

## How to say yes, no and don't know

### Say yes

Saying 'yes' stretches your skills and helps you uncover hidden potential

👉 when you feel like you're stuck or stalling

### Say no

Saying 'no' allows you to focus on your priorities and avoid being pulled in different directions

👉 when you feel overwhelmed, busy, or need to prioritise

### Say don't know

Saying 'don't know' gives you time to think and stops confidence gremlins from getting in your way

👉 when you genuinely don't know the answer or feel uncertain

### Coach yourself question

Where does repetition in your role result in complacency that could affect your career?



## Ideas for action



### For saying 'yes'

#### 1. Use 'yes if'

Sounds like:

👉 Yes If + someone else

*"I'd like to get involved if I could work alongside someone from HR"*

👉 Yes If + timebound

*"Happy to volunteer for this project if we review it in a month's time"*

👉 Yes If + something stops

*"Happy to get involved if I can pause this project in the meantime."*

#### 2. Use 'yes because'

Sounds like:

👉 *"Yes to taking part in that project because it will help me to (learn / share / grow / connect)"*

### For saying 'no'

#### 1. Fast filter

👉 Do I understand the ask?  
(*what, when, why*)

👉 Do I believe we should do this?

👉 Am I the right/only person?

👉 Do I have time to make this happen?

#### 2. Offer an alternative

Sounds like:

👉 *"No – I can't do that meeting, but I can send you a voicenote instead"*

👉 *"No – I can't work on that project, but I can send insights and links"*

#### 3. Present your priorities

Let people know why you need to say no by explaining a priority you are working on that you're proud of.

### For saying 'don't know'

#### 1. Ask for help

Sounds like:

👉 *"I'm not sure who to involve in this project, who would you recommend I talk to so I can learn more?"*

👉 *"I'm not clear what success looks like for this piece of work, what have you seen work well before?"*

#### 2. Say it a different way

Sounds like:

👉 *"It's an area I'm learning more about"*

👉 *"Let me double check the details and come back to you"*

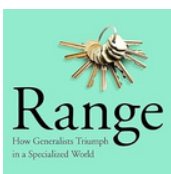
#### 3. Talk it through

Sounds like:

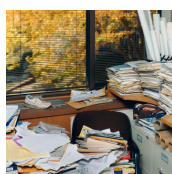
👉 *"What do you think about..."*

👉 *"How would you build on..."*

## Recommended resources



**Range: How Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World**  
by David Epstein



Read Cal Newport's essay in [The New Yorker](#) administrative overheads and setting boundaries



Helen and Sarah share more ideas for action for saying no in episode #106 of Squiggly Careers.