



Verbal Fillers and Pauses

Many novice speakers are uncomfortable with pauses and do not like moments of silence in a speech.

While speaking, we attempt to cover pauses with unnecessary and undesirable **vocal fillers**.

Examples of Vocal Fillers

- Uh
- You know
- Hmm
- I mean
- It's like

Like pitch, pauses are very important strategic elements of a speech.

Pauses enhance meaning by:

- Providing a type of punctuation
- Emphasizing a point
- Drawing attention to a key thought
- Allowing listeners a moment to contemplate what is being said.

They make a speech far more effective than it might otherwise be.

When keyword outlines (not full-text, word-for-word) are used as speaking notes, speakers do not have everything they want to say in front of them. Therefore, pauses in speaking may result while the speaker is processing the next thought in his/her head. Because of the social stigma that seems to be attached to silence, speakers tend to fill the silence with vocal fillers.

Avoiding Vocal Fillers

1. Speakers tend to be the most anxious at the beginning of their speeches, mainly during the introduction. Speaking notes should be the most detailed for the introduction and for the transitions between major points.
2. The silence that occurs when the speaker is processing the next bit of information he/she wishes to talk about may seem to last forever, but in reality, it is only a couple seconds.
3. Practicing a speech numerous times before the day it is given will make the speaker become more and more familiar with his/her topic and decrease the amount of time needed to process the next bit of information.
4. The removal of vocal fillers is a gradual process. Start by making a conscious effort to not use vocal fillers during the speech's opening, and gradually work to eliminate them from the entire speech. Eliminating verbal fillers needs to be a conscious, gradual effort.
5. If you find that you do use a lot of verbal fillers, ask a friend to sit in on a practice session and raise his/her hand each time you say one.
6. Video-tape yourself practicing your speech. By seeing all the verbal fillers you use, you will begin to better understand how they do not enhance a presentation.