

## 5. THE USE OF SPACE WHILE PUBLIC SPEAKING

**5.1 USING SPACE: Filler words** — including *um* and *uh*— are never written into a speech, and add nothing when a speaker utters them. Yet these insidious verbal hiccups are ubiquitous, uttered by most speakers in most speeches every day.

Um... What's the Problem?

Some people adopt a zero tolerance policy when it comes to filler words, believing that a few ruin the delivery and invalidate an otherwise solid speech.

An *occasional* filler word does not trump passion and a great message.

Furthermore, audience members comment that an occasional filler word makes the speaker seem human (and not robotic).

Nonetheless, **speakers should strive to minimize filler words**. They contribute nothing, and weaken your effectiveness as a speaker in two primary ways:

- **Filler words represent verbal static** that has to be filtered out by your audience. (It's one of the communication barriers cited in a recent article by guest author Stacey Hanke.) Why say it if the audience has to immediately filter it out?
- Repeated and **excessive use of filler words weakens your credibility**. It may be perceived as indicating lack of preparation, lack of knowledge, or lack of passion. All of these perceptions are bad for you.

Filler Sounds, Filler Words, and Filler Phrases

- **Filler Sounds** — e.g. um, uh, ah, mm
- **Filler Words** – e.g. basically, actually, literally
- **Filler Phrases** – e.g. “I think that”, “you know”, “what I’m trying to say is”

All of these — and there are more in each category — contribute nothing and could be completely wiped from your vocal patterns without any loss in meaning.

[Note: There are cases where some of the words/phrases do convey meaning, but this is rare.]

A Strategy for Removing Filler Words from Your Speech

I wish there were a switch that could be flipped to strike these from a speaker's vocabulary. (I would flip the switch for myself!) Since the magic switch is elusive, here are the steps I recommend for minimizing these fillers.

### **Step 1 — Assess how often you are using filler words.**

Before you embark on an effort to extinguish filler words, you should assess how frequently you utter filler words in your presentations. There are three easy ways to do this:

1. **Recruit an audience member** to track it and provide feedback. Ask them not only to provide a count of each filler used, but also to comment on the impact.
2. **Record your voice**, and do an objective analysis. I occasionally do this with a digital voice recorder. This can be done non-obtrusively for nearly any speech you deliver.
3. **Record yourself on video**. This is marginally more obtrusive, but delivers more benefits. You get verbal feedback, but you also get to see the expressions on your face and what happens to your eyes when you are... uh... filling in words.

Your goal in assessment is to answer the following:

- How often are you inserting filler words?
- Are they distracting?
- Are they undermining your credibility?

### **Step 2 — Understand why you are doing it, and why it is unnecessary.**

Filler words — that is, filler sounds, filler words, and filler phrases — are inserted when our brain needs a moment to catch up to our mouth.

In certain contexts, filler words can serve a minor purpose. In a phone conversation, for example, a filler word sends a signal to the other person which says “I’m still thinking, and I’m not willing to pass the conversation back to you just yet.” In this way, the filler word *fills* the otherwise dead space which might indicate that you have completed your thought.

In the majority of public speaking situations, however, this is a completely useless signal. There isn't any risk of someone in the audience taking over as soon as you

go silent for a moment. You don't need to fill that space to say that you're thinking. You just need to ... think, and your audience will understand.

### **Step 3 — Raise your level of preparation.**

I have observed my filler word usage is *highest* when my preparation is *lowest*. Failure to prepare adequately has two effects:

1. Your brain needs to “create” words on the fly, as opposed to pulling them from (preparation) memory. This increases cognitive strain, making it more likely that you'll fall behind.
2. You are (usually) more nervous when unprepared. Feeling nervous makes most people speak quicker, thus making it more likely that your brain won't keep up.

One additional aspect of preparation which merits mentioning is the importance of **adequate rest**. When you are rested, your brain will be sharper and you will find it easier to articulate your thoughts without stumbling.

Adequate preparation (which has many other benefits) will thus reduce the occurrence of filler words.

**“As speakers force more and more content into their presentation, they'll have to talk faster and faster to complete it on time. Avoid this temptation.”**

### **Step 4A — Slow down.**

Slowing your pace will also reduce those um's and ah's, because it makes it easier for your brain to keep up. It doesn't have to be a drastic change; even a modest reduction in pace will help. As an added bonus, speaking a bit slower probably improves the ability of your audience to understand you.

To make this possible, you must **be realistic about your time constraints and the amount of material you have**. As speakers force more and more content into their presentation, they'll have to talk faster and faster to complete it on time. Avoid this temptation.

### **Step 4B — Embrace the pause.**

The best advice I ever received to reduce ums and ahs is to *just pause*. Replace the filler word(s) with silence. Since you've probably become accustomed to using

filler words, replacing them with silence will take practice. Commit yourself to the change, and it will happen.

### **Step 5 — Monitor your progress, and be patient.**

Every so often, step back and monitor your progress. Revisit the assessment tasks in Step 1, and compare the results.

- Have you reduced the frequency of filler words in your speech?
- Have you reduced the negative impact on your effectiveness caused by using filler words?
- Do you notice a correlation between preparedness and speaking filler-free?
- Is your pace slower?
- Are you simply pausing when you think about what to say next?

**5.2 Gesticulation:** A **gesture** is a form of non-verbal communication or non-vocal communication in which visible bodily actions communicate particular messages, either in place of, or in conjunction with, speech. Gestures include movement of the hands, face, or other parts of the body. Gestures differ from physical non-verbal communication that does not communicate specific messages, such as purely expressive displays, proxemics, or displays of joint attention. Gestures allow individuals to communicate a variety of feelings and thoughts, from contempt and hostility to approval and affection, often together with body language in addition to words when they speak.

Gesture processing takes place in areas of the brain such as Broca's and Wernicke's areas, which are used by speech and sign language. In fact, language is thought to have evolved from manual gestures. The theory that language evolved from manual gestures, termed Gestural Theory, dates back to the work of 18th-century philosopher and priest Abbé de Condillac, and has been revived by contemporary anthropologist Gordon W. Hewes, in 1973, as part of a discussion on the origin of language

**Public Speaking Gestures** and facial expressions are like the seasoning on a well prepared meal. They add to the experience of a speech. Over used, they can detract from a tasteful lecture.

**Failure to add seasoning to food is cruel and illegal.**

History reported that some inmates won a law suit regarding meatloaf. It turns out they were being served meatloaf without any seasoning for punishment. The courts ruled it was cruel and unusual punishment. So one of the most basic rights we have, a little salt and pass the pepper please.

How do you season your talk? Speech mastery requires more than just talking in front of a lot of people. Communication involves more than talking and listening. To satisfy the taste buds of our eyes and stimulate our minds requires salt and pepper. More advanced speakers can add other seasonings.

As always, a little is good. Too much could ruin the taste or the talk.

That seasoning involves the non-verbal body language of public speaking gestures. They are your most basic form of body language. They can be facial expression. They can be arms and hands.

What expression comes to mind if you were to bite into a fresh, thick, wedge of lemon or lime? What facial expression comes to mind when you think of the first time you knew the one you love was the one? Facial expressions can add that extra to your message that will help you better communicate.

Like seasoning they not only help communicate, they also enhance the message we share. The face is where our conviction, love, joy, pain, sorrow, and hope can be communicated without a word. It is as important as the words we use. In effect, it is like saying the same thing twice; once with your words, and once with your face.

What about other ways of speaking with nonverbal communication?

## **Types of Public Speaking Gestures**

### **Arms and Hands**

Mostly limited to the arms and hands, they can also include the body. They will help you and your voice share your message in a convincing manner.

Why be cautious of too much or many? Over use can easily become a mannerism. A mannerism could be described as repeating the same style and form of public speaking gesture, over and over.

## **WHAT FORM SHOULD YOU USE: PUBLIC SPEAKING GESTURES FALL INTO TWO STYLES, EMPHATIC AND DESCRIPTIVE.**

### **Emphatic Gestures**

Emphatic gestures are subjective in nature. They express those things you feel, the convictions you have. They can be the period or exclamation mark at the end of a phrase. They can give power and energy to the speech.

They need to be blended into what you say. If transiently used here and there, they will look stiff and unnatural. They need to spring from your inner self.

If it is not your nature to be demonstrative with your hands, there is hope. To help put the nonverbal communication into your character, think of a favorite person or actor who you like who is great with gestures. Then when you're up, imagine being them. Imagine it is them doing what you would never do.

If it feels unnatural to move or communicate with arms, hands and face, it is only because of the programming of your brain. Some cultures are more demonstrative, others more conservative.

Your ability to stifle this movement is a great quality to have when in front of a TV camera on close up. Picture sitting 15-20 feet away from a TV screen with a person standing and talking to you. Only thing, that person is not moving.

That speaker is as stiff as a board. You could be listening to a tape recording and going about other things. To know he is alive and not a cardboard cut out, you need to see movement.

Your feeling unnatural is the one thing that makes the person who is far back in the audience know you're alive. They are small movements to them. So if you want to be natural, you have to move a little.

### **Descriptive Gestures**

Descriptive Public Speaking Gestures are objective in nature. They show how big, how small, which way, position, and location. Anything you can touch.

Often speakers will use flat extended hand to point when before large audiences. In large auditoriums, few will readily see you hold one finger up. The same would apply for something so small that you held two fingers to describe how small it was.

To use a descriptive gesture, think of catching a fish and how big it was. My dad, in describing the size would hold his flat palms together and start spreading his arms. As the distance increased between his hands he would say, "It was about this..."

By now his arms were extended as far as they would go. My guess, they could be at least four feet apart. And then he finished, "...far away from the boat before it got away."

## **Facial Expression**

Facial expression is the best non-verbal communicating feature we have. We can show a host of feelings without saying a word. It can show happiness, sadness, disgust, joy, and delight.

One of the most basic delights we can share is a smile. It takes so few muscles to do this. Nothing will have greater impact regarding a first impression. Of all facial expressions, master this one.

It can move mountains. It can convey your interest in your audience. It will help you make a connection if you're truly sincere.

Remember to add the seasoning, master the use of that non-verbal body language and facial expressions.

Failure to do so, well, could potentially make a lecture cruel and unusual punishment. So learn, master and use public speaking gestures.

**Naturalness** is not necessarily something we all have when it comes to using body language as part of our public speaking. If it is in your movements or in your speech, this is an essential skill.