

5 Tips for Eliminating Filler Words

Filler words are unnecessary and distracting.

Filler words are those pesky little utterances such as um, ah, so, and, you know, like, okay... which distract listeners and lower our effectiveness as communicators. Filler words are unnecessary and make our communication wordy rather than clean and concise. Replace them with silence – a purposeful pause makes a much better impact.

Become aware of your filler words.

Eliminating a bad habit begins with awareness. Pay attention to your use of filler words. Notice which ones you tend to use and when you use them. If necessary, record your speaking and replay to listen for the fillers you use most. Practice speaking in front of others and ask them to write down the fillers used and the number of times you repeat them.

Open your mouth without saying "um"

A great first step in eliminating fillers is to always begin speaking without them. You might be surprised how many people begin talking with a great big "UMMM," emphasizing they are collecting their thoughts. Holding your lips together and silently thinking before speaking and then using meaningful words is much more effective.

Use purposeful pauses.

A purposeful pause is an effective tool in speech. It helps both communicator and audience reflect on what has been said and collect their thoughts before moving on. A thoughtful pause separates ideas, helps gain attention, and builds suspense. Speakers who use pauses skillfully are considered more truthful. Avoid filling a pause with a filler word. Silence is power.

Practice, practice, practice!

The more prepared you are for speaking the fewer filler words you use. Practice answering questions and formulating ways to share ideas. With practice, your words will flow naturally without fillers. Repeat the second tip to be aware of any continuing use of fillers by recording your practice or asking someone to listen to you. Eliminate those fillers!