



Preparing Your Story:

A Step-by-Step Guide to Sharing Your “Why”

A meaningful presentation begins with understanding your audience and building a story that is authentic, engaging, and purposeful. Use the steps below to organize your thoughts and prepare your speech.

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Step 1: Know Your Audience

Before writing your speech, consider who will be listening.

Ask yourself:

- Who is my audience member (researchers, clinicians, care partners, community members, students)?
- What do they already know about dementia?
- What do I want them to learn, feel, or do after hearing my story?
- What language and examples will resonate with them?
- Are there terms or acronyms I should explain or avoid?

Goal: Tailor your message so it is meaningful, consultative, and easy to understand.

Step 2: Introduce Yourself

Begin by helping your audience get to know you as a person.

Include:

- Your name
- Where you are from
- Your personal background and origins
- A brief description of who you are beyond your connection to dementia

Tip: Keep this section brief and conversational to establish approachability and build rapport.

Step 3: Share Your Connection to Dementia

Explain how dementia has personally impacted your life.

Consider discussing:

- Your lived experience
- Your role (person living with dementia/MCI or at risk, care partner, family member, advocate)
- How these experiences have shaped your perspective

Goal: Help the audience understand why this topic is personally meaningful to you.

Step 4: Tell Your Journey

Take your audience through the experience that brought you to where you are today.

Include:

- Key moments or turning points
- Challenges you faced
- Sources of strength and support
- What did not work or barriers you encountered
- Lessons you learned along the way

Reminder: your audience often connects more deeply with your journey than facts alone.

Step 5: Discuss Your Experience with Research

Describe your experiences participating in or collaborating on research.

You may want to address:

- How you become involved
 - Positive experiences
 - Challenges or opportunities for improvement
 - How working with researchers has influenced your perspective
 - The values of including lived experience in research
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Step 6: Explain Why You Advocate

Help your audience understand what motivates your work.

Share:

- Why advocacy matters to you
- What continues to inspire you
- How your experiences have influenced your commitment to improving dementia care and research
- The impact you hope to make

Tip: This is your opportunity to share your “why”

Step 7: Share Your Message to Researchers

Offer practical insights from the perspective of someone with lived experience.

Consider discussing:

- What researchers should be especially mindful of when engaging participants and communities
 - What respectful, person-centered engagement looks like
 - How participants and researchers can work as true partners
 - Best practices that foster trust, inclusion, and meaningful collaboration
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Step 8: Share Your Vision for the Future

Conclude by looking ahead.

Reflect on:

- What meaningful, respectful, and impactful dementia research looks like to you
- Accomplishments you have seen and appreciate
- What you hope future research will prioritize
- Areas where additional progress is needed
- How researchers can continue improving the research process and participant experience

Tip: End with a hopeful message that inspires your audience to take action.

Final Preparation Tips

Before delivering your speech:

- Practice aloud several times.
 - Aim to tell a story rather than read a script.
 - Keep your message authentic and personal.
 - Use pauses to emphasize important points.
 - Speak at a comfortable pace.
 - Make eye contact when possible.
 - Remember that your lived experience is valuable, there is no one else who can tell your story the way you can.
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Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Finish

- What is the one message I want my audience to remember?
- Did I explain why this topic matters to me?
- Did I include specific stories or examples?
- Did I offer hope, insight, or a call to action?
- Will my audience leave with a better understanding of the importance of partnering with people with lived experience in dementia research?

Reminder: Facts inform, and stories inspire. Your personal experiences have the power to deepen understanding, influence research practices, and create lasting change.

Note: Give Yourself Grace and Stay Flexible

Flexibility is key. Not every session will go exactly as planned, and sometimes you may need to shorten or adjust your content to stay on the agenda. Give yourself, attendees, and the organizers grace when things shift unexpectedly. Trust yourself to adapt, stay present, and focus on what matters most. A successful session isn't about following the plan perfectly, it's about being responsive, flexible, and creating a meaningful experience for those in attendance.