

Eight
Filler Words/Phrases
to **DITCH**
from your Speaking



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Eight Filler Words/Phrases to Ditch

For anyone who is a speaker and everyone who wants to be a speaker.



It's easy to tell the difference between an average speaker and a great speaker. A speaker may be great because of their story. They may be a great speaker because of the way they tell the story. Often, it is how their message resonates with you that will be an indicator of a speaker's greatness.

The one consistent trait of great speakers is an efficiency of words. Great speakers use the appropriate amount of words to offer their message in the most meaningful way.

As humans, it's a common desire to not leave a single moment without noise - we seem to find that silence is a strange place to be. To achieve this lack of silence, we use filler words and phrases - words that are truly unnecessary to the conversation, the story being told, or the speech being presented - but will fill the otherwise empty space.

As a speaker, a key lesson is that every moment of a speech does not have to be filled with sound. The art of the pause can provide a moment for the audience to catch their breath; a moment to ponder the profundity just uttered; or a space where the message can sink in before the next topic is begun. Instead of filling a moment with words, a speaker can use that moment to breathe, pause, and take advantage of the power of the pause.

1. Um



The standard filler word.

Alternates: Er. Ah.

In our normal conversations, there are moments when we need to think about what we will say next. Short words like “um”, “er”, “ah” - which are just noise - give us that moment to indicate that we are still talking but our brain requires some thinking time.

Another view is that we do not want anyone else in the conversation to jump in, and a moment of silence would mean we are not relinquishing our current control of that dialog. A pause might mean we are indicating it is time for someone else to speak. This is definitely part of today’s culture. Many conversation participants are not listening as much as they are waiting for their moment to one-up the last story.

As speakers, the majority of our speaking experiences will not be improv sessions. Normally, we will be in a situation where we have a script or slides to use as our cheat sheet. The moments when we do not know what we are talking about should be practically zero.

Certainly, we will have brain-fart moments when we are temporarily lost. However, this is a monologue where you facilitate the conversation. If there is a moment when we lose our place, the audience does not know this - until you offer them “um”, “er”, “ah”. A pause, while you find your place using your cheat sheet or slides or taking a sip of water while your brain regroups, can be an effective speaking tool.

Ditch your um!

2. Right?



The end of every (other) sentence.

Alternate: OK?

Some speakers seem to be uncomfortable in the role of the speaker as an authority. This is apparent in the continual ending of sentences with a one word question - either 'Right?' or 'OK?'. The speaker is asking the audience if what they just said was agreeable with them.

It follows that the speaker may perceive that the audience might be more knowledgeable on the topic. Or, they may feel uncomfortable acting as an authority when the audience are their peers or even in a more senior role at the organization. This results in the speaker subconsciously feeling a need to reassure the audience they are equals or to continue to check if there are audience members who know more than they do.

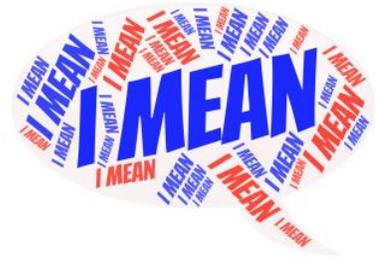
The point of any given speech or speaking session is to inform and educate the audience. Depending on the topic, it is rare that 100 percent of the audience will learn something new. And depending on the audience, you may never know what they know. It's important to be confident in what you do know and realize that there will be a majority of the audience who will be informed and educated. What you also need to remember is that your particular viewpoint and educational skills may reveal something to the audience members who thought they knew everything on this topic.

As a speaker, you are the teacher in the teacher-student relationship for that session,. This is not an adult-child or peer-peer relationship. The promise you have made is to offer knowledge and information to a receptive audience. There is no need to check with them to ensure they are on the same page as you. It is your role to educate, not have a conversation. Once the session is over, the peer-peer relationship can resume.

Once you are comfortable in stepping into the role of teacher , you will lose the subconscious desire to continue to check with the audience for reassurance.

Ditch your insecurity!

3. I mean



Speak words while your brain engages.

Alternate: Truthfully

Almost every recording of live television events begins with the words “I mean” as the speaker starts - before anything else is said. It appears to be a crutch while they get their brain working on their response.

One reaction might be something along the lines of “if you aren’t going to mean it, why would you say it?” Another is “do you normally not mean it?” Yet another is “why do you mean these words at this moment”?

Another reaction is similar to someone prefacing their conversation with “the truth is”. A rule of thumb is that this qualifier usually means the rest of the words will not be the truth. When you say “I mean”, the audience may think you do not mean the next words you are about to speak.

If you prefix your words with “I mean”, chances are you are not yet committed to the rest of your words. You may be pausing before you make that commitment and those filler words allow you to think for a moment. Alternatively, it’s possible you are about to speak a whole bunch of words that you do not mean.

Ditch the noise!

4. At the end of the day



The latest, trendiest filler phrase.

Alternate: When all is said and done

Try this experiment: when you hear someone utter “at the end of the day”, respond with a question about what happened in the afternoon. The most common response will be a momentary pause, a quizzical look, and the speaker diving back into their conversation. This is because they made no connection between their filler words and your question. Given that, “at the end of the day” are words being spoken to fill a gap between verbal thoughts.

It seems this phrase is used to mark a line in a conversation. It may suggest that everything is complete or that it is not possible improve the situation at hand.

Certainly, this phrase may have meaning in some circumstances. You might actually be talking about the evening, or midnight, or the end of your work day. However, this phrase has become overused and the words are spoken far more than necessary.

For a quick check, if the speaker (you) were to avoid saying “at the end of the day” and the conversation was identical, then these words are totally unnecessary.

Ditch the end before the story has.

5. Let me tell you...

A phrase to signify one's own importance.



Alternate: I am going to tell you

When speaking, conversations often become one monologue followed by another. While one person has the floor, there can be a tendency to attempt to dominate by continuing to speak or working hard to one-up all other stories. This is a basic human trait to ensure you are perceived as an authority on the current subject. If you watch closely, you'll see this happen and may even fall into using this approach yourself.

When speaking, you have the floor. Yet, the subconscious need to show your authority remains. This is manifested in phrases such as "let ME tell YOU", a totally unnecessary phrase given your position as the current authority on the topic about which you are speaking.

It is suggested that the emphasis is on the word "let", suggesting that the speaker is asking for permission to tell the audience. Listen closely to any speaker who utters this phrase and it is clear they are throwaway words not based in asking permission

Ditch your self-importance!

6. I am going to..



Precedes “*tell a story*”, “*end with*”, “*explain*” ...

Alternate: And now I will..

Now I will write some words for you to read to tell you about the topic I am writing about.

I am going to tell you a story about speakers who say “I am going to tell you a story”. And coming up, I am going to end with my conclusion about speakers who use filler words and phrases.

Were any of those words necessary? Did you need to be told what I was going to write? Most likely you were already reading my words and those sentences got in the way.

When speaking to an audience, the time you have is limited. There is challenge enough knowing that you have so much knowledge to impart and not enough time to give it all. This balance is challenged further when the speaker offers a commentary and description of what they are about to do.

Imagine you are watching a movie that was interrupted by a commentator telling you what the next scene will be? Not only would it disrupt your entertainment, but the movie would take much longer to finish.

A key tip to being an incredible speaker is to be efficient with your words. Give the audience the best value of your wisdom without wasting time describing what you are going to do. Just do it!

Ditch the logistics!

7. So!



The interminable starting word.

Alternate: Well...

You walk out to your speaking position in front of the crowd. You smile, breathe in, open your mouth, and the first word you speak is “So!”.

So?

Exactly what this means is a mystery, but it is clearly only for the speaker. Maybe it marks a line to step over to start the session. Maybe it is the sound of that breath coming out involuntarily.

It is possible that speakers think this is an emphasis word – one to start the speech with some kind of stamp of authority or power. Generally though, when this filler word is not spoken, nothing is different in the message being presented. No

So, as you can see, even when writing, this filler word is truly unnecessary.

“So” is also used often by some speakers as they move from one section of their presentation to another. Again, there is no purpose outside a confidence boost. There are so many speaker tips to be confident, to remember your words, to be efficient in the words you use for your presentation.

Learn them.

So, ditch the so!

8. Sorry

A standard defense for low confidence.



Alternate: I apologize

Nice people apologize. Nice people want other people to feel better, and they use words that are an attempt to do that.

Nice people are speakers. The language they use in their daily conversations will transfer to their speaking.

Nice people are still nice if they step up to using language that is direct, informative, and without apology.

There are two times when sorry is appropriate.

First, if you make a huge blunder of any kind - from leaving your fly undone, to inappropriate language, or maybe calling someone in the audience by the wrong name.

Second, if the culture requires it. In some situations, where there are specific sensitivities that might require an apology.

There are so many times when a speaker uses an unnecessary sorry. You do not need to apologize for being there. You do not need to apologize for being new to the topic. You do not need to apologize for not knowing an answer to a question. You do not need to apologize for reaching the end of the session. You do not need to apologize for coughing. You do not need to apologize for equipment failure.

You do not need to apologize for forgetting some of your words - the audience won't know. You do not need to apologize for being nervous - the audience won't know.

Ditch the apology!

Another URXO venture by Trevor Perry

Trevor has over twenty years of speaking experience around the globe and his technical expertise is extensive. He is a master at the tools of presenting and guides speakers and businesses in their technology adoption. Trevor understands how to deliver a message that is strong.

Trevor has a rare talent as a storyteller, which enables him to listen and translate your message into a story, a slide deck, and a stage presentation. He works with you to develop your speaking to realize the amazing potential you have.

You can reach Trevor at www.urxo.com

