

# ClearSpeech

## Reducing fillers like... *like* and *um* and *uh*

The odd filler word is OK. Yes, really. There are a few hyper-sensitive people (usually public speaking coaches :-)) who notice filler words and cringe, but most normal people don't notice. Just about everyone uses filler words occasionally. About one out of 15 or 20 words that people utter is an *um* or other filler word. However, too many filler words do reduce the credibility of the speaker. And if your fillers create the impression that you are *struggling* to find the next thing to say that is a definite problem

### How to Reduce Filler Words

So, if you do really use too many filler words what should you do?

Conventional advice is ineffective.

Conventional advice is to first become aware of your fillers:

Some experts like to suggest you put tiny "um" and "ah" stickers on your computer or cell phone to remind you to be listening.

No. This will only make you cringe every time you um.

The second piece of conventional advice is to insert a pause and learn to enjoy the power of silence. There's some truth to this: good speakers enjoy their silence. They take patience between points to let them sit. And when lost allow themselves a few moments of silence to sort things out in their own mind. If you notice when a speaker is silent they draw in more power from the room, like a wave going out before it comes back in.

I agree that pausing and silence are immensely powerful. And many of us simply speak too quickly. But silence can create a vacuum. And by the time you think to yourself I must pause and be silent, you will have um'ed. Trying to insert a pause is not substantially different from trying to stop saying um. It's difficult to do.

Focus on Chunking.

To be effective at stopping the habit you have to focus on something else – something positive that you can do, as an alternative to using a filler word. That alternative is chunking. Chunking is talking in short chunks of words with breaks in between the chunks. When you chunk you get into a rhythm: burst of words/break/burst of words/break....Focus on that rhythm and your um's will go. Where you divide your chunks is important and needs to be aligned with the meaning of what you are saying. If all your chunks are exactly the same length, it will be as annoying as multiple um's. You'll need to practice chunking. To begin with it will feel unnatural and uncomfortable. This is normal with a technique that you haven't tried before. It's different from how you normally speak, so just like crossing your arms the opposite way to normal, it will feel weird. You will need to practice chunking before it becomes easy and feels natural to you.

Practice chunking in normal conversation and get comfortable with it, before you try it in a presentation or speech. Most people listening to you won't notice you're doing a "technique". Though they may notice with surprise that you're not um'ing!

Adapted from

<https://speakingaboutpresenting.com/delivery/obama-eliminate-ums/>

Elizabeth Hanna, MHSc, Reg. CASLPO (3103), Speech Language Pathologist, ACTRA, OSLA

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