

Reducing Vocalized Pauses

It's easy to lean on filler words, such as "um," "ah," or "you know." In fact, they can become a habit that you need to break as a competitive speaker. Overuse of these words diminish your credibility and distract from your performance.

WHY DO WE USE VOCALIZED PAUSES? -- We think faster than we speak.

- The average presenter speaks at a rate of 150 words per minute.
- We think at 400 words per minute (wpm) For some spread debaters . . . the rate may be as high as 1,500 wpm.

STEPS TO REDUCE VOCALIZED PAUSES

- **Become Aware.** Videotape your presentation, time it and identify the word count.
 - a. Transcribe it exactly (Extemp and Impromptu). Include and highlight every filler word.
 - b. Oratory, Declamation and Informative speeches – Use your written speech.
- **Calculate Your Average Speaking Rate.** # of words / Time = Average speaking rate
 - a. The best speakers develop a **flexible speaking rate**.
 - b. Faster speaking rates signal urgency, excitement, passion or raw emotion.
 - c. Slower speaking rates signal importance, seriousness or significant ideas.
- **Adjust your speaking rate, replace filler words with silent pauses and videotape again**
- **Compare** each video to the one before and monitor your progress. Soon silent pauses will become your habit.
- **Practice, Practice Practice.** The optimal ratio of practice to performance is one hour of practice for every minute of performance. On tournament days, practice before each round: 1-2 full run-throughs. This is why speech competitors "talk to walls" in the common areas of every tournament. It works!

SOURCE INFORMATION

Author: Noah Zandan

Article: *How to Stop Saying "um," "ah," and "you know"*

Publisher: Harvard Business Review

Date (Month/Year): August 1, 2018