

Introduction to Story Writing

What is a Story?

A **story** is an imaginary account about people or situations that is told for **entertainment**. Everybody loves to read or listen to stories. But writing them is not a simple task. In this chapter, we will learn the guidelines to writing a good story.

Components of a Story

- **Theme:** The theme is the main idea around which the story revolves.
 - What idea do you wish to convey through your story?
 - Good versus evil, revenge, love conquers all

Often stories have a basic idea. They tend to convey a message to the reader. Aesop's Fables revolve around morals, Akbar–Birbal stories revolve around wit and intelligence, and the Panchatantra revolves around worldly conduct.

- **Setting:** The surrounding or the time period where the story unfolds.
 - Where is the story set?
 - When do the events in the story take place?

Good stories often engage the readers' senses. They have vivid descriptions that create visual (sight), aural (sound), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste) and tactile (feel) imagery. The setting sometimes plays a big role in the narrative. It provides a background for the story to unfold.

The air was burning their skin. Prince Arjuna and his charioteer Dharmapal had abandoned their chariot far behind and were dragging their feet through the dusty road. Beads of perspiration dripped from their foreheads as they searched the desolate place for a drop of water. The prince felt his throat getting drier and drier. From a distance, they could hear a faint tinkling of water. It seemed as if there was a stream somewhere in this dry, parched land.

The paragraph above aims to help the reader empathise with the characters. The description establishes not only the place but also the time when the events happen.

- **Characterisation:** Characterisation is the process of portraying characters.
 - Who is the main character?
 - What are his/her/its physical/mental attributes?
 - What is the problem faced by the character?
 - How does the character change or evolve in the end?



Characters are the catalysts in the story; their actions take the narrative forward. Good stories are often built around interesting characters whose circumstances change them. Characters can be flat (uncomplicated, do not evolve) or round (complex, undergo change). The key to writing a good story lies in developing interesting characters. Rather than stating the qualities of the character, good stories often let the readers derive their own conclusion about them.

Instead of: *Meena was always punctual.*

Write: *Meena reached ten minutes early for the interview.*

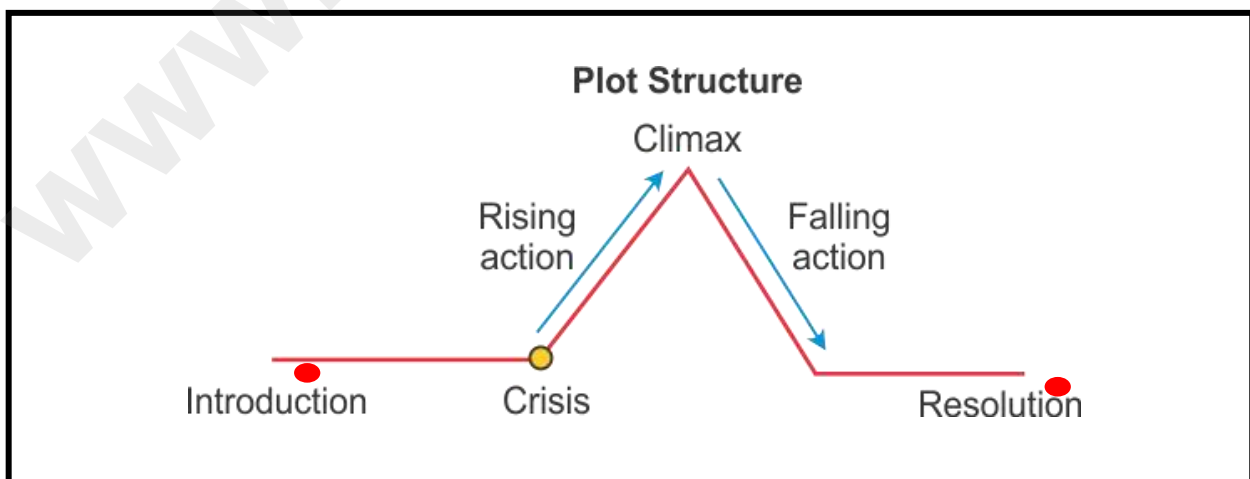
Instead of: *Akshay was the laziest person.*

Write: *Akshay wore a crumpled shirt and unpolished shoes. His hair was also dishevelled.*

Instead of: *The girl was petrified.*

Write: *The girl broke into a cold sweat; her fingers froze as she stood transfixed.*

- **Plot:** The plot comprises the main events of the story.
 - **Introduction:** The characters are introduced. A brief account of the setting is also established in this part.
 - **Rising action:** Rising action refers to the events that lead up to the crisis.
 - **Crisis:** Characters go through some kind of predicament. Crisis becomes the main catalyst for the evolution of the story and the character.
 - **Climax:** Climax refers to the stage where the crisis escalates to its highest point. It is the most crucial part of the story.
 - **Falling action:** Falling action refers to the events that follow the climax. The intensity of the events lessens in this stage.
 - **Resolution:** It is also known as **Denouement**. It is where the conflict and the crisis in the story are finally resolved. Loose ends of the story are tied and the story is brought to a close.



Steps for Writing a Story

(Sample taken: The Resignation by Premchand)

- **Step 1:** Fix a theme that you want to write about. What would be the moral of your story?
The theme or moral of the story would be
'Dignity can be taken away only if it is surrendered.'
- **Step 2:** Establish the setting
 - The story is set in India.
 - The story unfolds in pre-independence India.
- **Step 3:** Create character sketches
 - Fatehchand, who is a man of great dignity, but does not have the courage to defend himself.
 - Eventually he has the courage to stand up to his offender.
 - The Saheb is Fatehchand's boss. He is very abusive.
 - Ultimately, he is taught a lesson by Fatehchand. He vows not to harm another soul.
- **Step 4:** Outline the plot of the story

Introduction	Lala Fatehchand is a workaholic. He is good natured man but has faced only setbacks in life. He is in poor health and his heart is devoid of courage. Despite Fatehchand's dedication towards his work, his boss is always abusive towards him.
Rising Action	One day, he is called by his boss, the Saheb immediately as an urgent matter has come up. Fatehchand rushes to work at once despite his wife's objections. He walks as fast as he could.
Crisis	But the Saheb is annoyed as he expected him to get to work faster. He humiliates Fatehchand and shakes him by his ears. Later that day, after a deep contemplation, Fatehchand decides to avenge his humiliation. He enters the Saheb's house and threatens him with a stick. Saheb starts to tremble in fear and tries to reason with Fatehchand.
Climax	Fatehchand strikes the Saheb with a blow to the head when he tried to snatch the stick away from his hand. He makes the Saheb promise that he would never hurt a self-respecting human being again. He resigns from his job and reprimands the Saheb for being a wicked man.
Resolution	Fatehchand leaves with his head held high. He feels the pleasure of having tasted his very first victory.

Samples and Types

Outline of the Story

Sample 1

- In such questions, the outline of the story is provided. Students are expected to connect the points to form a comprehensive narrative.

Master sent a slave to the market—slave returned frightened—said he saw a woman in the market—the woman was Death herself—she made a threatening gesture at him—slave feared for his life—asked master to lend him his horse—he wanted to escape death—master obliged and lent him his horse—slave rode the horse to Bagdad—master went to the market to investigate—found Death there—he asked her why she threatened his slave—she said she didn't threaten—she was surprised to see him there—she had an appointment with him in Bagdad in the evening.

- Read the outline clearly.
- Understand the plot and the theme.
- Do not omit any points.
- Stick to the order of the points.
- Use connectors to join points.
 - 📖 Since, Hence, Therefore, Because
 - 📖 And, But, So, For, Or, Nor
- Use appropriate words to denote time.
 - 📖 Once upon a time, Long ago, Later that day
- Dialogues should sound natural.
- Use the tense form consistently.
- Add some details of your own, but do not change the course of the story given in the outline.
- Use good introduction and conclusion to make your story interesting.
- Use simple language.
- Check for grammatical errors.
- Give it a suitable title based on the main character or the theme of the story.

Death at Bagdad

Once there lived a master and his slave. The master sent his slave to the market to buy provisions. He returned frightened for he had seen a woman in the market. She was Death herself and she had made a threatening gesture at him. The slave feared for his life and asked the master to lend him his horse since he wanted to escape death. The master obliged and let the slave go. The slave rode the horse all the way to Bagdad. The master then went to the market to investigate. He found Death there standing in the market. He approached her and asked her why she threatened his slave. Death calmly replied that she didn't threaten him. In fact, she was surprised to see him there since she had an appointment with him in Samarra later in the evening.



Sample 2

A cunning jackal wants to eat grapes on the other side of the river—asks a good-natured donkey to carry him to the other side—jackal sits on his back—they cross the river—the jackal has his fill—he decides to have some fun at the donkey’s expense—howls loudly—villagers gather—beat the donkey black and blue—the donkey jumps into water—jackal follows suit and jumps on his back—donkey demands to know jackal why he had to howl—jackal explains that he howls after a good meal—donkey says he too has a habit—after a good meal he does a backstroke—donkey turns over facing the sky—the jackal falls into the water—he almost drowns and painstakingly swims back to safety—the donkey succeeds in teaching him a lesson

Unusual Habits

Once upon a time, there lived a cunning jackal who had a reputation for exploiting other animals for his own benefit. One day he had a craving for juicy fruits. He wanted to eat the grapes that were grown on the other side of the river. He didn’t know how to swim, so he decided to seek somebody’s help. He asked a good-natured donkey to carry him to the other side. He told him that there were enough grapes for the two of them at the vineyard and they could relish all of it. The donkey was sceptical about the plan as he feared the villagers who maintained the vineyard. After reasoning with him for hours, the jackal managed to convince the reluctant donkey. He sat on the donkey’s back and the two crossed the river.

Once they were at the vineyard, the jackal and the donkey feasted on the ripe, succulent grapes. After the jackal had his fill, he decided to have some fun at the donkey’s expense. He howled loudly attracting the attention of the villagers and thereafter he hid amid the bushes. The villagers gathered at the vineyard armed with sticks and spotted the unsuspecting donkey eating the grapes. They chased him to the banks of the river and beat him black and blue. To save himself, he jumped into the water and started to swim homeward. The jackal who was hiding behind the bushes followed suit and jumped onto the donkey’s back in time.

On their way back, the donkey demanded to know why the jackal had to howl. The jackal explained that he always howled after a good meal for it was his way of expressing satisfaction. The donkey didn’t buy the jackal’s argument. He said that he too had a habit; after a good meal, he always did the backstroke. Before the jackal could react, the donkey turned over facing the sky. The jackal lost his balance and fell into the water. He almost drowned, but he painstakingly swam back to safety. In this way, the donkey succeeded in teaching him a lesson.

When the Opening Line is Provided

Sample 3

- In such cases, the first line of the story is given. Students are expected to use their imagination and their writing skills to create an interesting story.

'There was a lot of excitement in the air. The sound of crackers could be heard all around...'

Steps

- List the all possible things related to the starting line and establish the setting.
 - 📖 Diwali
 - 📖 India has won a match.
 - 📖 Somebody is getting married.
- Pick a theme that you find interesting.
 - 📖 Friendship
 - 📖 Sharing the joy of Diwali
- Plan how the events could unfold in the story.
 - 📖 The character wants to burst crackers.
 - 📖 He is unable to.
- Put the character in unusual situations in the story.
- Help the character come out of that situation.
- Arrest the reader's imagination.
- Do not reveal too much in the first sentences.
- Use humour wherever possible.
- Make sure the story is logical.
- Conclude the story by adding an element of surprise.
- Use simple sentences so that the chances of grammatical errors are reduced.
- Use the tense form consistently.
- Stick to simple past or simple present tense for the narrative.
- Stick to the word limit.
- Do not introduce multiple plots without logically concluding them.

There was a lot of excitement in the air. The sound of crackers could be heard all around. Manu rushed out in the hopes of catching a glimpse of the beautiful sight of the sparklers, lamps and crackers. A voice reprimanded him, "Manu! What did the doctor say? The fumes are bad for you. Go inside." Crestfallen, he watched his mother shut the door behind him. She added, "You stay here in this room till the ruckus stops." At that very moment, Manu heard a series of taps at his window. He opened it to find Raj at the other side. He had in his hands two unlit sparklers. Manu asked him curiously, "What are you doing here?" Raj replied, "Stick your hands out; I'll light you two sparklers." Manu did as he was told and put his hands outside the window. "Here, hold them," Raj said. Manu had a big smile on his face thinking about his best friend's sweet gesture. He made patterns in the air gleefully. Raj was happy to have made his friend laugh and smile again.



Sample 4

'As I lay in my bed last night...'

A Surreal Journey

As I lay in my bed last night after a busy day, my eyelids were getting heavier and heavier. The twinkling stars in the dark blue night sky looked as if they were beckoning me. Before I could completely close my eyes, a bizarre sound caught my attention. It sounded like someone was trying to tune a large radio. The eerie, cacophonous sounds were accompanied by unearthly lights in colours of red, blue, purple and orange. I sat up on my bed to take a closer look at a luminous object that was hovering outside my window. It was a large metallic craft shaped like an odd-looking saucer. Parts of the vehicle were covered in what seemed like thick reptilian skin. It was scaly and greenish. The lights around the craft were so bright that I found it difficult to stare at that thing without squinting. The trees and shrubs danced to the wind generated by its propellers. Suddenly I was blinded by a strong light and found myself being beamed up through the air. I grabbed onto my bed post but the strength of the force pulling me was far too strong for me to resist.

Soon I found my limbs go limp and I was now being pulled up into the mysterious craft. When I regained consciousness, I feel someone or something hovering over me. I kept my eyes closed partly because I wanted to play dead and partly because I didn't want to see whatever was in front of me. I felt a cold, clammy caress grazing my forehead. It felt like the digits of a coldblooded animal. When I slowly opened my eyes, I saw a frightening form in front of me. It had an elongated head with tentacles sticking out of it. It had a big shiny blob in the centre of its head in which I could see my own terrified face.

It extended a clammy hand-like protrusion as if in friendship.

I reluctantly extended my hand too. When its digit-like appendages grasped my own palm, I felt a rush of electric charge running through my body. In its shiny blob, I saw the light years it had travelled, the lands it had visited and the creatures it had seen. As if it wanted to share its experiences with me, it made me feel everything it had felt in the course of its journey through surreal places. When it let go of my hand, I saw a star-shaped sign imprinted inside my palm. It took me through the craft where others like itself were seen attending various operations and speaking in an odd language I couldn't follow. The craft was stationed at a point through which one could get a panoramic vantage of the Earth.

Suddenly the craft was flooded with a white light. I again felt myself being beamed out against my will. With a loud thud, I landed on my bed. Thankfully, the mattress broke my fall. I looked all around to make sure it was my bedroom. Slowly I drifted into sleep only to wake up the next morning. Convinced that I had the most surreal dream ever, I dragged myself to the bathroom. There I saw inside the palm of my right hand a star-shaped impression.

When the Closing Line is Provided

Sample 5

- In such cases, the concluding line of the story is given. Students are expected to use their imagination and their writing skills to create an interesting story.

‘... Ultimately, I won it as I was determined to achieve my goal.’

- Use your imagination and think in the reverse order of events.
- Understand the crisis.
 - 👉 May have obstacles in achieving the goal.
- Create a character.
 - 👉 An athlete
 - 👉 A student
 - 👉 An employee
- Now imagine all the possible ways in which the character may have resolved the crisis.
 - 👉 Worked hard
 - 👉 Cheated
 - 👉 Manipulated someone
- Provide a plausible background for the story.
- Arrest the reader’s imagination.
- Use humour.
- Make sure the story is logical.
- Use simple sentences so that the chances of grammatical errors are reduced.
- Use the tense form consistently.
- Stick to the simple past or the simple present tense for the narrative.
- Stick to the word limit.
- Do not introduce multiple plots without logically concluding them.
- Check for grammatical errors.
- Give it a suitable title based on the main character or the theme of the story.

A huge crowd had gathered near the main notice board. I peered over the heads of the students to read what was written on the bulletin board. It read

RUNNING RACE ON MONDAY! First Prize – Personal Computer

This seemed god-sent. It’s about time I had a computer. But I came from a humble family background and our family couldn’t afford luxuries such as computers. With no guidance or support, winning this race seemed like a difficult proposition. I was also up against the fastest runner in the school.

I planned everything and was determined to achieve my goals. My ambition fuelled my drive to quell any difficulties I may face. I practised every day, starting my day as early as 5 am. I maintained a stopwatch and tried to beat my previous records. Eventually, there was a vast improvement in my performance and I could beat all my friends at running. On the day of the race, I put all my energy and concentration into my performance and managed to beat even the fastest runner in the school. Having my own PC was no longer a distant dream now. Ultimately, I won it as I was determined to achieve my goal.

Sample 6

'...She learnt a valuable lesson as she tried to cover one lie with another.'

She craved for acceptance and admiration from everyone around her. She never divulged anything from her private life. Instead, she would elaborately construct stories to make her life seem extremely interesting. A few of her close friends knew about her penchant for fibbing and stretching the truth. Despite their efforts, she never mended her ways.

Once she was regaling a few people at a party with her 'inside stories' about people in the entertainment industry. She brazenly lied about connections and how she knew about the private lives of the rich and the famous. One person asked her how she knew so much. She said that her father worked as an assistant director to a leading Indian movie maker. Someone in the room asked her, "Which movie did he work on?" She named some movie which had apparently been the film maker's biggest hit.

The surprised man said, "In that case, he might know Mr Desai. He was the set designer!" My friend broke into a cold sweat, but being an accomplished liar who might have found herself in similar situations before, she easily found a way out of it. She said, "Of course I know him! He is a dear friend of my father. His daughter and I grew up together."

The man said, "Then you should have recognised me. I am Mr Desai and I am a chronic bachelor." Muffled laughter emanated from the room and everyone could see her sweating profusely and trying to mask her nervousness by taking large gulps of water from a bottle. She wiped her sweat and left the party in haste.

Her confidence as an accomplished liar was shattered as somebody beat her at her own game. She learnt a valuable lesson as she tried to cover one lie with another.

When a Picture is Provided

Sample 7

- In such cases, a picture is provided and the students are expected to assess it. After which they are supposed to write either an essay or a story based on the picture.



Steps

- Study the picture closely.
- List the people, animals or things that you can see.
 - 📖 Tiger
 - 📖 Tree
 - 📖 Jungle
- Identify the activity that is happening in the picture.
 - 📖 Sleeping
- Identify the attributes you see in the person/animal/thing in the picture.
 - 📖 Relaxed
 - 📖 Lazy
- Use your imagination and give names to these characters.
- Follow the usual steps for story writing.
- Use humour wherever possible.
- Use simple language to minimise grammatical errors.
- Make sure the story is logical.
- Use a consistent tense form.
- Narrate in either the present tense or the past tense.
- Stick to the word limit.
- Do not introduce multiple plots without concluding them.
- Check for errors.
- Give it a suitable title based on the main character or the theme of the story.

The Lazy Tiger

Once upon a time, there lived a tiger. His mother named him Mkali, which means fierce. But that was a misnomer because Mkali was a lazy little cat. Nothing in the jungle could excite him. His mother Jasiri was an expert hunter. She had single-handedly provided for the entire ambush once when food was scarce in the jungle. She had also taught her other children how to prey on hippopotamuses and how to tackle prey with antlers. She was very well respected in the Tiger community and had held the title of 'Tigress Extraordinaire'. The carnivores of the jungle sniggered when they spoke of her perpetually sleepy son. "How could he be born to Jasiri?" the Hyena Cheka said. Tiririka the python added, "That boy wouldn't swat a fly if it were to be sitting on his nose all day." Mkali was never bothered. He loved his life; lazing around the river all day, returning home for dinner, feasting on the prey his mother had painstakingly caught and then sleeping on the thickest branch of his favourite tree.

One day, the unthinkable happened. Jasiri had cornered a water buffalo and was preparing to strike it down in one swift move. Suddenly, the beast swung its head goring her grievously. Her den was at a distance, so she had to drag herself all the way. Mkali wondered why his mother didn't call him for supper that day. Once he entered the den, he saw his mother moaning in pain. She said, "Son, I think I will die. I don't know how you would feed yourself." Mkali's eyes welled up. He was aware of his prodigal ways, but he didn't want to let his mother die thinking that her son could not provide for himself. Something changed in him that day. He walked to a nearby pool and looked at his own reflection. He saw in himself a fierce tiger who had finally realised his life's purpose; he had to make his mother proud.

Mkali started providing for his ailing mother. He hunted small animals first. He then graduated to preying on larger animals such as sambars. He gathered medicinal herbs and ground them. Jasiri's wounds were very deep, but with Mkali's loving care, she could walk again. The other animals were dumbfounded by his metamorphosis. Jasiri, on the other hand, was proud that her son proved everyone wrong.

Sample 9



When Two Fight, the Third Gains

Once upon a time, there lived two boys Stuart and Pip. They were orphans who had taken to petty crimes. They made a living out of duping unsuspecting, rich people and running off with their money. Despite the treacherous nature of their occupation, Stuart and Pip were extremely loyal to each another. They used to divide the loot equally between the two and one wouldn't take a decision without consulting the other first.

There was a boy named Ritchie who like them had turned to crime for survival. But unlike Stuart and Pip, he operated alone and had grown jealous of their unity. Ritchie knew that he lacked the expertise of Stuart who could unlock any locker and the charm of Pip whose glib-tongued persuasion could fool anyone. But he did have a deep insight into human behaviour and was more artful than the two friends combined.

He once learnt that the two had managed to dupe a wealthy gentleman and had stolen his expensive pocket watch. The two were in a fix as to how to divide the watch since exchanging it for money at the jeweller's might land them in trouble. Taking the opportunity, Ritchie spoke to Pip. He said, "Stuart wanted to sell the watch to me. He told me to keep it a secret from you since he doesn't want you to take the credit for the theft. According to him, he had single-handedly stolen it." Pip was taken aback. He said, "But we stole it together. How can he double cross me?" Unbeknownst to Pip, Ritchie had fed the same lie to Stuart.

The two former friends started sparring publicly in the marketplace. In the heat of the argument, the two openly mentioned the pocket watch. The police were already on the lookout for the two boys. An officer who heard the two fight arrested them and took them away.

When the Title or Theme is Provided

Sample 9

Write an original story titled: Lost and Found

Steps

- Reflect on the title
- Imagine possible situations where the idea can be applicable:
 - 👉 Getting lost in a jungle
 - 👉 Losing something valuable
 - 👉 Friends/siblings separated at childhood reunite later
- Create characters and the plot as per the instructions

Lost and Found

In May 2013, Nakul, Rishab and I went to Misty Valley for our annual summer vacation. There we rented an old colonial style mansion for our stay. The locals tried to dissuade us by saying that unearthly mishaps have been known to happen there in the dead of the night. Nevertheless, we still decided to stay there. The mansion was situated atop a mountain and offered a panoramic view of the entire valley.

We reached there about 10 pm and caught a sight of the mansion drenched in moonlight. We were greeted at the door by a strange looking man who was the housekeeper. He and his assistant unloaded our luggage and took us to our rooms. At dinner, Karamchand, the housekeeper, had a few words for us, "After dinner, kindly retire to your rooms for sleep. I advise you not to loiter around this mansion at night: it is very risky." I was filled with a sense of curiosity about Karamchand's words.

Rishab said, "Let's stop dwelling on what he said and quietly go to sleep." But I wasn't convinced; I wanted to know the reason for the housekeeper's warning. My mind was abuzz with thoughts. After the two fell asleep, I tiptoed out of my room with a torch in my hand. I saw a huge bookshelf with a big book sticking out. As soon as I tried to push the book back in, the floor beneath my feet opened, and I went down a slide, kicking and screaming.

I realised that I was stuck in a labyrinth. Huge rats ran past my feet, and I was mortally afraid of being lost here forever. I broke into a sweat when I heard the rattling of chains and the sound of footsteps behind me. I prayed for my dear life and scampered through the endless maze. Awaiting a dreadful fate, I hid behind some old boxes.

In the morning, I was amazed to see the faces of my friends staring at me. I hugged them in happiness since I thought I would be lost here forever. Nakul said, "Good going champ! We notified the police when we couldn't find you. Little did we know that you would help them uncover Karamchand's illegal liquor den." I replied sheepishly, "Yeah, I had a hint. That's why I ventured out!"

Sample 10

Write an original story titled: Me and my big mouth!

Ever since I was a child, my folks and friends would comment on my talkative nature. I truly had the gift of the gab. Unlike my sister who is the reticent type, I had what people call 'a motor mouth'. It helped me win a lot of friends, but it had its pitfalls too. I am here to discuss a few instances where my garrulousness landed me in big trouble. They say when it comes to talking, less is always more. I had to learn it the hard way.

Once my best friend Aditi entrusted me with a big secret—she had failed in Math and the news about the results had to be kept away from her family. Given my reputation, why she chose to confide in me remains a mystery. Few days later, we had gathered at her place for dance practice and her mother started enquiring about our studies. I absent-mindedly told her that I scored decent marks in all subjects. She looked at me with a befuddled expression and said, "Aditi said that the results are yet to be declared." I looked at Aditi who had turned pale with fear of the impending catastrophe. In an attempt to salvage the situation, I decided to put some random words together to say, "Only those who passed in all subjects are given their results." My former best friend looked at me with an exasperated expression.

Another instance is when my sister and I went shopping. Being the chubby one in the family, she is very touchy about her weight. After having tried a particularly unflattering blouse, my sister turned to me for my opinion. Aware of what my frankness could unleash, I tried my hand at diplomacy. I said, "Picking a darker shade is a good idea since it conceals your upper-body flab." My sister turned a bright shade of red and stormed out of the store in a huff. I smacked my forehead in dismay as my infamous mouth had struck again!

These two instances attest to the fact that speaking too much can cause more harm than good. It is always better to think before speaking and to measure one's words wisely.