

## Storytelling phrases

A useful compilation suggested by members of the [Storytell](#) listserv

### Phrases to cover a mistake

A key one...often used for covering “mistakes” or omissions....is, “Now, what I didn’t tell you was ....” Rona Leventhal.

When one forgets to include an essential detail early in a story, then realize you need it later on: “Now it’s important that you should know...” and add back in the missing detail. I’ve only needed it a handful of times, but knowing that I can use this phrase has made me a more relaxed storyteller, having a lot more fun! Emily Manvel Leite.

Or sometimes this works: "What (Character X) didn't know, was..." This one is nice and smooth, when the context allows for it. Pam Faro

I like Ray Hick's "Now you probably forgot that I told you ..." cover-up. Charles Kiernan.

Re: Ray Hicks' - that would be great to follow-up with asking, “Right...?” and then, “That’s cause I didn’t tell you!” as if to let them in on your “oops”! Rona Leventhal.

“Now what you don’t know, because I didn’t tell you – but I’ll tell you now – is that earlier...” Richard Martin

### Phrases to move the plot forward

‘And you’ll never guess what happened next ...’

This a great line I come back to when encouraging audience participation in a story. Allison Galbraith.

“She was just about to XYX when ABC happened” i.e. “She was just about to take her first bite when there was a knock on the door” Rona Leventhal.

“And it didn't move an inch. But you didn't expect it to, did you?”  
I only use in one story I tell and it always gets a laugh. John Rogers.

“...and whether it was a short time or a long time I cannot say, but when at last...” (he arrived at the castle,...) Mary Grace Ketner.

“...and you may not believe this, but at the very same moment...” Mary Grace Ketner.

“... and as you know it had to happen...” Richard Martin.

I know. I was there. And the taste of that sweet wine is still on these lips. Mary Grace Ketner.

I've always loved Robin Williamson's -- "Once, and once again, in very good times..." Robin Nott.

"Where was I?" Sometimes I really can't remember. Just as often, I do, but am giving myself and the listeners a short break, and giving someone a chance to shine. Bob Kanegis.

"After that, I don't know what happened. The storyteller didn't tell me. But I bet you can imagine."  
Bob Kanegis.

When telling a tall tale (Though of course, being a storyteller Truth is sacred to me) I'll appear struggle to remember a detail that I know... "I want to get this just right." Bob Kanegis.

And it was, and so it went... Papa Joe.

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"They say . . ." I often start most Native American stories, mythology, other legends and traditional tales I tell with this phrase. It absolves the teller of having to answer for the things that happen within the story that might be hard to believe or seemingly fantastic to the listener. Marc Severson.

When telling O'odham Indian stories I always start with the O'odham language phrase: "Heki hu . . ." (*hoo-kee hoo*) which means "Long ago . . ." Marc Severson.

There is also the Hopi phrase "*Alekasai* . . ." (sp?) which as I understand means "Attend and listen " and signals the start of a traditional story. Marc Severson.