

A Guide to Unscripted Speaking

RIT

Expressive
Communication
Center

8 strategies for impromptu speeches,
post-presentation Q&A, and interviews

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1 Pause more

This overlooked communication tool is often the most transformative. Without pauses, your ideas blur together.

Pause for 2–3 seconds to ground yourself and think through your response before you speak. Then, when you finish an idea, pause instead of filling the silence with an “um,” “like,” or “so,” or stringing ideas together without a break. A pause between thoughts gives the listener a moment to absorb what you just said, and gives you a moment to find what’s next.

Strategic, intentional pausing makes you appear more confident and competent by demonstrating a command of your material. Pausing also allows the listener to comprehend, process, and engage with the information.

Example interview question: “What’s your biggest weakness?”

Rambling

“I guess, um, I think maybe I’d say like time management is something, or maybe it’s more like prioritization, because sometimes I take on too much and then everything kind of piles up and I’m not always sure what to tackle first, so that’s probably it, I think.”

Declarative

“My biggest weakness is prioritization. When I take on multiple projects, I sometimes struggle to sequence them effectively. I’ve started using a simple triage system, urgent, important, and later, to sort tasks the moment they land. It’s made a real difference.”

Unscripted doesn't mean unprepared.

2 Paraphrase the question

In any Q&A setting, it can help to restate the question briefly before you answer. This does four things: 1) you confirm you got the question right, 2) you show the person you were listening, 3) it keeps everyone else in the room following along, and 4) it buys you time to think.

3 Slow down to highlight

Slowing down acts like a verbal highlighter. When you slow your pace on a key phrase sentence, it signals to the listener that this part matters. Save it for the moments you most want remembered.

4 Make declarative statements

Declarative statements communicate clarity and conviction. Rambling happens when your speaking outruns your thinking. Use short, complete sentences with a full stop.

Finish one thought before starting the next. Start a thought → finish a thought → pause → move to the next idea. If you jump between ideas mid-sentence, your listener has to mentally chase you. As a result, you risk sounding unsure and scattered, even when your ideas aren’t.

5

Project your voice

Don't shout, but speak at a healthy volume. It increases your presence and transfers your energy to the listener. This isn't just about being heard; it's about being felt. When your voice is small, your ideas can be perceived as small too.

If you communicate through sign, an interpreter, or an AAC device, the same principle applies to your physical presence: clear, deliberate signing space and confident posture carry energy the same way volume does. Don't shrink yourself to take up less room.

6

Use imagery

An analogy is a shortcut to understanding. Take something complex and compare it to something familiar. Imagery makes your point stick, makes a complex idea simple, and makes you more relatable.

Example: Explaining a process improvement

"It's like decluttering a closet. Before, everything was crammed in wherever it fit. Now there's a system, so you can find what you need without digging through everything else."

7

Practice

List the topics or questions you're likely to face and practice your responses out loud. This will often reveal a gap in your knowledge before it costs you in the real moment. After the real thing, write down whatever caught you off guard and add it to your list for next time.

Rehearsing with a friend or an ECC consultant simulates the pressure of the moment in a way solo practice can't. You also get feedback you can't generate on your own. It's one of the most effective ways to calm speaking nerves.



Make an appointment to practice unscripted speaking with an ECC peer consultant!

Scan or visit rit.edu/ecc

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Use a framework

Reach for a framework when the question is complex or multi-part, when it's unexpected or hostile, or when the answer could easily run long without something to contain it.

Sometimes, though, the right move is just answering directly. Forcing a structure onto a simple question can make it worse.



PREP: Point, Reason, Example, Point

State your answer. Give one reason. Give one example. Restate.

Example: "Why should we hire you for this co-op?"

"I'd be a strong fit because I can turn ambiguous problems into a clear plan. Last semester our team project had no defined scope. I built a timeline and task breakdown that got us organized in a week. That's the structure I'd bring to this role."



Acknowledge, Answer, Anchor

Acknowledge the question briefly. Give your answer. Anchor back to your larger point.

Example from Q&A: "Isn't your argument missing the counterpoint about cost?"

"That's fair to flag. Cost matters, but the data shows the long-term savings outweigh the upfront investment within two years. The core point stands that this is worth the initial cost."



Bridge: Acknowledge, Reframe, Redirect

For questions outside your scope, hostile, or things you genuinely don't know.

Example from interview: "What do you know about our company's market share in Southeast Asia?"

"I don't have exact numbers memorized, but what I can tell you is I researched your recent expansion announcements and I'm genuinely excited about the growth trajectory there. I'd love to learn more."