

# S L O W P R O L O N G E D S P E E C H

This explanatory leaflet accompanies an audiobook which you can listen to at [www.soundcloud.com/stammeringbsa](http://www.soundcloud.com/stammeringbsa).

## INTRODUCTION

Slow-prolonged speech is a technique for controlling your stammer and feeling confident about speaking. Do remember it is not a miracle cure. Maintaining fluency is no simple matter and may well require daily practice for a considerable length of time, as well as careful use of the technique in work and social situations.

*(The technique is not to be used by children under twelve, unless supervised by a speech and language therapist.)*

Slow-prolonged speech is not just one technique, but consists of different features which together make up the whole. Each feature is considered separately and a demonstration will follow on the tape using these features together.

## 1 SLOWING DOWN

Slowing down the rate of speaking has been found to be of great help in the control of stammering. It is difficult to talk just a little more slowly, so that when learning the technique it is advisable to start by speaking very slowly and gradually build up the speed. In this way you can learn what it feels like to talk at various different speeds.

## 2 PAUSING

As well as speaking more slowly you must practise pausing more often. In the past you may have aimed at carrying on speaking without pausing; partly because you needed to continue in case you were stopped by an unwanted stammer; partly for fear that if you paused, you might be unable to start

again or be interrupted by someone else. Whilst listening to this tape, you will note that the speaker pauses quite a lot and that 'normal' speech does not continue non-stop with every moment filled by sounds and words.

PAUSES are an essential part of speech – they help to reduce urgency and tension; give time for breathing, for thinking about what you want to say and for allowing your listener to take in what you are saying.

### 3 A SMOOTH FLOW OF SPEECH

Although a smooth flow of words is characteristic of fluent speech, you may find that you tend to tackle each word separately – almost testing it to see if it might be difficult to say – so that your speech sounds jerky, even when fluent. When a SMOOTH FLOW of speech is achieved then all your speaking will sound more normal.

### 4 LIGHT CONTACTS

Contacts refer to the touching of any two speech organs – the lips, teeth, tongue and roof of the mouth – in order to produce a particular consonant sound. So, in order to make a 'p' or 'b' sound the lips must touch; to make a 't' or 'd' sound the tip of the tongue touches the roof of the mouth just behind the upper teeth; for a 'f' or 'v' sound the lower lip touches the upper

teeth and so on. Saying the sounds that you find difficult will help you to discover which two speech organs have to touch or nearly touch in order to produce those sounds. It is very helpful to work at making speech contacts light and relaxed so as to eliminate the tense, hard contacts which contribute to stammering – e.g. not to say Tea but tea, not Butter but butter, not Force but force etc.

### 5 PROLONGATION

Prolonging or lengthening some of the speech sounds, especially the vowel sounds, will help you to pass more smoothly from one sound to the next and one word to the next. This smooth transition may have been difficult for you in the past. Prolongation of sounds is a useful feature of the technique when practising at the slower rates, but this feature is phased out when normal speaking rates are achieved.

## DEMONSTRATION TEXTS

### 40 WPM

**At approximately 40 wpm or 60 spm each sound is said slowly and lightly. The words run together smoothly and some of the sounds are slightly prolonged. Pausing for relaxed breathing is very important and it is essential that you breathe as**

soon as you feel that you're running out of breath. This rate is for practising the technique so that all features are being used – light contacts, flow and pausing as well as speaking slowly, easily and gently. It is not a speed that is useful in everyday life. At this speed you can experience speech that is smooth, flowing, relaxed and fluent.

### 60WPM

At approximately 60 wpm speech becomes easier to understand as it is now possible to use more normal phrasing and to make your speech sound more lively and interesting. This is a good speed for practising, but remember to use all the features of the technique – pausing, light contacts, prolongation and the smooth flow of words into each other. Whilst you practise, consider how simple it is for you to maintain this smooth, relaxed and fluent speech. Become aware of how your mouth, lips and tongue are moving gently and easily whilst you speak using this technique. Although slower than a normal speaking rate, you are now speaking without stammering and without any fear that you may stammer, because your speech is becoming smooth, easier and gentler.

### 80WPM

At approximately 80 wpm you must concentrate on not allowing any urgency or tension to creep back into your speech. The prolongation of sounds will now be less pronounced and give way to a more normal way of speaking. You should be pausing quite frequently and making your words run together smoothly. Light contacts are still very important so that your speech continues to be gentle and easy although the speed has been gradually increased. When saying the next sentence think especially about making every contact a light one – particularly on sounds such as 'p', 'b', 't', 'd' and 'k' which are often spoken with considerable force. "Today and tomorrow I will practise my new technique of speaking and I am getting better all the time". This speed is very useful in the outside world when you feel that you are running into trouble – even when you are able to speak at a faster rate.

### 110WPM

At approximately 110 wpm speech sounds essentially normal. An average speaking rate is about 110-140 wpm, so that you are now speaking at a slowish speed within normal limits. At this speed it is

sometimes difficult to remember the technique, because you have to think more quickly about what you want to say, as well as how you want to say it. It is most important to retain the relaxed and easy way of talking that you have used at the slower speeds and not to allow feelings of tension and urgency to come back into your speech. For this reason, you should use adequate pausing to allow yourself to breathe easily and to think about your speech. There is now little or no prolongation of sounds, but light contacts continue to be of the utmost importance to maintain control over your speech. This rate can be used in everyday life and will not be noted as different by your listeners. It is necessary to go on practising at the slower speeds so that you can change your speaking rate according to the situation and your own needs.

## DEMONSTRATION ERRORS

- 1 *As you can hear, the words do not run together smoothly and so the speech sounds jerky and disjointed.*
- 2 *Most of the contacts are too hard and, at a faster rate, these hard contacts could result in stammering. It is necessary to concentrate on making the contacts light and easy.*

- 3 *There is a lack of pausing. If you do not remember to pause frequently you will find it difficult to maintain control over your speech.*
- 4 *Here the speaker is concentrating so hard on relaxed breathing that she is taking in quite an abnormal and unnecessary amount of air.*

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## LEARNING SLOW-PROLONGED SPEECH

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In order to learn slow-prolonged speech you need a tape recorder, demonstration tape, blank tape and a stop-watch or watch with a second hand.

Remember that you are learning a new skill – the skill of speaking in an easier and more comfortable manner. Be realistic from the start and accept that you cannot learn this skill in a few hours or a few days. The work you are about to undertake will continue to require your attention for at least one year. It is important that you do not rush. You are naturally eager to improve your speech but just as you could not drive a car down a busy main road after your first driving lesson, so you cannot hope to gain control over your speech after a few practice sessions.

Consider that for most people the ease or difficulty of speaking is related to: (a) the listener(s) on any particular occasion, e.g. you may find it hard to say "Good morning" when speaking to your boss and have no difficulty with these words when by yourself at home and (b) the content of what you are saying, e.g. if you are talking about something fairly unimportant like the weather, your speech may be much easier than when you have to communicate important and precise information. For this reason the technique should be learnt with this in mind, i.e. start by working on your own (no listener); continue to one close friend or relative (one friendly listener) and so on whilst also building the content of your speech in easy stages from reading, to talking by yourself, to conversation.

Some guidelines are given below and the reader is asked to use common-sense and adapt the following steps where necessary:

- ① Start by working at 40 wpm only. Play the demonstration of slow-prolonged speech at 40 wpm several times to yourself until you feel at ease with it.
- ② Work for approximately 10-20 minutes twice a day.
- ③ Using the typescript on this leaflet read the passage at 40 wpm at the same time as the tape. Read the passage several times with the tape playing.

④ Read the 40 wpm sample again but turn down the volume on the demonstration tape so that you are virtually reading by yourself.

⑤ Remove the demonstration tape and insert a blank tape into the recorder. Record yourself reading the first two sentences of the 40 wpm passage. Play it back and check that you are using all aspects of the technique.

⑥ If satisfied, continue two sentences at a time until you can manage the whole passage from 'At approx 40 wpm' to 'flowing, relaxed and fluent.'

⑦ Insert the demo tape and check with the 'DEMONSTRATION ERRORS' to make sure that none of these errors have come into your speech.

⑧ Work on steps 3-6 until you feel confident reading this passage to yourself.

⑨ Take an old newspaper and mark off two passages of 40 words each. Read the first passage of 40 words on to your blank tape and check that you have taken approximately 1 min to read it.

⑩ Play back the passage and make sure you are using all aspects of the technique.

⑪ Follow 9 and 10 above with the second set of 40 words from your newspaper.

⑫ If you feel confident with the technique reading at 40 wpm continue to step 13; if not, go through steps 3-12 as often as necessary.

- 13 Begin working at the passage demonstrated at 60 wpm and proceed exactly as before from steps 3-12 but working at 60 wpm.
- 14 When you feel confident reading at 60 wpm continue to step 15. If you have feelings of uncertainty, go back and work at 40 wpm and then move slowly back to 60 wpm. Remember not to push yourself too hard. Remember also, that if you have trouble with the technique, work on one sentence at a time, then two sentences and so forth until you can cope with the whole passage at 40 and 60 wpm.
- 15 Read the passage at 60 wpm until you have the speed and the technique fixed in your mind. Now continue by doing a short description – talking out loud to yourself. Just describe something in the room etc. (you can hear a sample demonstration on the tape). This is the first time that you will move from reading to ordinary speaking. Remember to go on using all aspects of the technique. Aim to talk to yourself out loud for one minute at approx. 60 wpm and confine yourself to one minute at a time. Play back the recording to check the techniques. Continue practising both reading and talking aloud at 60 wpm by yourself until you feel satisfied with the technique at this rate.
- 16 You may now feel ready to use this speed of approx 60 wpm with one other person. Be sure to explain what you are doing and that you are still speaking slowly in order to work at the technique,

although this is not a speed you will be using in everyday life. Also be sure to work with a close friend or relative who does not make you anxious or worried. Just try a very short conversation twice a day if possible with this one friend – the friend speaking normally and you concentrating on the technique at 60 wpm.

- 17 When comfortable at 60 wpm proceed to 80 wpm. Work through the same steps on reading as before (steps 3-11).
- 18 Continue with talking to yourself with a description or anything else you want to talk about. Talk first for one minute at a time. Gradually increase to two minutes and three minutes until you feel confident speaking by yourself at this rate. Continue to check on your tape recorder that the technique is correct.
- 19 At 80 wpm you are at a speed that it is possible to use in some situations in everyday life. Use this rate in SHORT conversations first with a close friend/relative, then when asking for an item in a shop, then with a stranger. Use this rate in short conversations three or four times during the day. Do not aim to maintain the technique for longer periods at this stage.
- 20 Continue working on reading and talking to yourself at 40, 60 and 80 wpm until you finally feel ready to work on the passage at 110 wpm. Practise as before but check the following advice on practising.

## PRACTISING THE TECHNIQUE

Consider practising the technique on three different levels – all of these levels need to be worked at every day and at least twice each day. It is better to work for short periods several times a day than to practise for a long period every day or two.

### 1 PRACTISING WHILST ALONE

A few minutes reading and talking aloud whilst by yourself every day is important to make sure that you continue to work on all aspects of the technique, even when you can speak well at a faster rate. Sometimes people who stammer say that it is a waste of time practising reading by themselves, as they do not stammer when reading and do not stammer when alone. Remember that the aim of this technique is not to see how often you can stammer, but to build on more and more controlled fluency until this becomes automatic. It is essential that you continue to practise both reading and talking when by yourself for a few minutes once or twice a day, and that you practise at various speeds. Use your tape recorder on occasions to check your work. This level of practice can be compared to being in training for a particular sport, when you have to increase your fitness slowly over

a long period of time through exercises that are not used when you finally play the sport in public. You are now in training to gain control over your speech and continuous, gradual practice is of great importance.

### 2 PRACTISING WITH ONE CLOSE FRIEND/RELATIVE

At this level of practice you are transferring your slow-prolonged speech from working by yourself into a conversation. Be sure to explain what you are doing and why you need this practice – an explanation is important so that your friend understands what is going on and is not confused by the change in your speech when you are talking at a slowish rate. Your friend will be talking in the usual way but you should start by speaking at 60 wpm and then approximately 80 wpm for short periods at a time. Begin with a few minutes every day and gradually increase the length of time and the speed of speaking.

### 3 PRACTISING IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE

Obviously your ultimate aim is to use the technique at a normal rate in your everyday life. Remember that other people are far too busy to analyse your speech and, although you may feel strange at first, others may be unaware

or uninterested in HOW you speak, because they are attending to WHAT you are saying. Remember that you do not need to be fluent all the time and concentrate on gaining control over your speech. In working on the technique during the day at school, work or home you need to consider using the technique as follows:

- for a short period of time – 1 or 2 minutes several times each day.
- with people who do not make you feel uncomfortable.
- about subjects that are not of great importance.

A rate between 80-110 wpm will be quite acceptable. The important aspect is that you transfer the technique into your everyday life in easy stages.

Proceed in gradual steps by:

- increasing the length of time and the number of occasions when you are speaking in slow-prolonged speech.
- begin to use this speech with people that you do not find it easy to talk with.

- Use the technique in situations where the content of what you are saying is more important than before.

Set yourself various goals each day – the goal should be to use slow-prolonged speech and not the goal of total fluency. Examples of such goals could be: a conversation in a shop, asking for a ticket on a bus, making a short telephone enquiry, asking directions from someone in the street and so forth.

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WE WISH  
YOU EVERY  
SUCCESS

*Renée Byrne & Michael Jackson*

Our thanks are due to Liz and Richard for giving their time and expertise in the making of the cassette tape.

## ***The British Stammering Association (Note: this material was created in the 1990s)***

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