

# Eliminating Verbal Static: Tips for Curing Filler Words

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Filler words, such as “um,” “ah,” “like” and “ok,” represent verbal static or noise that your listeners have to filter out. The more fillers you have, the more difficult it is for your listeners to hear your message. Minimizing these annoying irritants will boost your credibility.

Researchers tell us that listeners perceive those who have the “um and ah disease” in a negative way. They see them as nervous, unsure, or stalling for time. The more eloquent you are, the more intelligent you seem.

The question for many of us is how do we eliminate these meaningless words, phrases or sounds?

First, one has to be observant. **Record your voice three to five times a day, every day for a three week period.** Since you leave voice mails for colleagues, family and friends, **use your cell phone to heighten your awareness.** Before you disconnect, carefully review your message. Count the number of non-words. Additionally, listen for how quickly you speak. Notice if you connect one sentence to another with “and,” “but” or “so.” Assess whether your voice fades every so often? Evaluate how often you pause. **If you have a video camera, turn the camera on yourself and watch your eyes.** Do your eyes often go up as you say “ah?”

Once you know what is causing your filler words, you can take action.

For example, if you have discovered you speak quickly because you have a lot of content, you may want to be more realistic about the amount of material to be covered in the allotted time. Concentrate on the “must know” information and reserve the “nice to know” for another time. It will eliminate the pressure to speak quickly to cover everything.

Fast talkers have a lot of filler words because their brain is struggling to catch up with their mouth. No-

tice “on air” newscasters. They speak at a slow pace and pause where there might be a comma or a period, and, as a result, they almost never have filler words.

Over-connecting with “and, but or so” also causes problems. Speakers who over-connect talk until their voice fades or they run out of air. At which point, they drag in air with an elongated “so ah.” Instead of breathing from the diaphragm, they breathe shallowly through the upper chest and use fillers to bring in air. Olivia Mitchell suggests “chunking” information. Once you finish a chunk, pause. Take a deep breath and begin to speak on the exhaled breath.

The good news is that when speakers are practiced or rehearsed, they have very few fillers. The brain accesses the information from a memory bank, instead of creating it on the fly. With awareness and practice and pausing frequently, you will come across as confident and knowledgeable.

**Question:** *If you have had filler words and eliminated them, what other suggestions do you have? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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