

The Milton Model: Five Patterns

Language that leaves room, so the listener supplies the content

The one-line difference. The Meta Model asks for specifics, to recover what a sentence left out. The Milton Model leaves things out on purpose, so the listener fills the gap from their own experience. Say what is true, then leave room.

Five patterns

Pattern	Sounds like	What it does
Pacing and leading with truisms	"You're listening, you're sitting somewhere, and you may be noticing..."	Say what is verifiably true, then lead.
Artful vagueness	"A sense of ease." "Something you've learned." "Begin to notice."	Deletions, unspecified verbs and nominalisations, used on purpose.
Presuppositions	"As you become aware of how easily this can happen..."	Presupposes that it can happen.
Embedded commands	"You can feel ready to decide."	A suggestion inside a larger sentence, marked by tone.
Double binds	"Would you rather start this week or next?"	Two options that both move forward. Use only when both are good for them.

Specific or vague? Choose on purpose

- Ask for detail when you need facts: "Ready for what, specifically?"
- Leave room when you want the person to find their own answer.
- If they say "what do you mean?", you left too much room. Add one concrete anchor and carry on.

Use what they bring

Erickson's principle of utilisation: use whatever the person brings, including their words, behaviour and resistance. "I need to think about it" becomes: "Good, and as you think about it, you may notice which parts already feel right."

The permission test

1. Is this for their outcome?
2. Would I say it if they could hear my reasons?
3. Have they said yes to this kind of conversation?

If it needs hiding, do not use it.

What is known. The Milton Model is Bandler and Grinder's description of patterns in Milton H. Erickson's language (1975). It is not the whole of Erickson's work. Research on the model itself is thin. Hypnosis here means focused attention and responsiveness, in the waking state. Nothing in this handout asks anyone to close their eyes.

Try it now. Think of a real situation where you would like someone to find their own answer. Write three sentences: two truisms you can verify, and one open lead with room in it.

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Bandler, R. and Grinder, J. (1975) Patterns of the Hypnotic Techniques of Milton H. Erickson, M.D., Vol. I. Meta Publications. Witkowski, T. (2010) Polish Psychological Bulletin, 41(2), pp. 58-66.

YOUR NEXT STEP

NLP: Word Patterns That Hold a Room for an Hour

Tuesday 20 October 2026, 7:00 to 10:00 PM EDT, live on Google Meet, 20 seats. A practice class: you practise each skill twice with a partner and get feedback. Tickets from \$47.

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