Effective Pauses

Brief: When used effectively, pauses can enhance delivery. When used ineffectively or unintentionally, pauses can distract or annoy the audience.

Learning Objective: Demonstrate how to effectively use pauses in a public speech.

Key Terms:
- Fillers: Parts of speech that are not generally recognized as purposeful or containing formal meaning.
- Pause: An interval of silence in speaking.
- Speech disfluencies: Breaks, irregularities, or vocal interrupters that occur within the flow of otherwise fluent speech.

Pauses

In public speaking, a pause is an interval of silence. When used effectively, pauses can enhance delivery. When used ineffectively or unintentionally, pauses can distract or annoy the audience.

Effective Pauses in Public Speaking

If you use a pause after you've presented an important point, your audience will have enough time to process what you have just said.

When you use a pause just before introducing a new idea, your audience will understand that that new idea is important and take notice. Well-placed pauses can also create a sense of suspense—and a sense of suspense can create interest. The audience will want to hear more if you pause just before your punch line or conclusion.

Strategically using pauses can also benefit you. For example, pausing just before your conclusion can allow you to gather your thoughts before delivering your final summary.

Ineffective Pauses

Speech disfluencies are breaks, irregularities, or vocal interrupters that occur within the flow of otherwise fluent speech, including false starts (words and sentences that are cut off in the middle), phrases that are restarted and repeated, grunts, and fillers.

Fillers are speech disfluencies that are not generally recognized as purposeful or containing formal meaning, usually expressed as pauses such as "uh," "like" and "er." Fillers occur

regularly in everyday conversation, with some studies showing they represent upwards of 20% of "words" in conversation.

Fillers are also used to repair mistakes made as we speak, for example, "He was wearing a black—uh, I mean a blue, a blue shirt." Fillers can also be used as a pause for thought, for example "I arrived at, um—3 o'clock."

Used sparingly and effectively, filler words can make you more relatable to your audience, give you time to catch your breath, and emphasize key points. However, when they're overused, your audience will be at best distracted and at worst irritated enough to tune you out completely.

Here are some of today's most popular fillers:

> *y'know*
> *so*
> *actually*
> *literally*
> *basically*
> *right*
> *I'm tellin' ya*

To Eliminate Fillers, Embrace the Pause

Research suggests that most conversational speech consists of short (0.20 seconds), medium (0.60 seconds), and long (over 1 second) pauses. By way of contrast, great public speakers often pause for two to three seconds or even longer.

Both filler words and pauses give you a chance to take a break and figure out what comes next. However, pauses make you sound confident and in control, while filler words are distracting and make you sound as if you don't know what to say.

The first step to replacing fillers with pauses is to identify your habitual filler words. Then, learn to listen to yourself as you're speaking and when you begin to hear a filler, force yourself to be silent instead. Practice using pauses instead of filler words. While it might feel awkward at first, over time you'll discover the benefits of a well-placed pause and this new behavior will come naturally.

From Concept to Action

Are you aware of your habitual fillers? In stressful situations does your use of fillers increase? If you're not sure what your filler habits are, ask friends for their observations. Or, better yet, ask a friend to make a video or audio recording of you practicing your speech. Once you're aware of what your filler habits are, begin to practice pausing instead. Keep at it. Over time, you'll be better able to consciously choose more effective pauses to complement your speech.

OER TEXT SOURCES:

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