

**Chatterbox #34 – The art of telling stories in English****Transcript**

Harp: Hello everyone. This is Harp.

Maura: And Maura.

Harp: And we're here at Culips.com.

Maura: Yeah, and don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com, and become a member because then you'll have access to our Lipservice, which includes a transcript of this episode and our past episodes. You can also get a more detailed explanation and a quiz.

Harp: Exactly. So this is a Chatterbox episode. And this is the episode where we chat about different topics of interest, we interview people.

Maura: Yeah, maybe something new that's going on or some tips that will help you get to know English-speaking culture a little bit more.

Harp: To get to know Canadian culture as well.

Maura: Yes. So today's topic is storytelling, or telling stories. I love to tell stories!

Harp: Me too. I love listening to your stories, Maura.

Maura: Aw, thanks.

Harp: You're a good storyteller.

Maura: So, people in cultures all over the world traditionally tell stories. Some have oral traditions, but today we're just talking about regular stories that friends share with friends about things that have happened to them, or crazy or interesting stories that you've heard that you tell people that you know. So first we're going to talk about how to tell a story in English, so some tips about which verb tense to use when telling a story and also some expressions that we often use to begin a story.

Harp: Exactly. And then our second topic is about how people often exaggerate when they tell a story.

- Maura: Yes, they make things bigger or better or more dramatic when they tell a story. And we'll include some expressions that people use when they're exaggerating their story.
- Harp: And then we're gonna finish by telling some stories.
- Maura: Yes, and we'll try not to exaggerate them too much. OK, so first, when people tell stories they're about the past, right? You talk about what happened to you, you talk about what happened to you 5 minutes ago or 10 years ago, but it's in the past.
- Harp: Yup, agreed.
- Maura: But when some people tell stories, they don't use **the past tense**.
- Harp: What do they do?
- Maura: Well, they use **the present tense**. Yeah, and the reason that some people do this is just because when you use **the present tense**, you're talking about the present, so it makes the story seem more immediate and active. You're in the situation, like it's happening right now.
- Harp: OK, so people use **the present tense** to talk about a story that happened in the past because it gives a good effect to their story.
- Maura: Right. It's almost like when you're telling the story you want the person listening to imagine that they're there with you and they're experiencing it with you.
- Harp: Yup, I see that.
- Maura: And we should also mention that when people are doing this, especially when they're talking, sometimes they use **the present tense** and then sometimes they change and use **the past tense**. They're not thinking about grammar when they're telling the story, so they change their verb tense.
- Harp: Yeah, they're just trying to tell the story in the best way they can.
- Maura: Right, so some people, when they're telling stories, use **the present tense**, but, like most of you already know, some people use **the past tense** when they're telling a story. So Harp, could you tell me a story using **the present tense**?
- Harp: OK, so I'm standing in the line-up to get into a club in **Vegas** and I'm just

standing there, **minding my own business**, waiting with my friends. All of a sudden, I see **Regis Philbin**.

Maura: Wow!

Harp: He's walking beside me. I started screaming and saying "Hi Regis! Hi!" He smiled and waved.

Maura: That's awesome.

Harp: Yup, if you don't know, he's on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* and he's on the morning show ... I forget what it's called.

Maura: It's called *Live with Regis and Kelly*.

Harp: Very famous in North America.

Maura: Yeah, he is an American talk show host, who has been around for a long time. (That's a nice way of saying he's older.)

Harp: OK, so in my story, I used **the present tense** to make it more exciting for when I saw **Regis**.

Maura: Right. And I imagined, a little bit, being right there with you as it was happening, because when you started the story you were using **the present verb tense**.

Harp: Yeah, so in my story I didn't say I was standing, I said, I am standing.

Maura: Exactly, so it just made the story that much more alive and in the moment.

Harp: Like it was happening right now.

Maura: Exactly. Now, when people tell stories, they often want **to grab people's attention** and they do this from the moment they begin the story. So, we have a few expressions that people might use to get your attention to listen to a story. One really common way that people start stories is simply by saying, **this one time** or **one day**. Like I could say, "**this one time**, I was downtown Toronto and ..." So I've started my story and I've gotten your attention.

- Harp: Yeah, that's a good example of ways we start stories. I like to start my stories by saying, ***I got a crazy story for you***. Right away they know it's going to be interesting and exciting.
- Maura: Yup exactly. That really gets people's attention because you can say, ***I got a crazy story for you***, or ***I got a really funny story for you***. So the people listening already know that the story is going to be crazy or interesting or funny. They already have expectations for a good story, so they want to listen.
- Harp: Exactly. Or you could say, ***listen to this*** yesterday I did ***blah blah blah***.
- Maura: Right, so sometimes we just say ***listen to this*** and that whole sentence really tells the person to listen to you and so they'll listen to you because they expect something interesting is going to be said. You could also ask them a question like, ***"do you want to hear a funny story?"***
- Harp: That's a good way to start it, 'cause I always want to hear a funny story.
- Maura: Yeah. You could say, ***"do you want to hear a crazy story?"*** and then you begin your story.
- Harp: Yeah, that **grabs attention** right away.
- Maura: Right. And then, like I said before, the people know that the story is going to be good so they're going to focus on you.
- Harp: Exactly. OK good, let's move on to our next topic, which is ...
- Maura: Exaggeration.
- Harp: Yeah. People often exaggerate when they're telling a story so that it's more exciting; it's bigger than it actually is.
- Maura: Right. So, most of the time, someone telling a story who's exaggerating isn't trying to lie or be dishonest. They're just excited about the story or they want to get your attention, so they exaggerate.
- Harp: Yeah, they're exaggerating for effect, so that you enjoy the story more.
- Maura: So, some things that people exaggerate in stories are the seriousness of something or the danger in something.
- Harp: Can you give me an example?

- Maura: Sure. So, maybe you're driving with your friend, who's driving really fast and speeding. And when you tell the story, you say, "my friend was driving so fast, **I thought I was going to die.**" That is an exaggeration; you probably didn't really think you were going to die. You were just scared or nervous because your friend was driving fast.
- Harp: Good point, good example.
- Maura: So, what are some other things that other people might exaggerate?
- Harp: They could exaggerate their reaction. They could say that they're really, really angry, and they were yelling and screaming in the story, when they probably just **raised their voice** a little bit.
- Maura: So, one other thing we exaggerate is the time that passed. So maybe I'm telling a story about waiting for a friend who's late. I could say, **I waited forever.** Of course, I did not wait forever, that's impossible. But what I mean is that I waited for a long time.
- Harp: Exactly. Yeah, when I tell stories, I always exaggerate. I make them so big, like, the plate broke **into a million pieces.** Really it probably broke into maybe a hundred pieces, not a million.
- Maura: Yeah, that's a number that we often use when we're exaggerating—**a million**—but there's no way that people would know if something was a million times, because we don't usually count that high.
- Harp: Yeah, I'm not going to count the pieces of the plate.
- Maura: Right. So, those are some expressions that we use when we exaggerate. Like we said, **a million pieces**, or **I waited forever**, or **I thought I was going to die.** Those are all exaggerations.
- Harp: Exactly. Let's move on to the third topic today.
- Maura: Yes. Let's tell some exaggerated stories, Harp.
- Harp: OK! Maura, last week I had the worst commute home ever.
- Maura: What happened?
- Harp: So, I had a doctor's appointment, so I left work early and I'm walking to the bus station and I have **to wait forever.** It felt like hours I was waiting for the bus. I was waiting for so long, **forever.** Finally the bus comes, then there's so

much traffic. It just took hours to get home, when normally it takes 30 minutes. Then, I have to take **the metro** and I'm thinking OK, it's going to be OK, the **metro's** fast, it's good. **The metro** was OK, no problems. Then I get outside: torrential rainstorm. It was raining so much, like, a downpour that you would get in the rainforest. It was crazy, and of course I forgot my umbrella. But I have a doctor's appointment, so I can't wait for the rain to stop. So I just start walking in the rain and I get drenched. I am soaked to the bone. I don't think I was dry at all. My hair was soaked, all my clothes, my feet were so wet. So I go to my doctor's appointment. I'm late. I see the doctor, then I'm going home, and I have to take another bus. Is this bus on time? No, it's not on time. It's late as well. It took so long, again! I felt like I was waiting hours for the bus. I finally got home. I had a piece of chocolate cake. I was feeling very upset about my commute.

Maura: So, great. Harp gave us a lot of examples of what we just talked about. Harp exaggerated a few times in her story and you also changed from **the past** and **the present** tense when you were telling your story.

Harp: Like we said we do.

Maura: Exactly.

Harp: Maura, do you have a good story for us?

Maura: Well, it's not my story 'cause sometimes we tell stories that we've heard, if it's a really good story.

Harp: For sure.

Maura: So, this story happened to a classmate of my friend.

Harp: So, this is a story of a guy in your friend's class.

Maura: Yes, but it's a good one.

Harp: OK, I'm ready.

Maura: So, this guy was fishing one day and he lost his dentures. You know? The fake teeth in his mouth? He was fishing and he opened his mouth too wide, something happened, and they fell out into the lake.

Harp: I'm laughing. It's funny.

Maura: And then, you know, he just forgot about them, moved on, didn't know what happened to them. And then some time passed and he's driving, listening to

the radio, and he hears this crazy story that they're talking about on the radio. The story is that there was a man who was fishing, he caught a fish, and then he cut open the fish because he was preparing it to eat, and inside the fish was some dentures.

Harp: No way!

Maura: Yes. So this guy started thinking to himself, when he heard this story, you know maybe that's where I lost my dentures in the lake. So he decided to check it out and he contacted them at the radio station, somehow got in contact with this guy who had found the dentures. Turns out, the fish had eaten his dentures, and they were his dentures.

Harp: He found his dentures that were in a fish?

Maura: Yup. Pretty crazy, eh?

Harp: That's a crazy story. That's bizarre.

Maura: Yup, that's why it's worth telling again. Even though it's not my story, it's a good enough story that it should still be told.

Harp: It's a really good story.

Maura: And if you notice, when I started my story, I said, **one day**, just like we mentioned earlier. OK, so, this episode was about story telling.

Harp: Yes, and we started by giving you some tips on how to tell a story.

Maura: Yes, and then we gave you some expressions and examples of exaggerating, and how people often exaggerate in their stories.

Harp: And we finished off by telling some stories.

Maura: Yes, we hope you liked our stories. Harp's was a bit more exaggerated than mine.

Harp: I like to exaggerate for effect.

Maura: Nice. OK, so, don't forget to go to our website, Culips.com.

Harp: And that's it for us today.

Maura: We'll see you next time.

Harp:       Bye everyone!

Maura:     Bye!



## **Detailed Explanation**

### Past tense versus present tense

Most people know that when talking about the past we use the past tense in English. This means that we put an “-ed” on the end of regular verbs or use the irregular verb form. Like we say in this episode, people also sometimes use **the present tense** when telling a story that happened in the past. This is true for speaking or creative writing. And remember that when people are telling stories they might also switch back and forth between verb tenses for no reason!

### Vegas

**Vegas** is short for *Las Vegas*. It is a city in the United States, in the state of Nevada. In **Las Vegas**, there are a lot of places to watch different kinds of theatre shows on a stage or live music concerts. There are also many dance clubs and casinos where you can gamble and win money. It's a popular place for adults to visit. It's not a family place to visit.

### To mind your own business

If you are **minding your own business**, it means you're only thinking about what you yourself are doing. You're not paying attention to what is happening around you if you are not a direct part of it. If you are with people, then you are only thinking about what you all are doing. It also means that you are not bothering anyone around you. When you **mind your own business**, you keep to yourself and let others do what they like around you.

Harp wasn't looking at the people and things happening around her while she waited in line at the club in Vegas. She was **minding her own business**, so she was just concerned with herself and was doing something that did not disturb other people. Then she suddenly saw a famous person beside her.

You can use this expression with any subject, for example, **her own business**, **their own business**, etc.

Here are a couple of examples with **to mind your own business**:

Tyler: I was just standing there, **minding my own business**, when this guy comes up to me and tries to steal my bag!

Ivan: Oh no! I'm glad he didn't get away with it!

Dean: So, I hear that Sarah is in trouble at work.

Matt: Yeah, at first she was really just **minding her own business**, but now she has to talk to the boss tomorrow.

This expression is often heard as an order: **Mind your own business**. In this case, when the first person tells a second person to “**mind your own business**,” it means that the second person was thinking about or interested in things that they were not a part of.

### Regis Philbin

**Regis Philbin** is an American talk show host and game show presenter. He is in his 70s and has had a very long career in television. He is the host of a daily morning television show called *Live with Regis and Kelly*. Harp has trouble remembering the name of this show in this episode, but Maura remembers. He also hosted a game show called *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* This game show is now available in many different countries and languages around the world.

### To grab someone's attention

**To grab** means to take something quickly. You can **grab someone's attention** by making a hand gesture like waving or by saying a person's name loudly to make sure they look at you. When we tell a story, we **grab people's attention** with our words or our excited expression. When telling a story, we want to begin the story in a way that gets someone's attention quickly, right from the beginning.

*This one time, one day, I got a crazy story for you, and listen to this* are all examples of expressions people use at the beginning of their stories to **grab people's attention**.

### This one time/one day

When we are starting to tell a story in English, we often begin the story by saying, **this one time** or **one day**, and then we explain what happened. When you use these expressions to tell a story, it is not important when it happened. These expressions tell that the story happened in the past.

If when the story happened is important, you can also be specific. You can also use a combination of both, for example, **this one time last year** or **this one time last week**. Instead of **one day** you can also be specific and state which day it happened.

### I got (or I have) a crazy story for you

Another way to begin a story is by saying **I got (or I have) a crazy story for you**. When something that happened is surprising, not expected, or even funny, we sometimes use the word **crazy** to describe it. Harp's story is **crazy** because she saw a famous person walking beside her, which is something that she didn't expect.

You can also replace **crazy** with any adjective. You can say you have a scary story or a funny story. Any adjective that describes your story can work in this expression.

Listen to this

If we begin a story by saying, **listen to this**, usually this means something very interesting is going to happen in the story we're about to tell. Before giving any details of the story, you want to make sure you have the person's attention. So you say, **listen to this** to get their attention.

Blah blah blah

**Blah blah blah** is an expression we use to replace part of a sentence or story that is not important. We say **blah blah blah** instead of explaining something unimportant in detail. We also might say **blah blah blah** so that we can save time, or so we can continue speaking about another more important subject.

In this episode, Harp says **blah blah blah** to cut out details that are not important. She gives the example of beginning story with **listen to this**. And then she continues the beginning of the story by saying, "Yesterday I did ..." Since this is just an example, the details of what she did yesterday are unimportant so she says **blah blah blah**.

You can use **blah blah blah** to end a story or to cut out unimportant details in the middle. Usually people say two or three **blahs**, but sometimes they say more.

Here are a couple of examples with **blah blah blah**:

Samantha: So I called up Mike, and I asked him how he was doing, and **blah blah blah**.  
And then suddenly he asks me what I'm doing this weekend,  
Justin: Did he ask you out?  
Samantha: Yep!

Jonathan: What did I miss at the meeting yesterday?

Walt: We just reviewed the work we've been doing, **blah blah blah**. You didn't miss much.

Do you want to hear a funny story?

This is another expression that you can use to get people's attention before you begin a story. It's very similar to **I got a crazy story for you**. We can also say, **do you want to hear a crazy story?** The only difference is the sentence structure, but the implied meaning is the same.

Remember, **a funny story** can be something that will make you laugh, or **a funny story** can also be a story that is strange or unusual. **Funny** can be used in more than one way.

I thought I was going to die

This is an exaggeration we often use in English when we tell a story where something negative happened and we want to make sure our listeners know how extreme the situation was.

Here is an example with ***I thought I was going to die***:

Mark: Yesterday was really cold.

Jeff: I know! I waited outside for the bus for over half an hour. It was so cold that **I thought I was going to die!**

People might also use this expression to describe how embarrassed they felt. Here is an example using the expression this way:

Anna: I was talking about Fred this morning, and I was saying that I thought he was so good looking. Then I realized he was right behind me! **I thought I was going to die!**

#### To raise your voice

**To raise your voice** is to speak louder than we usually do in a relaxed conversation. Sometimes we **raise our voice** when we're angry. Other times we **raise our voice** just to grab someone's attention.

**To raise your voice** can be used to simply talk about a person speaking more loudly. It can also be used as a polite way to say that someone was yelling. Here is an example of this:

Billy: Hey! What are you doing!?

Karen: Please don't **raise your voice** at me.

#### I waited forever

This is another exaggeration we use when telling a story. When we say that **someone waited forever**, we really mean that they waited for a very long time. But to emphasize how long we waited, we say that we **waited forever**.

**Forever** is often used to exaggerate the length of time. Here are some other exaggerations with **forever**:

Samantha: I can't believe you're finally going on a date with Shawn.

Penny: I know, I've had a crush on him **forever**.

Ryan: When are you going to buy another car?

Jamie: I don't know. I've had this old car **forever**, but I love it.

#### Into a million pieces

This is an exaggeration used to explain how much something is broken. It means that something is broken very badly, and can probably never be repaired. Because saying something is broken **into a million pieces** is an exaggeration, sometimes it is possible to repair the item.

We can also simply use **a million** to exaggerate the amount of something. The amount is a lot, but we have no idea how much it is. We can exaggerate the number of anything that is countable.

Here are some more examples:

Chris: What time do you start work on Monday?

Amy: I work at 7. I've told you that **a million times** already!

Chris: Oh yeah. Sorry, I always forget.

Emily: Do you remember the time we almost failed our English exam in high school?

Lara: Yeah, but high school was **a million years ago!** I study a lot for all of my exams now.

### The metro

In Montreal, the underground train system is called **the metro**. In other parts of the world, it may be called the subway, the tube, or the underground. **The metro** is the French name for the subway. Since Montreal is in a French province, everyone calls it that, even the English speakers.

**Quiz**

1. Which verb tense is often used to tell stories about things that happened in the past?

- a) the future
- b) the present
- c) the past
- d) b and c

2. Ben was just \_\_\_\_\_ when someone came and yelled at him.

Please fill in the blank with the expression that means Ben was focused on himself and not bothering anyone.

- a) minding his own business
- b) doing business
- c) doing his business
- d) minding

3. Which is another way to say *to get someone's attention*?

- a) to attain someone's attention
- b) to grab someone's attention
- c) to check someone's attention
- d) to attend to someone

4. Which expression is NOT often used to begin a story?

- a) One day
- b) I got a crazy story for you
- c) Listen to me
- d) This one time

**5. What do English speakers say when they cut out unimportant or unnecessary detail from a story?**

- a) do re mi
- b) la di da
- c) big bang bop
- d) blah blah blah

**6. Which of the following is NOT an exaggeration?**

- a) They've been dating forever!
- b) I've been waiting for such a long time!
- c) hey thought they were going to die!
- d) here must be a million spiders in here!

**7. Which is a polite way to say *to yell*?**

- a) to raise your voice
- b) to improve your voice
- c) to life your voice
- d) to lower your voice

**8. What is the subway system called in Montreal?**

- a) the tube
- b) the underground
- c) the metro
- d) the train

**Answers:** 1.d 2.a 3.b 4.c 5.d 6.b 7.a 8.c