

SEVEN PRACTICE RUNS

Use this exercise to:

- Get ready for specific talks or interviews
- Become more improvisational
- Generate content and language
- Guard against a “canned” and over-rehearsed style

The following Practice Runs ask you to approach your preparation in a variety of ways.

The Exercise:

The more ways you practice your story, the more improvisational and confident you will be. Record your practice runs and make notes, or work with a partner.

Practice Run 1: What you need to know

- Imagine your audience before you. Sit or stand comfortably, set a timer for 3 minutes, and start speaking. The theme of this free-telling is “Why it’s important for you to hear my experience.”
- Keep talking for the full 3 minutes. Use one of these phrases to begin, and return to it if you get stuck:
 - “It’s important for you to hear my experience because....”
 - “Here’s how my experience relates to you....”
 - “I think you may be surprised to know this about my experience....”

Practice Run 2: Speak the Start

- If preparing for a presentation, practice just the first 30 seconds. Practice sitting or standing as you will at the start. Think about what happens right before you speak. Concentrate on starting strong.
- If preparing for an interview, practice your very first answer. Imagine the interviewer asks you an open-ended question: “What happened?”

Practice Run 3: Speak the Finish

- If preparing for a presentation, practice just the last 30 seconds. Practice sitting or standing as you will at the end of your talk. Think about what happens afterwards. Concentrate on ending strong.
- If preparing for an interview, practice your last answer. Imagine the interviewer says, “We only have 30 seconds left. Is there anything else you want our audience to know?”

Practice Run 4: Talk the Structure

- Focus on the structure of your story or presentation, or the key messages you will stress in your interview. Practice speaking that structure, for example:
- “I begin with the startling statistic, then explain why I’m here today. I preview my key messages, then transition to my story...”
- “The three key messages I’m going to return to in the interview are...”

Practice Run 5: Tarzan-ing

- Think about how you’ve chosen to tell your story and the order in which you’ll tell the events or episodes. Focus on the *transitions* between moments or events. Practice just the transitions (like Tarzan, swinging from vine to vine).
- If preparing for a talk or presentation, think of the structure. Focus on the transitions between the intro, body, and conclusion and practice just those transitions.
- This is a particularly useful practice run if you’re working with visual aids. Practice just the transitions from visual to visual.

Practice Run 6: Soft Ball

- If preparing for an interview, write a list of questions you’re hoping the reporter will ask you. Make them open-ended questions (“What happened?”) or directly related to your advocacy goal (“Why is this important?” “What do you want people to do?”).
- Have a partner ask you the questions, or make an audio-recording of them and practice responding to them while alone. Practice multiple responses.

Practice Run 7: Hard Ball

- If preparing for an interview, write a list of questions you’re hoping the reporter doesn’t ask you. Think of questions that would take the interview in the wrong direction or directly challenge your advocacy.
- Have a partner ask you the question, or make an audio-recording of the questions and practice responding while alone. Practice multiple responses.