

The SME Situation Guide

Say this, Not That

When your SME does *THAT* thing. Here's what to do about it.

If Your SME Says or Does This...	Then You Should Do This...	Why It Works
<i>"I don't have time for this right now."</i>	Acknowledge it directly: "I totally get it. I'll keep this to 20 minutes max and come prepped so you don't have to repeat yourself." Then follow through. Every. Single. Time.	Respect = trust. Trust = cooperation.
<i>"Just use the training we did last time."</i>	Ask: "Can you walk me through what was most useful from that? I want to build on what already worked." Then gently surface whether that old content still applies.	Validates their effort without trapping you in outdated content.
<i>Keeps adding more content to every meeting</i>	Redirect with learner impact: "This is great. Let's flag this as 'nice to know' versus what they absolutely need on Day 1." Use a simple two-column doc: Need to Know vs. Nice to Know.	Gives them a way to contribute without overwhelming the course.
<i>Gives vague answers like "it depends" to everything</i>	Ask for a specific scenario: "Tell me about the last time a new employee got this wrong — what happened?" Specificity unlocks real content.	Stories are the goldmine. Abstractions are the maze.
<i>Dismisses the training as "not my job"</i>	Connect it to their pain point: "When your team has to re-explain this 10 times, that's time you're losing. This training takes that off your plate." Make the ROI personal.	People support what benefits them.
<i>Rewrites your draft entirely in review</i>	Before next draft, schedule a 15-minute alignment call: "I want to make sure I'm capturing your voice. Can we go through your changes together?" Then clarify what they want vs. what learners need.	Prevents the endless rewrite cycle.

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<i>"The learners should already know this."</i>	Ask: "What do you see happen when they don't? Can we address that gap here?" Then let the data do the talking: survey results, help desk tickets, error rates.	Shifts the conversation from assumption to evidence.
<i>Goes on long tangents during meetings</i>	Listen for the gem in the ramble, there's usually one. Then say: "That example you gave about [X]. Can we capture that? That's exactly the kind of thing learners need." Redirect with appreciation.	SMEs often bury the best content in the story.
<i>Ghosts you after the kickoff meeting</i>	Send a low-effort check-in: a single question via email or chat, not a meeting invite. Something like: "Quick one. Can you confirm if [X] is still current policy?" Easy to answer, keeps the relationship warm.	Reduces friction without making them feel hounded.
<i>"I reviewed it. Looks fine."</i>	Push gently: "Glad to hear it! Any specifics that stood out as great examples? I want to make sure the examples feel realistic to your team." You need substance, not a rubber stamp.	A superficial review = a content liability later.
<i>Insists on including every exception and edge case</i>	Validate, then scope: "These are important. Can we note them as a job aid or reference doc so the core training stays focused on the 80% scenario?" Offer them an appendix.	Gives exceptions a home without cluttering the main experience.
<i>Questions your instructional decisions openly</i>	Welcome it. Say: "Tell me more about your concern. What outcome are you worried about?" Then explain your reasoning in plain language tied to learner performance, not methodology.	Defensive IDs lose SMEs. Confident, curious IDs keep them.