

Delivering a Briefing: Navigating the Unexpected



This job aid provides five tips on how to tackle briefings that do not go as planned.



Pause and take a breath

- **Do not fear silence.** The pause might feel lengthy for you, but for your audience is barely noticeable.
- Pausing and breathing can help regulate the nervous system. It creates a bit of space to gather your thoughts and makes it easier for you to respond intentionally rather than blurting out the first thing that pops into your mind.



Prepare for the unexpected

- The more important the briefing, the more important it is to **have a contingency plan.**
- Identify one or two possible scenarios that would be most stressful for you (For example having your presentation cut short) and imagine how you would respond. This can reduce stress and increase your confidence. However, avoid spending precious time and energy imagining every worst-case scenario.



Remain open and curious

- Audience interruptions and questions can be frustrating, especially when you have developed an outline and are trying to follow it. **Try to avoid becoming defensive** by reminding yourself that the briefing is for your audience.
- While unprompted questions may feel like they are challenging your point of view, try to think of them instead as expressions of engagement and interest, and use them as an opportunity to demonstrate your expertise and your flexibility.



Stay present

- When things do not go well, it's easy to start disengaging from your content and stop focusing on the briefing. When you realize your thoughts are wandering, try to draw yourself back to the present moment.
- Active listening can also help you stay present and is a powerful technique for effective communication.
- You might start criticizing yourself and thinking that the briefing is not going as planned. Whether that is true or not, there will be plenty of time to reflect on the experience after you finish. In other words, **don't start second-guessing yourself in the middle of the briefing.**



Follow up

- If you do not have the answer to a question, do not make it up—follow up!
- Be honest that you will need to do some research and promise to **come back with an answer in a timely fashion**, and make sure you do.



Related resources

Online courses

- [By Design Online: Using Visuals and Narratives to Build Better Decks \(TRN120\)](#)
- [Being Brief: Planning and Delivering a Successful Briefing \(TRN152\)](#)
- [Seeking a Decision from Executives in Two Minutes or Less \(TRN222\)](#)

Online self-pace course

- [Writing Briefing Notes \(TRN118\)](#)

Job aids

- [Delivering a Briefing: Creating an Outline \(TRN1-J27\)](#)
- [Facilitation Essentials: Active Listening \(TRN1-J02\)](#)