

Self-Assessment and Coaching Tool — Verbal Presence in Clinical and Leadership Settings

This tool helps you **identify, measure, and improve** how you sound in professional settings. It can be used individually, with a peer, or in a leadership program.

Part 1: Quick Self-Assessment (Baseline)

Rate your **typical communication** in patient care, rounds, meetings, or presentations.

Scale:

1 = Rarely | 3 = Sometimes | 5 = Consistently

Clarity and Structure

- I organize my thoughts before speaking.
- I use a clear structure (e.g., SBAR, Problem–Assessment–Plan).
- My main point is clear within the first 10–15 seconds.

Filler Words

- I rarely use “um,” “uh,” “like,” or similar fillers.
- I pause instead of filling silence when thinking.
- I speak without frequent restarts or corrections.

Confidence and Authority

- I avoid unnecessary hedging (“I think,” “maybe,” “just”).
- My statements sound definitive, not like questions.
- I finish sentences clearly and firmly.

Delivery and Pacing

- I speak at a controlled, steady pace.
- I use pauses intentionally.
- My voice remains strong through the end of sentences.

Listener Impact

- People understand me the first time.

- I reduce confusion or follow-up questions.
- I come across as calm and confident under pressure.

Score Interpretation

- **60–75:** Strong presence; refine and maintain
 - **45–59:** Solid; focus on 1–2 targeted improvements
 - **30–44:** Inconsistent; needs structured practice
 - **<30:** Priority development area
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Part 2: Objective Awareness (What You Actually Do)

Use a **3–5 minute recording** of yourself (presentation, rounds, or rehearsal).

Measure:

- Total filler words: _____
- Filler words per minute: _____
- Hedging phrases (“I think,” etc.): _____
- Upspeak instances (statements sounding like questions): _____
- Sentences completed vs. trailing off: _____

Key Reflection

- When did filler words increase?
 - What triggered it (uncertainty, pressure, complexity)?
 - What is ONE behavior to change next time?
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Part 3: Choose One Focus Area

Do not try to fix everything at once. Pick **one skill** for the next 1–2 weeks:

- Eliminate “um/uh”
- Replace filler with silence
- Reduce hedging

- Improve structure (e.g., SBAR)
- Slow down speech (~15%)
- Eliminate upspeak
- Finish sentences with authority

Commitment:

“My focus for the next 2 weeks is: _____”

Part 4: Daily 5-Minute Practice

Keep it simple and repeatable.

1. Pause Drill

Pause 1–2 seconds before speaking each sentence. No filler allowed.

2. Structured Response

Deliver a 30-second patient summary using a clear format.

3. Hedge Removal

Replace weak phrases:

- “I think we should...” → “We should...”

4. Tone Control

Practice ending sentences with a downward, confident tone.

Part 5: Real-World Application (Daily Reflection)

At the end of the day, note:

- Situation: _____
 - What worked well: _____
 - One improvement: _____
 - Filler word estimate: _____
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Part 6: Coaching Conversation (Optional but High Value)

Use with a peer, mentor, or supervisor.

Observer provides:

- One strength
- One pattern (e.g., filler words, pacing issue)
- One specific suggestion

Speaker reflects:

- Where did I feel least confident?
- What will I do differently next time?

Action for next week:

Part 7: 30-Day Reassessment

Repeat Parts 1 and 2.

- What improved?
 - What still needs work?
 - What is your next focus area?
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Core Principle

Improvement follows a simple loop:

Awareness → Practice → Feedback → Repetition

Small changes in how you speak quickly change how others perceive your **confidence, competence, and leadership presence.**

Section 8: Slow Down to Speed Up

Fast speech increases filler words.

Optimal Pace

Professional speech is slightly slower than conversational speech.

Techniques

- Deliberately reduce speed by 10–20%
- Insert micro-pauses between phrases
- Emphasize key words

Slowing down improves clarity, reduces errors, and enhances authority.

Section 9: Practice Under Realistic Conditions

Simulation Training

- Practice case presentations
- Rehearse difficult conversations
- Simulate high-pressure scenarios

Feedback Loops

- Peer feedback
- Coaching
- Self-review recordings

Deliberate Practice

Focus on one skill at a time:

- One week: eliminate "um"
- Next week: reduce hedging
- Next week: improve pacing

Incremental improvement compounds.

Section 10: Build Executive Presence Holistically

Voice is one component of presence.

Align Verbal and Nonverbal Communication

- Eye contact
- Posture
- Gestures

Prepare Key Messages

Leaders rarely improvise critical communication. Preparation reduces filler words.

Develop Internal Confidence

External clarity reflects internal clarity. Deep knowledge and preparation reduce verbal hesitation.

Section 11: Special Considerations in Healthcare

Teaching Environments

Trainees often mirror attending physicians. Model strong communication habits.

Difficult Conversations

In emotionally charged situations, filler words increase. Preparation and pauses are especially critical.

Interdisciplinary Communication

Clear communication across disciplines reduces errors and improves outcomes.

Section 12: A Practical 30-Day Plan

Week 1: Awareness

- Record daily speech
- Identify patterns
- Count filler words

Week 2: Silence and Structure

- Practice pauses
- Use communication frameworks

Week 3: Tone and Delivery

- Work on pacing
- Eliminate upspeak

Week 4: Integration

- Apply in real conversations
- Seek feedback

Consistency is more important than intensity.

Conclusion: Clarity Is a Leadership Skill

Eliminating filler words is not about sounding polished for its own sake. It is about communicating in a way that builds trust, reduces ambiguity, and enhances effectiveness.

In medicine, where stakes are high and time is limited, clarity is not optional. It is a professional obligation.

By developing awareness, embracing silence, structuring your thoughts, and refining your delivery, you can transform how you are perceived—and how effectively you lead.

The goal is not perfection. It is intentionality. Every word should serve a purpose. When it does, your voice becomes a tool of precision, authority, and care.