

# SELF-ADVOCACY STORYTELLING TOOLKIT

## A YETI Resource

### WHY SHARING YOUR STORY MATTERS

- **Raises Awareness** – Personal stories make issues real and relatable for others, including policymakers, educators, and the public.
- **Inspires Change** – When decision-makers hear real experiences, they are more likely to take action on policies that affect people with disabilities.
- **Builds Confidence** – Sharing your story helps you develop self-advocacy skills and a strong sense of identity.
- **Connects with Others** – Your story can inspire and empower others facing similar challenges, creating a stronger community.



### TIPS FOR CRAFTING YOUR STORY

- **Start with Who You Are** – Introduce yourself and share key parts of your identity (e.g., disability, interests, goals).
- **Describe Your Challenge or Barrier** – Explain a specific situation where you faced a challenge related to disability, accessibility, or inclusion.
- **Highlight What Helped or What You Did** – Share how you navigated the situation, what supports helped, or what changes you would like to see.
- **End with a Call to Action** – Encourage listeners to support a policy, change a practice, or take action in a meaningful way.
- **Keep it Clear and Concise** – Stick to key points and practice your story so it's easy to share in different settings.
- **Make it Personal, But Protect Yourself** – Share what feels comfortable.



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## WHERE TO SHARE YOUR STORY

- In IEP or 504 meetings to advocate for your needs.
- At school events, disability groups, or leadership programs to lead others.
- With legislators and policymakers to push for disability rights and accessibility.
- On social media, blogs, or podcasts to reach a wider audience.



## ADAPTING YOUR STORY FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Your story is powerful, but how you tell it should change depending on who is listening. Different audiences connect with different aspects of a story. Below are strategies to tailor your message for policymakers, peers, and the general public.

### 1. **Policymakers & Decision-Makers** 🏛️

**Goal:** Influence policies and advocate for systemic change.

#### ☒ **Focus on Facts & Impact:**

Explain the challenge you faced and connect it to a larger issue (e.g., lack of accessibility, discrimination, healthcare barriers).

Use statistics or laws to back up your story (e.g., “Under the ADA, I should have access, but...”).

#### ☒ **Be Clear About What Needs to Change:**

Share what would have made a difference in your experience.

End with a strong call to action (e.g., “Pass this bill so others don’t go through what I did”).

#### ☒ **Keep it Brief & Direct:**

Policymakers have limited time, so stick to key points and avoid unnecessary details. One to two minutes is ideal for in-person meetings.

#### **Example:**

"As a student with a disability, I was denied access to an afterschool program because they didn’t have an accessible bus. If funding was allocated for accessible transportation, students like me could fully participate. I urge you to support funding for inclusive transportation in schools."

# ADAPTING YOUR STORY FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES (continued)

## 2. Peers & Community Members

**Goal:** Influence policies and advocate for systemic change.

### **Make it Relatable & Personal:**

- Share emotions and everyday experiences your peers can connect with.
- Use humor or storytelling techniques to keep them engaged.

### **Encourage Action & Support:**

- Inspire others to become allies by explaining how they can help.
- Highlight the importance of inclusion, respect, and advocacy.

### **Create a Conversation:**

- Ask your peers questions like, “Have you ever felt left out?”
- Imagine if it happened every day.” Encourage discussion and shared experiences.

### **Example:**

"I love playing video games, but when my school didn't allow adaptive controllers, I felt excluded. Everyone deserves to play. If you see something unfair, speak up with me!"

## 3. The General Public

**Goal:** Educate, raise awareness, and change perceptions.

### **Explain Without Jargon:**

- Avoid complex legal terms or acronyms.
- Assume your audience knows little about disability experiences.

### **Use Storytelling to Evoke Empathy:**

- Describe a specific moment that highlights a barrier or challenge.
- Show how small changes can make a big difference in accessibility and inclusion.

### **Make the Issue Feel Relevant:**

- Connect disability rights to broader social justice issues.
- Use analogies people can relate to (e.g., “Imagine going to a restaurant and being told there’s no chair for you”).

### **Example:**

"When I go to a coffee shop, the counter is too high for me to reach in my wheelchair. Something as simple as a lower counter could make the world more inclusive for millions of people."

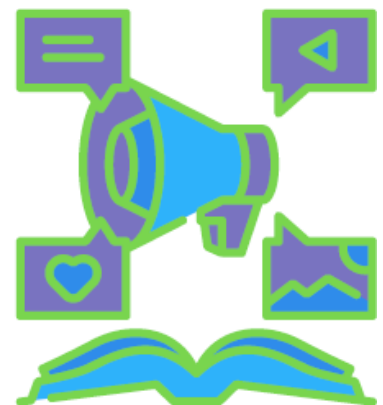
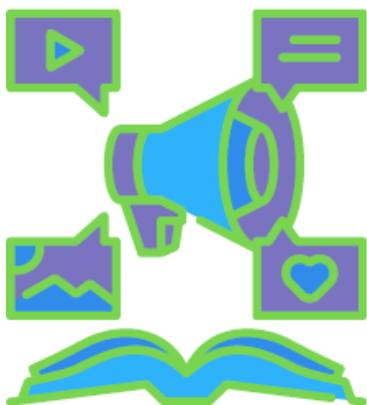


## Final Tip: Know Your Audience!

Before sharing your story, ask yourself:

- ◇ What do they care about?  
(Laws? Personal connections? Social justice?)
- ◇ What action do I want them to take?  
(Pass a law? Support inclusion? Change attitudes?)
- ◇ How can I make my story resonate with them?

**No matter the audience, your voice matters—and your story can create real change! 💖**



# Now It's Your Turn!

You can use these prompts to guide you  
in crafting your own story:

## Start with Who You Are

"My name is \_\_\_\_\_ , and I identify as \_\_\_\_\_ ."

"Some things that are important to me are \_\_\_\_\_ ."

"One goal I have for myself is \_\_\_\_\_ ."

## Describe Your Challenge or Barrier

"A challenge I have faced related to disability, accessibility, or accommodations is  
\_\_\_\_\_ ."

"This situation was difficult because \_\_\_\_\_ ."

"It made me feel \_\_\_\_\_ ."

## Highlight What Helped or What You Did

"I navigated this situation by \_\_\_\_\_ ."

"Something that really helped me was \_\_\_\_\_ ."

"A change that would have made this experience better is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ."

## End with a Call to Action

"To make things better for others, I encourage \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ ."

"One thing everyone can do to create change is \_\_\_\_\_ ."

"I want to see a future where \_\_\_\_\_ , and you can help by  
\_\_\_\_\_ ."