk. As an example, an incident in the early life of a person may foreshadow achievements later on.
- One trick used by speakers is to start with a negative story, then tell a positive story, then go on to explain the reasons behind the positive outcome story.
- Alternatively you may place your story mid-way as a change of pace and bridge between two parts of your talk.
- What could you achieve if you finished with a story?

### Using the recent experience of the audience to make a point

You can help your audience to think more deeply about their own experiences.

How could you include a story about the way we behaved when the fire alarm went off and it was raining outside? What point would you make?

For another story you might begin: *From time to time we have uncomfortable but needed reminders when we lend our city to the wider world.* You go on to tell a story of the 2008 Olympic Torch relay in Canberra. What would you be helping your audience understand: Modern Olympics? Aspects of democracy? Conflict? Human rights? Non-violence? Cultural differences? The globalization of sport? Or?

Your interpretation of the story would need balance and background research for accuracy and effect.

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