



ORAL COMMUNICATION

2

CHAPTER

Communicate in such a way that your speech does not belie your education.

Sally Ingles

Effective teachers are effective communicators. Undoubtedly, teachers spend much of their instructional day engaged in oral communication with students, colleagues, and families. From explaining to questioning, to directing and retelling, teachers are wielders of words. Though communication skills *alone* are not predictive of a candidate's teaching performance, "having a certain level of verbal ability is obviously a necessary part of a teacher's vital skill set" (Andrew, Cobb, & Giampietro, 2005, p. 348).

Most teacher candidates enter teacher preparation programs with average or above-average verbal ability as measured by standardized test scores. However, these measures are not indicative of the candidate's *oral* speech patterns, speech fluency, and other related behaviors that comprise effective oral communication. Therefore, this chapter places an intensive focus on the development of teacher candidates' oral communication skills and the language they will ultimately "wield" as professional educators: educational jargon.

VERBAL FILLERS

2.1

CHAPTER

OBJECTIVES

The learner will:

- develop self-awareness of the most pervasive verbal fillers used in personal speech;
- self-assess proficiency in oral communication skills;
- refine oral communication skills by focusing upon the removal of verbal fillers; and
- reflect upon self-assessment and peer-assessment of practice performances.

VERBAL FILLERS

Throughout my tenure as professor of education, I have encountered a number of aspiring preservice teachers who have excitedly shared their reasons for pursuing a degree in education. Unfortunately, too often a student's expressed passion for teaching is obfuscated by the manner in which he or she speaks.

VIGNETTE 2.1

"Like . . . I . . . like . . . want to be . . . like . . . a teacher, because . . . like . . . I really love kids. I'm just . . . like . . . really good . . . like . . . with kids, ya know? They're . . . like . . . sooooo cute!"

Many preservice teachers who use this speech pattern truly are passionate about teaching and helping children. How unfortunate that their passions are overshadowed by their difficulties in oral communication. The encouraging news in the midst of this message is that the usage of verbal fillers in oral speech is an addiction that has been shown to respond well to treatment if the speaker is willing to submit to three steps:

- Step One | Admit he or she has a problem.
- Step Two | Actively participate in intensive therapy (called Exercises) as prescribed by a course instructor.
- Step Three | Submit to accountability.

All joking aside, I must admit that I know how it feels to be a recovering "addict," once addicted to the word "like." As an aspiring Language Arts teacher at the height of my improper usage of the English language, I came to the realization that I could not teach what I did not possess: articulate speech. The three-step intervention has served me well, and I am confident that the ensuing exercises repeated on an ongoing basis will significantly enhance your poise and speech patterns. I believe that you, too, can regain command of the English language so that your oral communication does not belie your professional education.

In Figure 2.1, you will notice a list of the most commonly spoken verbal fillers that I have noted over the past two decades. I have deemed them “infamous” because they have are looked upon with great disdain by lovers of the English language and professors-at-large.

Figure 2.1 Common Verbal Fillers

| The “Infamous Eight” | |
|-------------------------|--|
| umm | |
| uhh | |
| like/it’s like | |
| and ... and ... and ... | |
| ya know | |
| okay | |
| so | |
| I mean | |



THINK AND WRITE

How many times have you heard a friend or classmate use a speech pattern similar to the one noted at the beginning of the chapter? Consider for a moment how the sheer number of verbal fillers reduced the efficiency of the spoken word and threatened to overshadow the speaker’s intended message. Explain your initial reaction to the “like ... like ...” speech pattern and its impact upon the speaker’s efficiency and message.



THINK AND WRITE

Imagine that your doctor, lawyer, or teacher, spoke in a similar manner—riddled with verbal fillers. What negative assumptions might you make about that professional based upon speech pattern alone?



EXERCISE

Take a moment to complete Self-Assessment 2.2. Place a check mark in the column that best describes how frequently you think you use each of the following verbal fillers:

Self-Assessment 2.2

Student's Name _____ Date _____

| VERBAL FILLER | FREQUENCY OF USAGE | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | <i>Occasional</i> | <i>Frequent</i> | <i>Pervasive</i> |
| umm | | | |
| uhh | | | |
| like/it's like | | | |
| and ... and ... and ... | | | |
| ya know | | | |
| okay | | | |
| so | | | |
| I mean | | | |
| | | | |
| PRONUNCIATION ERRORS | <i>Occasional</i> | <i>Frequent</i> | <i>Pervasive</i> |
| | | | |
| fur (for) | | | |
| tuh (to) | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |



THINK AND WRITE

Reflect upon your answers to the preceding self-assessment. Overall, do you believe that your speech is creating a favorable or an unfavorable impression of your intellect, education, and competence? Explain your answer.

SPEECH WITHOUT VERBAL FILLERS

Educated people develop proficiency with the English language. Years of reading, writing, and public speaking hone the educated person's communication skills. The product of such intensive work is articulate, clear, and fluent speech.

Because pervasive errors hamper communication and thwart a teacher's efforts to efficiently communicate with students and stakeholders, it is imperative that preservice teachers practice oral communication skills until verbal fillers dissipate.

Is there any single strategy that seems to work best for removing verbal fillers from speech? For starters, one must learn to embrace the silence. It is far better to pause for a moment of contemplation than to break that silence with verbal fillers. What may seem like an eternity to the speaker is often only a second or two of silence. If necessary, the speaker should simply inform the audience that some processing time is needed before responding to the question posed. It is preferable to embrace the silence instead of masking it.

Secondly, a speaker needs to practice being “put on the spot”—placed in the center of the room without a prepared script, so that with time he or she develops the poise and confidence to think and then speak while under pressure—without leaning on unnecessary words.

As we develop awareness of the verbal fillers that pervade our own speech and the speech of community members, we speakers and audience members may be tempted to become overly critical. “Calling out” one another's verbal fillers can be a sensitive area in the classroom. Therefore, it is vital that a supportive learning community is established. In safe learning communities, members encourage one another to stretch and take risks. When members fall short of the goal, they are to be encouraged and supported. Falling short of a goal is not failure. Refusal to keep trying is failure.

The following exercise is a lighthearted activity wherein students face their fears of public speaking in a fictitious context of serving as a “visiting professor.” During this exercise, students are challenged to remove verbal fillers from their own speech patterns when they are chosen to speak in front of the group and to alert classmates of any undetected usage of verbal fillers when they play the role of audience member.

SHOW ME: “UMM GAME”

View an instructor introducing the “Umm Game” exercise to students and her students' first attempts at speaking without verbal fillers.

Note to Instructors: As a general rule, the course instructor is the first “visiting professor” to complete the exercise. Thereafter, attempt to select only volunteers in the first few class periods, reminding students that ALL will be given the opportunity to showcase their skills in front of the entire group before the end of the semester. To generate a list of random topics for the “visiting professor” to discuss, simply ask students to generate random topics on index cards so that you have a “ready pool” of questions from which to draw.

EXERCISE: “UMM GAME”— LEVEL ONE (“Visiting Professor”)

[Script to be read by the Instructor to the class following a viewing of the “Umm Game” video clip]:

“Class, we have a guest professor, visiting us from [the student volunteer chooses the name of the university]. Dr. [student’s last name] will be sharing with us [his or her] research on [randomly assigned topic]”. Dr. _____, you may begin now. . . .”

Over the course of the remaining 30 seconds, the speaker must address the assigned topic (completely fictitious content, usually) while refraining from the use of “umm,” “uhh,” “like,” repeated usages of “and,” and other forms of verbal fillers. If at any point the speaker uses verbal fillers, the class *immediately* claps politely—encouraging the speaker to start over. The “visiting professor” starts over, and the clock is reset for 30 seconds.

The “Umm Game”—after repeated modeling—should be practiced in small groups and eventually expanded to impromptu speeches in front of the entire class.



LET’S TALK

As you listen to a classmate play the “visiting professor” role in the “Umm Game,” complete the Peer Assessment 2.3 table. Upon completion of the peer assessment, use the sandwich language strategy (presented in Chapter 1) while sharing constructive feedback to your classmate in a positive manner.

Peer Assessment 2.3

Student’s Name _____ Date _____

| VERBAL FILLER | FREQUENCY OF USAGE | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | <i>Occasional</i> | <i>Frequent</i> | <i>Pervasive</i> |
| umm | | | |
| uhh | | | |
| like/it’s like | | | |
| and . . . and . . . and . . . | | | |
| ya know | | | |
| okay | | | |
| so | | | |
| I mean | | | |
| | | | |
| PRONUNCIATION ERRORS | <i>Occasional</i> | <i>Frequent</i> | <i>Pervasive</i> |
| | | | |
| fur (for) | | | |
| tuh (to) | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**EXERCISE**

Ask a classmate to use his or her iPad or SmartPhone to tape your subsequent attempts at “filler-free” speech. Then take a minute to review the recording and self-assess using the following chart.

Self-Assessment 2.4

Student's Name _____ Date _____

| VERBAL FILLER | FREQUENCY OF USAGE | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | <i>Occasional</i> | <i>Frequent</i> | <i>Pervasive</i> |
| umm | | | |
| uhh | | | |
| like/it's like | | | |
| and ... and ... and ... | | | |
| ya know | | | |
| okay | | | |
| so | | | |
| I mean | | | |
| | | | |
| PRONUNCIATION ERRORS | <i>Occasional</i> | <i>Frequent</i> | <i>Pervasive</i> |
| fur (for) | | | |
| tuh (to) | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

**THINK AND WRITE**

Compare your first self-assessment (before attempting the “Umm Game”) and your second self-assessment that followed.

Which verbal filler(s) are you most tempted to use?

How often do you hear yourself using that and other fillers? (all of the time, most of the time, some of the time, not very often)

Why do you think that is the case?



THINK AND WRITE

List two individuals you will ask to hold you accountable—to “call you out” when you begin relying upon verbal fillers. How exactly will these individuals alert you to improper usage of verbal fillers? Explain.



EXERCISE: “UMM GAME”—LEVEL TWO (“PERSUADE ME”)

This stage should be a bit more challenging than the last, so make certain that you have practiced sufficiently at Level One before proceeding.

Instructions: The instructor will bring a collection of objects into the room or predetermine a list of objects already present in the room. Each student will be given the name of the object to be discussed, 10 seconds of “think time,” and then he or she must persuade the audience of the object’s practical use and/or value in an educational setting—all the while avoiding using verbal fillers.

During this level, however, students may not use fictitious responses. Plausible statements of an object’s practical use and/or value in a classroom setting must be shared.

Examples:

- rectangular table (student workstation for larger groups; a station for classroom supplies, etc.) and
- popsicle sticks (inscribed with student names; to be drawn from a jar to determine next student participant).

[Script to be read by the Instructor]

“Class, we educators must be resourceful people considering limited budgets and various competing needs for those funds. Your classmate, [student’s name], has devised a plan to make [name of object] of tremendous practical value to the classroom teacher. [Student Name], you may begin persuading us of the practical value of this object now. . . .”

Over the course of the remaining 30 seconds, the speaker must address the assigned topic (both factual and persuasive) while refraining from the use of “umm,” “uhh,” “like,” repeated usages of “and,” and other forms of verbal fillers. If at any point the speaker uses verbal fillers, the class *immediately* claps politely—encouraging the speaker to start over. The student speaker is asked to start over, and the clock is reset for 30 seconds.

The “Umm Game”—after repeated modeling—should be practiced in small groups and eventually expanded to impromptu speeches in front of the entire class.



LET’S TALK

As you listen to a classmate speak in the “Persuade Me” role of the “Umm Game”—Level TWO, complete the Peer Assessment 2.3 table. Upon completion of the peer assessment, use the sandwich language strategy (presented in Chapter 1) while sharing constructive feedback to your classmate in a positive manner.

Peer Assessment 2.5

Student’s Name _____ Date _____

Behavior Indicators: Oral Communication

| | ACCEPTABLE | NEEDS IMPROVEMENT |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Use of verbal fillers | Free of verbal fillers; limited use of verbal fillers | Pervasive use of multiple verbal fillers; uses one or two verbal fillers in most contributions; verbal fillers impede message |
| Fluency | Fluent speech | Stilted; hesitant; broken |
| Grammar and word choice | Uses proper grammar Uses correct word as correct part of speech; avoids use of slang or nonstandard English | Improper grammar usage Uses wrong word at times; uses correct word as wrong part of speech; pervasive use of slang or nonstandard English |
| Vocabulary | Extensive; demonstrates breadth of vocabulary | Limited |
| Volume, pitch, and tone | Volume and pitch are appropriate; tone is pleasant | Volume is too low or too high; pitch is unsettling to learners; tone is unpleasant or offensive |



THINK AND WRITE

Compare the most recent peer assessment you received with previous peer assessments. Describe growth and remaining challenges with oral communication and the use of verbal fillers.



THINK AND WRITE

Explain how giving and receiving constructive feedback on performance is preparing you for giving and receiving constructive feedback as a classroom teacher.



EXERCISE: “UMM GAME”—LEVEL THREE (“THIS I KNOW”)

This stage should be the most challenging of all, so make certain that you have practiced sufficiently at Levels One and Two before proceeding.

Instructions: The instructor will bring a collection of quotes or guiding principles from the field of education. Many of those quotes or principles should have been previously discussed or found in assigned readings for the course. Each student will be given the quote or principle to be discussed, 10 seconds of “think time,” and then he or she must accurately interpret the prompt—all the while avoiding using verbal fillers.

During this level, like Level Two, students may not use fictitious responses. Plausible statements of the meaning of the quote or guiding principle are to be shared.

Additionally, each student should have an assigned peer assessor who will complete the peer assessment form and also record the partner’s impromptu speech for self-assessment purposes using a personal electronic device.

Examples:

“It takes a village to raise a child.”—African proverb
Teachers lead by example.

[Script to be read by the Instructor]

“Class, we educators must be knowledgeable of the guiding principles and fundamental belief statements of our profession. Your classmate, [student’s name], will be sharing [his or her] interpretation of [insert prompt here]. [Student Name], you may begin now. . . .”

Over the course of the remaining 30 seconds, the speaker must address the assigned topic (as accurately as possible) while refraining from the use of “umm,” “uhh,” “like,” repeated usages of “and,” and other forms of verbal fillers. If at any point the speaker uses verbal fillers, the class *immediately* claps politely—encouraging the speaker to start over. The student speaker is asked to start over, and the clock is reset for 30 seconds.

The “Umm Game”—after repeated modeling—should be practiced in small groups and eventually expanded to impromptu speeches in front of the entire class.



LET’S TALK

As you listen to a classmate speak in the “This I Know” role of the “Umm Game”—Level THREE, complete the Peer Assessment 2.3 table. Upon completion of the peer assessment, use the sandwich language strategy (presented in Chapter 1) while sharing constructive feedback to your classmate in a positive manner.

Peer Assessment 2.6

Student’s Name _____ Date _____

Behavior Indicators: Oral Communication

| | ACCEPTABLE | NEEDS IMPROVEMENT |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Use of verbal fillers | Free of verbal fillers; limited use of verbal fillers | Pervasive use of multiple verbal fillers; uses one or two verbal fillers in most contributions; verbal fillers impede message |
| Fluency | Fluent speech | Stilted; hesitant; broken |
| Grammar and word choice | Uses proper grammar Uses correct word as correct part of speech; avoids use of slang or nonstandard English | Improper grammar usage Uses wrong word at times; uses correct word as wrong part of speech; pervasive use of slang or nonstandard English |
| Vocabulary | Extensive; demonstrates breadth of vocabulary | Limited |
| Volume, pitch, and tone | Volume and pitch are appropriate; tone is pleasant | Volume is too low or too high; pitch is unsettling to learners; tone is unpleasant or offensive |



EXERCISE

Take a minute to review the recording of your impromptu speech and self-assess using the following chart.

Self-Assessment 2.7

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Behavior Indicators: Oral Communication

| | ACCEPTABLE | NEEDS IMPROVEMENT |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Use of verbal fillers | Free of verbal fillers; limited use of verbal fillers | Pervasive use of multiple verbal fillers; uses one or two verbal fillers in most contributions; verbal fillers impede message |
| Fluency | Fluent speech | Stilted; hesitant; broken |
| Grammar and word choice | Uses proper grammar Uses correct word as correct part of speech; avoids use of slang or nonstandard English | Improper grammar usage Uses wrong word at times; uses correct word as wrong part of speech; pervasive use of slang or nonstandard English |
| Vocabulary | Extensive; demonstrates breadth of vocabulary | Limited |
| Volume, pitch, and tone | Volume and pitch are appropriate; tone is pleasant | Volume is too low or too high; pitch is unsettling to learners; tone is unpleasant or offensive |



THINK AND WRITE

You have delivered numerous impromptu speeches to date. Overall, do you believe that your speech is creating a more favorable impression of your intellect, education, and competence than it did at the beginning of the course? Explain your answer.



THINK AND WRITE

You have completed numerous impromptu speeches recently, each delivered with the intent of eliminating verbal fillers. Which verbal filler(s) are you most tempted to use now?

How often do you hear yourself using that and other fillers? (all of the time, most of the time, some of the time, and not very often)

Why do you think that is the case?

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

So where do we go from here? Well, if you were an athlete who made only 40% of your free throws, your coach would help you diagnose the problem with your shot, show you how to correct the problem, and then tell you to practice, practice, practice. If you were a musician who struggled reading music, your teacher would prescribe the same.

For a teacher-in-training, the prescription is the same. Practice. Not half-hearted practice or “I’ll do it when I feel like it” practice. The type of practice required to begin this new way of life (imagine trumpets sounding here) is 24 hours per day/7 days per week. Make a commitment to yourself and your future students that you will not go back to your old pattern of speech.



THINK AND WRITE

Forming new habits requires discipline, and discipline is predicated upon perseverance. Recall a time you broke an old habit and successfully replaced it with a new way of living. What strategies ensured your success in that situation? What strategies and commitments will you employ for this fresh start?



THINK AND WRITE

On a scale of 1–6 (6 = highest; 3 = average; 1 = poor), how would you rate your proficiency in oral communication? Explain how you arrived at that score.

EDUCATION TERMINOLOGY

2.2

CHAPTER

OBJECTIVES

The learner will:

- define key terms regularly used in the field of education and
- begin compiling a personal glossary of terms deemed “educational jargon.”

It is not enough to simply remove verbal fillers from one’s speech. It is also of great importance that one develops proficiency with the language of one’s chosen profession. By developing basic proficiency in speaking and understanding the language of the field of education, you will become more conversant with professional educators who can mentor you into this noble profession.

VIGNETTE 2.2

“TEAM has requested that you attended an IEP this afternoon to discuss Tom’s progress in the PPI program. The PT and OT will also be present to discuss how effectively Tom’s IEP...”

Did you follow that? Likely not.

Professional educators have a language all of their own, so let us explore some of the most common terms you will encounter as you enter this noble profession.

Figure 2.8 Common Terms

Assessment
Collaboration with Stakeholders
Content knowledge/content area
Common Core
Content Expectations (state-specific)
Curriculum
Curriculum Framework
Dispositions
Diversity
Management and Organization
Pedagogy
Profession
Professional Disposition
Smarter Balanced Assessment
Standards/benchmarks
Title I

This list of common terms is by no means exhaustive. There are additional lists of terms commonly used in specializations within the field such as special education and elementary education. If you are seeking certification in either of those specializations, I would encourage you to develop a glossary for those field-specific terms as well.

WEBCONNECT

Search for .edu websites that provide field-specific definitions for the education terms listed below. Browse for additional terms that are commonly used in your area of specialization as well.

LET'S TALK

With a partner or in a small group, share your previous experiences learning a second language. What strategies seemed to work best for you? How can you employ similar strategies as you learn this new language: the language of professional educators?

THINK AND WRITE

Reflect upon the experiences and strategies shared in the previous discussion. Which strategies would you like to use when learning the language of educators? Explain.



EXERCISE: PERSONAL GLOSSARY

As you begin observing and volunteering in classrooms and other educational settings, you should become a “collector” of the terms of the profession. Be certain to record these terms on the following pages. For each term, be certain to follow the model provided:

Column One: Write out the word you heard or saw.

Column Two: Write out your best guess as to what the word means.

Column Three: Record the dictionary definition of the word.

Column Four: ask your instructor, field experience supervisor, classroom teacher, or other school personnel to explain what the term means, and then write down a condensed version of the explanation.

EXAMPLE:

| WORD | “Best Guess” Definition | Dictionary Definition | Explanation Provided by an Educator |
|------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| CURRICULUM | The lesson plans teachers use | “The courses offered by an educational institution” (Merriam-webster.com) | What is to be taught in every subject at every grade level |

Figure 2.9

(See Appendix for additional glossary pages.)

Personal Glossary: Education Terms

| WORD | “Best Guess” Definition | Dictionary Definition | Explanation Provided by an Educator |
|------------|----------------------------------|---|--|
| CURRICULUM | The lesson plans teachers use | “The courses offered by an educational institution” (Merriam-webster.com) | What is to be taught in every subject at every grade level |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Personal Glossary: Education Terms

[illegible]

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Effective educators have a strong command of the language of their field. Although that is true, it is appropriate to share some related words of caution. These commonly used terms are deemed *jargon*—words that are field-specific and, therefore, difficult to understand by others outside of the profession. (Do you recall how you felt reading Vignette 2.2?)

Therefore, the reality is that—though you must master the jargon to effectively communicate with colleagues, administrators, and other school-related personnel—you must use these terms sparingly with other educational stakeholders such as students and their families. An example follows:

To a colleague, you may regularly use the terms *curriculum* and *Common Core* and *assessments*.

To a student's family, you should consider using phrasing such as “lessons that must be taught” and “testing.”



THINK AND WRITE

What are the most valuable insights you gleaned from Part I in this chapter? Share 3–5 insights in a bulleted list.

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THINK AND WRITE

What are the most valuable insights you gleaned from Part II in this chapter? Share 3–5 insights in a bulleted list.

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