

Drills for self-practice

Enunciation and clarity: *What do I do if people say they can't understand me?*

Pen drills:

Take an article, a part from a manuscript or other reading material. Put a normal sized pen in your mouth and start reading for about 5-10 minutes. This drill will force you to open your mouth more, and hence, to say each word more clearly. This will minimize on the risk that people may mishear you. You will find over time that your mouth muscles will be more flexible and hence, audiences will better understand your speaking.

The “ah” drill/ backwards drill:

In these drills, take something that can be read aloud and either read it backwards, or read it normally and add the word “ah” in between each word. This exercise will force you to say each word clearly, and hence maximize fluency.

Maximizing fluency: *What do I do if I can't stop saying words such as “like?”*

An essential component to effective and powerful communication is speech efficiency. Particularly in formal communication, use of filler words can come off as unprofessional or overly casual. In conversational speech, we use filler words to account for those times we are mentally searching for a thought that we cannot readily express.

Examples of filler words include, but are not limited to: like, such as, at that point, remember, you know...

Correcting such usage requires training one's brain away from such speaking patterns consistently, which the following drills do:

The start/stop drill:

With a partner, pick a topic or a speech that you will have to talk about. Initially, instruct them to take a sheet of paper and write down each time you use a filler word that interrupts the flow of your speech. Then talk about the same topic and have the partner interrupt you *each and every time* you use one of the filler words. Ideally, start over each time you are interrupted. This is very repetitive, but over time, you will start getting conscious awareness of when you are about to use a filler word.

Audio recording:

Practice speaking for about 2-3 minutes about a topic, ideally extemporaneously. Then listen to the tape and tally each time you use a filler word.

Then redo the speech and pause every time you use a filler word. Then continue speaking, and repeat the stop/pause process until you are done speaking.

Both of these drills interrupt your normal speech patterns, and hence will eliminate unnecessary usage of such words from your vocabulary. You will then find it easier to express yourself and your message in less time—which will ensure that you can say a lot even when you have tough time demands.

Voice-volume:

What do I do if people can't hear me?

Speaking from the diaphragm:

This is a technique commonly used by people in singing groups. Put your hand slightly above your belly button, breath normally and try to speak more loudly. Often we speak from our throats when trying to speak louder, but this hurts your throat and doesn't maximize your volume. Instead, imagine you are speaking from where you have put your hand. If your hand moves up and down, you are speaking from your diaphragm. It may help to breathe in and out, and as you breathe out increase your volume.

The standing back method: (As popularized from the movie, *The Great Debaters*)

Have a partner stand a few feet away from you as you speak, and continually move back further and further. Ideally, you should be in an area that has a lot of space. This may be best to do outside. Your partner should give a thumbs up or down to indicate if they can fully hear you. At a certain point, The partner will indicate they can no longer hear you. The partner should stop moving back and wait. At this point, practice using your diaphragm to speak more loudly until they indicate they can hear you clearly. When they do, have them continue to walk back, and repeat the process.

Voice variation:

How do I keep people awake while I speak?

Very often, audiences fall asleep because they may drown out your voice. This is most likely when one is speaking in a dull monotone—at the same flat rate over a sustained period of time.

To fix monotone:

- 1.) Model effective speakers and their vocal patterns—reporters from the evening news are experts at voice variation. Notice how they deliberately pause or emphasize key words.
- 2.) Underline, bold or other wise mark off on a manuscript where you want to emphasize a key point. Then practice delivering your talk with such instructions.
- 3.) Audio tape yourself and listen back. Write down key phrases or thoughts you want to emphasize but didn't. It may help to transcribe what you said. Then redo the speech making particular note to emphasize the key phrases/points you missed the first time.

Doing these drills is a continual process—consider it the public speaking equivalent of athletic workouts. To master these key skills do these drills on a consistent basis (i.e. weekly). Doing so will make sure your speaking “muscles” will stay in tip-top shape!