



PERSONAL SCRIPTS - QUICK GUIDE

At work, and especially when you are in a position of authority, difficult or tense situations arise and require your response. These guidelines will help you construct a series of “go-to” phrases, or personal scripts, to prepare for handling them. When you have prepared and practiced some phrases in advance, you can use your attention and cognitive effort in the moment for processing what is happening and deciding on a course of action. With ready access to words you have considered in advance, you will be more articulate and communicate more clearly. These guidelines are primarily for conversations concerning ongoing issues, when outcomes are still uncertain.

1) *Preparation is key:*

Some of the most useful phrases to have on hand are those that buy some time to think when an unexpected issue or situation arises without warning. Your decisions will be more robust and respected when you are ready to consider alternative explanations, especially that you might be wrong. Assess your goals and match your actions to your goals. Stay as calm as you can.

- “I am concerned and would like to discuss this matter with you to assure I am appreciating your perspective before I come to a conclusion. Can you help me understand ...”
- “You have provided new information of which I was not aware. I need to check with others affected and will do that and then get back to you.”
- “I would like to reflect so that I can give you a thoughtful answer. Can I come back to you in twenty minutes?”
- “This afternoon is already heavily booked and I would like to give this issue proper consideration. I will set aside time tomorrow; will it work to speak then?”

2) *If you are initiating the conversation, open by acknowledging the other person:*

- “You have a great deal of experience with our Center and I would like to understand more about the interaction with Sanjay.”
- “As you asked, I have reviewed and carefully considered the evaluation that concerns you.”
- “My interest is in your success here. It is my duty to evaluate your performance and to provide you with clear feedback so you know how others will assess your performance, so you can focus your efforts and improve your dossier.”

3) *Leave time and conversational openings for the other person to respond:*

- “I’d like to explain my concerns and then I hope you will be willing to share your reactions with me.”
- “I noticed [some specific event] and seek to understand your assessment of it.”

4) *Use neutral language to describe the situation, and soften your introductory phrases to leave room for a misunderstanding:*

- “I’d like to understand more about what happened...”
- “I might have misunderstood. Could you explain the policy to me again?”
- “Maybe I’m confused. As I read the policy, it would lead to a different outcome in this situation. Could you point me to the element that is supporting your conclusion?”
- “The guidance the compliance staff provided seem to suggest a different outcome. Is that not applicable in this situation?”





5) Use **low-key language**. Strip all accusatory, blaming or angry words out of anything you say. Avoid adjectives. Use neutral descriptors and specific action words:

- Try “You left the meeting” instead of “you stormed out of the meeting.”
- “She was unable to speak” instead of “she was upset/angry/beside herself.”
- “This report indicates that you were late on three occasions last week” instead of “Your consistently careless tardiness...”

6) Stay **factual**; do not infer cause or connection:

- “You stated / I heard you say...”
- “I saw / noticed / observed ...”
- “First [A] happened, then [B] happened ...”

7) Use **“I” not “You”** messages:

- “I’m confused ...”
- “I’m concerned ...”
- “I wonder ...?”

8) Ask **questions**, do not make charges:

- “Why do we do it this way?”
- “Who else does it this way?”
- “How will this affect ...?”
- “Have I understood properly?”
- “Is there someone who could help me understand?”
- “Did I receive a copy of that? My records do not show receipt.”

9) **Thank** the other person for listening, for reflecting on the situation with you, for making recommendations and for taking time to help you find an answer to your question.

10) If **followup** is desirable or required, agree on a time, place and method.

A note about difficult conversations when you must convey unwelcome news:

When you are providing a final response, it becomes especially important to prepare and practice words that you have tried out with a trusted confidant to assure they convey the message you seek to communicate. Such words must close the matter unequivocally, no matter how uncomfortable it may be to convey that message.

- “There is no appeal of this decision.”
- “After consideration, your request is denied.”

