

I Say "Um" Too Much

Objectives:

Vocalized pauses or fillers, including *um*, *uh*, *ah*, and their close relatives *like*, *you know*, and *OK?* are some of the most common concerns brought to a speech consultant. We don't *uh* want to *uh* get too *um* picky here, since 1 to 3 percent of everyone's speech normally contains hesitations. However, a bad case of *um-itis* makes you annoying to listen to. So why do so many of us *um* along in life? Most often, vocalized pauses function as a way to fill up space as we formulate the next thought. Though old habits take some time to break, it is possible to banish the *ums* and *ahs* forever.

For Um and Uh Extermination:

1. Spend a week observing your *um* and *uh* pattern. Just becoming aware of the dimension of the problem helps you cut down.

Optional: Enlist the help of a friend to signal when you're using too many fillers in your everyday conversation.

2. Practice deliberately inserting silent one- or two-second pauses into your speech. Many people who *um* their listeners to distraction don't realize that short silences are less obtrusive and perfectly acceptable.

3. Your goal is to allow a slight pause instead of unnecessary vocalizing. Try to catch the start of *um* and *uh* (you can feel it in a movement of your vocal chords). Nip it in the bud and just be silent instead!