

Ericksonian Language Patterns

The patterns, with one live example of each. Section Two of the manual teaches them in full.

Pacing and leading	Say what is already true, then add what you want	<i>"You're sitting there... hearing my voice... and you can begin to relax."</i>
and	Joins without claiming cause; hides the seams	<i>"...and your hands are heavy... and your breathing slows..."</i>
as / while	Links in time so one seems to bring the other	<i>"As you listen to my voice, you can relax more deeply."</i>
because	States a cause; strongest, so use it sparingly	<i>"Because you're breathing so slowly, your body is letting go."</i>
Time presupposition	Assumes the change; questions only the timing	<i>"Before you go into a deep trance, take a breath."</i>
Awareness presupposition	Assumes the change; questions only the noticing	<i>"You may notice how heavy your arms have become."</i>
Ordinal presupposition	A first implies a second	<i>"The first thing you'll feel is the warmth in your hands."</i>
Adverb presupposition	Not whether, but how	<i>"I wonder how deeply you'll relax."</i>
Change-of-state	Implies a process already in motion	<i>"You can begin to feel more confident."</i>
Embedded command	A short command hidden in a longer sentence, marked by voice	<i>"I don't know exactly when you'll begin to relax... and it doesn't matter."</i>
Simple double bind	Two options, both of which are yes	<i>"Eyes open or closed?" "Right hand first, or left?"</i>
Conscious–unconscious bind	Gives the critic a job elsewhere	<i>"Your conscious mind may listen, while your unconscious does something useful."</i>
"I don't know whether"	The workhorse bind	<i>"I don't know whether you'll go deeper on the in-breath or the out."</i>
Negative command	The mind must picture the thing to avoid it	<i>"Don't relax too quickly."</i>
"You don't have to"	Removes pressure; the command remains	<i>"You don't have to relax right away."</i>
Permissive verbs	An offer, not a demand — can, could, may, allow, let	<i>"You can let your eyes close."</i>
Covering all possibilities	Every response is claimed in advance as success	<i>"Lighter... or heavier... or warmer... and any of those is exactly right."</i>
Nominalizations	Process words the client fills in themselves	<i>comfort, relaxation, learning, change, healing, freedom</i>
Unspecified verbs	Leaves the how to them	<i>"You can experience this in your own way."</i>
Tag question	Invites agreement; softens a statement	<i>"It's easy, isn't it?"</i>
Lost performative	A judgment with the judge removed	<i>"It's good to know the body can heal itself."</i>
Quotes	Any suggestion, put in someone else's mouth	<i>"An old teacher of mine used to say, very quietly, let go of that fear."</i>
Interspersal	Marked words carry a second message under the story	<i>A garden that takes its time... roots deep... let it grow...</i>
Utilization	Whatever happens becomes part of the trance	<i>"And even the sound of that truck... fading... can take you deeper."</i>
Ambiguity	Two meanings at once — use only when natural	<i>"As you hear my voice, you can be here, fully."</i>