

4 Steps to Speak Better in Interviews

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Filler words like "um," "ahh," "so," "like" and "you know" can reduce your credibility as a speaker and hurt your chances in a job interview.

Recently I attended a panel discussion with three speakers. One of the speakers was a well-spoken young woman, but she used “filler words” excessively and to her detriment. In her first two minutes speaking to the audience she used 10 filler words — most prolifically, “um.”

After the panel discussion I turned and asked the people sitting with me if they noticed the excessive use of the word "um." They responded, “Notice? I couldn't concentrate on a word she said. All I heard was ‘um.’ ”

What are filler words? They're tics of speech such as “um,” “ahh,” “so,” “like” and “you know” that we use to fill gaps and pauses in our speech. Most of use too many of them, and they can reduce your credibility as a speaker and hurt your chances in a job interview.

At Corporate Speech Solutions, we recommend speakers try to maintain a limit of two filler words in every two minutes of speech. Any more than that and you begin to sound less professional and less qualified.

During a job interview, you may be asked questions that you are not prepared to answer. Don't fill your answer with excessive “um's.” Even worse, be careful of “like” and “you know.” These speech patterns may stand between you and the job.

Filler words can dilute the message and make you sound timid. When you use them excessively, it makes you sound unsure of yourself and uncertain of your answer. You want the interviewer to see you as a confident executive and a subject-matter expert.

The key to reducing filler words is a relatively easy, **four-step process**. Like anything, it takes practice.

- 1. Awareness:** Listen to yourself on tape during a telephone conversation and count the use of “uh,” “um,” “like” or “you know.” Remember, if they occur more frequently than two times in two minutes, you need to work on modifying the habit.
- 2. Recognize your patterns.** I have noticed that many of my clients habitually start sentences with “um.” Others may use the word “and” as a connector instead of using a period. Still others have a tendency to add “you know?” at the end of a sentence as confirmation of what they said. Recognize your own personal pattern if you want to address it.
- 3. Anticipate that you are about to use a filler word!** Once you are aware of your pattern, you will recognize when you are about to use a filler word in your speech.
- 4. Pause.** Once you know it is coming, take a pause. We call it “strategic pausing.” Strategic pausing will give you the time to think of what you want to say, say it and move on without inserting the filler word. Strategic pausing does not just give you time to think; it adds impact to your message. Resist the urge to fill the time with a “filler” word and you will automatically sound more impressive.

Practice these techniques every day until the filler words are no longer a part of your working speech pattern. Remember not to use the filler words when leaving voicemail messages. Notice how and when others use filler words. Does it sound professional?

Learning to eliminate your filler words will enhance the effectiveness of your speech and the professionalism of your interviews.