

# Fluency Shaping Strategies

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## REDUCED SPEECH RATE

- The average speaking rate of speakers who do not stutter is 167 words per minute. The average speaking rate of speakers who stutter is 123 (Darley, 1940). Thus, the average person who stutters speaks about slower than their non-stuttering counterparts, so it is NOT typical that individuals who stutter speak with increased rate.
- The purpose of this technique is to teach the speaker to be in control of his speech.
- Speech should be slowed to about one syllable per second for older children or about 2-3 syllables per second for very young children.
- Gradually increase the rate to the point where the student is using a roughly normal speaking rate, but still maintaining fluent speech.
- When rate can be controlled easily, the speaker can concentrate on other techniques that may be used in conjunction with rate control.

## EASY ONSET OF VOICING

- Also called “Easy Speech,” “Easy Starts,” or “Easy Onset.”
- It should be used for speakers who exhibit phonatory arrests.
- The purpose of this technique is to teach the student to start out speaking with less physical tension in the speech so the student can start a sentence a “little easier.”
- This technique works well Reduced Speech Rate (if necessary) because the student should slightly reduce the rate of speech and reduce the physical tension in the speech muscles when beginning a sentence.
- To provide the most opportunity for success, the initial phonemes of target words should be presented in the following order:

1. Nasals
2. Glides
3. Liquids

Nasals, Glides and Liquids involve unimpeded, continuous airflow or movement. If student has trouble, you may need to resort to /h/-initial words first.

4. Fricatives
5. Affricates
6. Plosives

Next, move to sounds that are harder to begin with an easy start because they involve some obstruction or stoppage of air.

7. Vowels

Introduce vowels last because they are often initiated as a glottal stop.

- After the student has successfully produced single words at each of the six levels above, he should then gradually move into the rest of the sentence using regular speech. Complete the sequence of single words, short phrases, longer sentences at each level before moving to a higher level in the sequence.
- Easy Starts can be used as often as the student need in order to manage his speech.
- The primary benefit of this technique is that it increases the student's sense of control over speech tension when he is starting to speak.
- Of all the techniques student will learn, easy starts may need the *most* practice in lots of different situations.

### REDUCED ARTICULATORY PRESSURE (“LIGHT CONTACTS”)

- The purpose of this technique is to teach the articulators to touch with less physical tension so the student can keep his speech moving. This helps child produce plosives.
- It should be used for speakers who exhibit sustained articulatory postures.
- Light contact involves using softer or lighter touches of the articulators.
- As the student is producing a sound, he needs to be reminded to simply touch the articulators with less tension. For example, when producing /t/ (as in “touch”), he should move the tongue up to **lightly tap** the alveolar ridge rather than pushing hard against it.
- Using reduced articulatory pressure decreases physical tension in the speech muscles.
- It also increases the student's awareness of the difference between hard or tense speech movements and light or easy speech movements and increases his ability to “monitor” tension in his speech muscles so he can more successfully manage his speech.
- The use of light contacts takes a lot of practice. Allow time to learn it. Some sounds are easier to use light contacts than others. Student should practice on different sounds and words.

### CONTINUOUS PHONATION

- The purpose of this technique is to reduce the likelihood that there will be a “block” because the continuous airflow enhances smoother speech.
- Speech should have continuous voicing except when a pause is necessary to take a breath or for linguistic stress.
- Maintain normal rate and prosody while using continuous phonation.
- Slightly stretch the first sound in the sentence to provide greater benefit.
- The constant airflow enhances fluency because phonatory arrests and sustained articulatory postures cannot occur when phonation is occurring.

### CONFIDENTIAL VOICE

- This technique was originally developed as a therapy procedure for correcting hyperfunctional voice disorders.
- The purpose of Confidential Voice is to reduce the likelihood that there will be a “block” because the continuous airflow enhances smoother speech.
- The student should repeat your confidential voice model to be sure the he understands how to produce it (as if not wanting to wake a sleeping person nearby).
- The temporary use of the confidential voice is explained. This is usually a few weeks, but should be used until the effortful voice is no longer used.
- Establish times when the confidential voice can be practiced while reading.
- Use of the Confidential Voice results in increased breathiness, reduced vocal loudness, and slightly slower speaking rate.
- This technique can be used anytime to help the student regain control of his speech.
- A whisper should **NEVER** be used.

### PAUSING/PHRASING/CHUNKING

- **Phrasing** simply means saying words that group together naturally. **Pausing** means leaving a little bit of time between those phrases (compare to Continuous Phonation). This also helps with rate.
- The purpose of this technique is to allow short pauses in the speech at natural points within the conversation (e.g., between phrases or breaths). This should be used whenever the student wants to reduce how fast the conversation is going so he has more time to think about what he wants to say or to prepare to use other techniques.
- The student should speak as he would normally, but when he comes to the end of a phrase, he should use a short pause — as long as he needs, but not too long — and then continue to the next phrase.
- During the pause, he can prepare to use an easy start or light contact to help reduce tension in the speech muscles before continuing to speak.
- This technique helps to decrease the overall rate of the conversation, thus helping to reduce time pressure.
- It gives the speaker control over the conversation and gives him the chance to reduce tension in speech muscles.
- At first, the pause time may feel uncomfortable. The student should give himself time to become comfortable with it. Don’t rush through the process.

- Start out by practicing in situations that have very little time pressure (e.g., during practice exercises). Then gradually practice in situations with more and more pressure. The more time pressure there is in a conversation, the more useful phrasing and pausing will be.
- The student will need to be reminded that Phrasing and Pausing can be used with other techniques. He should try combining the pause with *Easy Starts* or *Light Contacts* to help speak with less tension.

### GILCU/ELU

- GILCU = *Gradual Increase in Length and Complexity of Utterance* (Ryan & Van Kirk)
- ELU = *Extended Length of Utterance* (Costello)
- The purpose is to enhance fluency in a highly structured way from single words to conversation.
- Student repeats single words after you. Then move to 2 words, 3 words, and 4 words, (5 words and 6 words should be used with older children).
- Next, the student repeats single sentences after you. Then 2 sentences, and 3 sentences, (4 sentences should be used with older children).
- Progress to picture description, which is not in imitation. Student should look at a picture and say a sentence (or two or three) about it. Now the child is adding the linguistic element to what he has previously done because he now is formulating sentences himself. He should be encouraged to use declarative sentences and ask questions. Pausing to breathe after two sentences is appropriate.
- This approach allows the student to become very aware of his speech early on.
- Most steps should be practiced in controlled environment (home or therapy room) rather than the classroom.
- This technique **MUST** be used with Continuous Phonation.

### EYE CONTACT

- The purpose of this technique is to encourage the student look at the listener during conversation, as part of normal interpersonal skills.
- This should not be used initially with individuals on the autism spectrum because required eye contact typically makes them extremely uncomfortable.
- Using good eye contact simply means that the student looks at the listener when he is speaking, or that he looks at speakers when they are talking to him.
- The student cannot look at people all the time, but he may want to make sure that he doesn't let fear about stuttering cause him to look away when speaking.

- He should start out by using eye contact during times when he is speaking easily and then gradually move toward maintaining eye contact during moments of stuttering.
- This technique helps listeners know when the student is talking (even if he is in the middle of a stutter) and helps listeners know when he's done talking (so they won't interrupt him).
- Using Eye Contact allows the student to demonstrate confidence in himself and his comfort with his speech. When he becomes more comfortable with using Eye Contact, he often is more willing to enter into speaking situations that were once avoided.
- Lots of people don't have great eye contact skills. This is a skill that takes time and practice to develop, so the student should not rush it. As he gets better at it, he will appear more confident as a speaker.
- Start out in easy situations where he is comfortable with the listener. This will make it easier for him to maintain eye contact. Ultimately, as he gains confidence in his speech, he will find it easier to maintain good eye contact with any listener.
- The student should remember that his good eye contact is part of good communication. It's not just for improving his speech, but for improving the way he communicates with different people and in different situations.