

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.



Youth Engagement Now
yen.transitionta.org



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.

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:

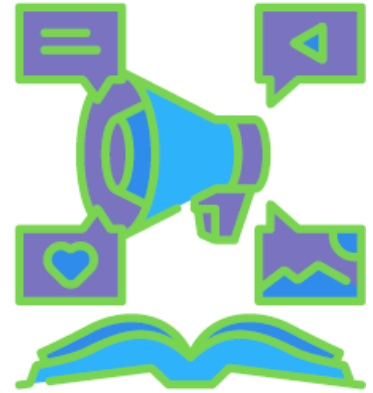
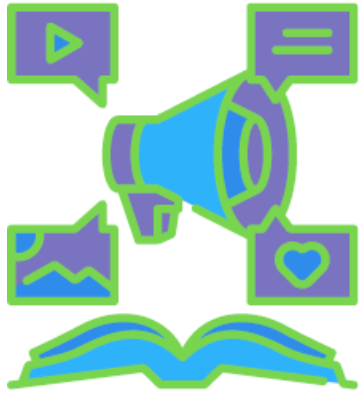
- Describe a specific moment that highlights a barrier or challenge.
- Show how small changes can make a big difference in accessibility and inclusion.

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."

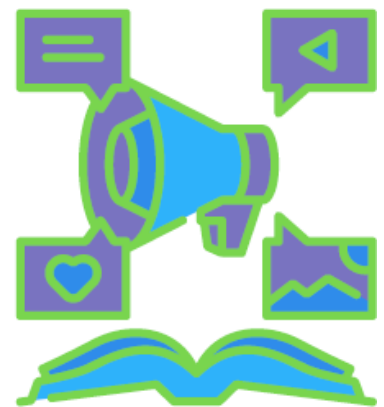
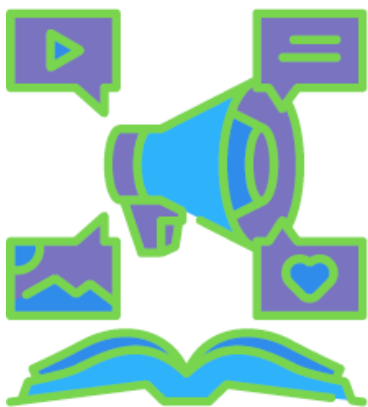


Final Tip: Know Your Audience!

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
_____ ."