# **Telling Stories: Sequencing for ESL Students**

## Learn how to organize your phrases with sequence writing exercises

## *Source:* [*https://www.thoughtco.com/telling-stories-sequencing-your-ideas-1210770*](https://www.thoughtco.com/telling-stories-sequencing-your-ideas-1210770)



Telling stories is common in any [language](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-conversation-analysis-ca-p2-1689924). Think of all the situations in which you might tell a story in everyday life:

* Talking about last weekend to a friend.
* Giving details about something that happened during a job interview.
* Relating information about your family to your children.
* Telling colleagues about what happened on a business trip.

In each of these situations—and many others—you provide information about something that happened in the past. To help your audience understand your stories, you need to link this information from the past together. One of the most important ways to link ideas is to sequence them. The passages below are good examples of sequenced ideas. Read the examples and then measure your understanding with a quiz. The answers are at the bottom.

**EXAMPLE PASSAGE: A Conference in Chicago**

**Last week,** I visited Chicago to attend a business conference. **While I was there**, I decided to visit the Art Institute of Chicago. **To start off,** my flight was delayed. **Next,** the airline lost my luggage, so I had to wait for two hours at the airport while they tracked it down. **Unexpectedly,** the luggage had been set aside and forgotten.

**As soon as** they found my luggage, I found a taxi and rode into town. **During** the ride into town, the driver told me about his last visit to the Art Institute. **After** I had arrived safely, everything began to go smoothly. The business conference was very interesting, and I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to the institute. **Finally**, I caught my flight back to Seattle.

Luckily, everything went smoothly. **I arrived** home just in time to kiss my daughter goodnight.

**Sequencing Steps**

Sequencing refers to the order in which events happened. Sequencing is often made easier by the use of transition words. Following are some of the most common words and expressions used to sequence when writing or speaking.

**Beginning your story**

Create the beginning of your story with these expressions. Use a comma after the introductory phrase.

* First of all,
* To start off with,
* Initially,
* To begin with,

Examples of these beginning phrases in use include:

* To begin with, I began my education in London.
* First of all, I opened the cupboard.
* To start off with, we decided our destination was New York.
* Initially, I thought it was a bad idea.

**Continuing the story**

You can continue the story with the following expressions, or use a time clause beginning with "as soon as" or "after." When using a time clause, use the [past simple](https://www.thoughtco.com/esl-simple-past-tips-and-quiz-4176634) after the time expression, such as:

* Then,
* After that,
* Next,
* As soon as / When + full clause,
* ...but then
* Immediately,

Examples of using these continuing phrases in a story include:

* Then, I started to get worried.
* After that, we knew that there would be no problem!
* Next, we decided on our strategy.
* As soon as we arrived, we unpacked our bags.
* We were sure everything was ready, but then we discovered some unexpected problems.
* Immediately, I telephoned my friend Tom.

**Interruptions and Adding New Elements to the Story**

You can use the following expressions to add suspense to your story:

* Suddenly,
* Unexpectedly,

Examples of using these interrupting phrases or turning to a new element include:

* Suddenly, a child burst into the room with a note for Ms. Smith.
* Unexpectedly, the people in the room didn't agree with the mayor.

**Ending the Story**

Mark the end of your story with these introductory phrases:

* Finally,
* In the end,
* Eventually,

Examples of using these ending words in a story include:

* Finally, I flew to London for my meeting with Jack.
* In the end, he decided to postpone the project.
* Eventually, we became tired and returned home.

When you tell stories, you will also need to give reasons for actions. Review tips on [linking your ideas](https://www.thoughtco.com/discourse-markers-linking-your-ideas-1208952) and [providing reasons for your actions](https://www.thoughtco.com/using-adverb-clauses-with-time-expressions-1210680) to help you understand how to do so.

**Events Occurring at the Same Time**

The use of "while" and "as" introduce a [dependent clause](https://www.thoughtco.com/dependent-clause-grammar-1690437) and require an [independent clause](https://www.thoughtco.com/independent-clause-grammar-1691159) to complete your sentence. "During" is used with a noun, noun phrase, or [noun clause](https://www.thoughtco.com/noun-clause-1210726) and does not require a subject and object. The construction for this kind of sentence is:

* While / As + subject + verb + dependent clause or independent clause + while / as + subject + verb

An example of using "while" in a sentence is:

* While I was giving the presentation, a member of the audience asked an interesting question.
* Jennifer told her story as I prepared dinner.

The construction for using "during" in a sentence is:

* During + noun (noun clause)

Examples of using "during" in a sentence include:

* During the meeting, Jack came over and asked me a few questions.
* We explored a number of approaches during the presentation.

**Test Your Knowledge!**

Provide an appropriate sequencing word to fill in the blanks. The answers follow the quiz.

My friend and I visited Rome last summer. (1) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, we flew from New York to Rome in first class. It was fantastic! (2) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ we arrived in Rome, we (3) \_\_\_\_\_\_ went to the hotel and took a long nap. (4) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, we went out to find a great restaurant for dinner. (5) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, a scooter appeared out of nowhere and almost hit me! The rest of the trip had no surprises. (6) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, we began to explore Rome. (7) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the afternoons, we visited ruins and museums. At night, we hit the clubs and wandered the streets. One night, (8) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I was getting some ice cream, I saw an old friend from high school. Imagine that! (9) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, we caught our flight back to New York. We were happy and ready to begin work again.

**Multiple answers are possible for some of the blanks:**

1. First of all / To start off with / Initially / To begin with
2. As soon as / When
3. immediately
4. Then / After that / Next
5. Suddenly / Unexpectedly
6. Then / After that / Next
7. During
8. While / As
9. Finally / In the end / Eventually