

## David's "Top Ten Pack"

### Ten Pathways To Improved Speech Fluency

Here's the Top 10 things that have helped me. In reviewing, please remember my disclaimers: 1) I'm not an SLP; 2) Always put the advice and guidance of your SLP first; and 3) not all suggestions will work for everyone.....Good Luck!!!!

- 1. Objectify and Analyze:** Objectify your stutter....To the extent you can, study it. Try to understand as best you can what happens when you stutter, as well as when you don't. Objectify both the physical and the emotional. Try to objectify and understand the "zone" you enter when whispering or singing or any time you speak with increased fluency, and see if you can replicate that mindset in everyday speech. It's tough, I know, sort of like being told to meditate and put everything out of your mind, and then your mind races. But be uplifted by the fact that, as the hands raised at our workshop attest, those who stutter do not stutter on all occasions all of the time.
- 2. Read and Research:** Much of the literature on stuttering is complex and sometimes contradictory. But the more you know about the subject, the better. The Internet, of course, has outstanding resource material. There are many enlightening perspectives and speech exercises to be found in Google. Articles on neuroplasticity and brain elasticity can be particularly useful, encouraging and relate directly to many speech therapy interventions and fluency shaping exercises. Know and believe that your brain, your mind and your emotions and responses, can and will change over time. Your job is to manage and direct that change.
- 3. Seek Difficult Speaking Situations:** De-sensitizing yourself about your stutter is absolutely paramount. You'll always be self-conscious, but you have to work to minimize your anxiety. Don't shy away from difficult situations. Ask for things in stores, ask directions, use the phone as often as possible. You may find it tough, particularly at first, but it's short term pain for long term gain. Ease yourself into it, if necessary. As I mentioned, this was the first form of therapy I took, at age 22. Standing on street corners talking to strangers was sure challenging. But it was great for me and changed my outlook and internal view of my stutter even within the first hour of activity.
- 4. Speak Early In Group Settings:** When in a group, such as a meeting, classroom, seminar or whatever, try to speak as early as possible. Ask a question, ask for clarification, anything to "break your ice." You'll find this grounding and empowering. Getting into the speaking game early can be very reinforcing and will help alleviate anxiety. Why sit there terrified that you may have to speak? Slay the terror before it slays you.

5. **Fluency Shaping and Word Lists:** Make lists of difficult words, put them into sentences, and read them aloud...again and again and again. Practice, practice, practice!!!...This really helps, particularly if you employ #1 above. Do it every day you can. Memorize the sentences and say them under your breath, all day. (see my Fluency Shaping Word List included with these attachments). Hard research suggests that such repetition and hard work may be a key step in reconfiguring your neural pathways that affect and govern speech.
  
6. **Read Aloud:** Read out loud when you're alone as much as possible. I do this all the time, just about every day. Poetry (Dylan Thomas), Shakespeare and your scriptures of choice are great for this. Get loud. Get emphatic. Act the parts out. As emphasized in The King's Speech, realize that you have a voice! The more animated you get, you will see that you stutter less. Animation also leads to deep diaphragmatic breathing, which is crucial to improved speech patterns. Actors rely on their speaking voice and they read and speak aloud continuously. So there's got to be something to it. And believe me, there is!!
  
7. **Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse:** If you've got a speaking event coming up, or even a meeting, rehearse what you'll be saying out loud, and then rehearse it again. In most cases, knowing where you're going verbally will enhance speech fluency. Practice the difficult words, as in #5 above. You don't want to sound mechanical or wooden in your delivery, but preparation, where possible and appropriate, can be great tool.
  
8. **Speak Constantly and Often:** Speak as much as you can.....Even whispering under your breath can be useful. Become loquacious. The more you speak and the more you put your voice and speaking machinery to use, the more hope you'll have for improved fluency.
  
9. **Stay Positive:** Easy to say, I know, but don't let the bad days get you down. Make small gains steadily and chart your progress, at least mentally. Steady improvements, and I mean over several years, can reach a tipping point, after which the gains and advances come more quickly and with greater impact. Remain true to your mission and always retain your sense of humour. Stuttering does have its humorous moments, though some days you may wonder. I'm not one to say that stuttering is a gift. But I do believe that dealing with such an issue certainly builds our character, breeds humility and teaches about human frailty and empathy. And these are good things. Very good things.
  
10. **Change Your Self-Image (Optional):** This is somewhat controversial and certainly complex, and is therefore suggested here only as an option. Many chronic stutters have stuttered most of their lives. They therefore see themselves as "stutterers," "a person that stutters," and accept this version of themselves as the norm. Rightfully, they desire and expect that others will accept them as they are.....But some would argue that real personal change cannot and does not occur until there is change within, which is to say,

until a person modifies or transforms their self-image, that hidden internal mirror which reflects the person we think we are. For example, research suggests that many chronically obese people regain weight after diet programs, simply because they have an unalterable self-image of themselves as an overweight person. Likewise, many stutterers report that increased fluency can actually make them uncomfortable. We gravitate toward our self-image, both on a conscious and sub-conscious level. I only began to make key gains in my stuttering battle when I began to see myself as a person who could speak fluently, and when I began to believe in that person. Rightfully or wrongfully, I don't identify as a stutterer. I identify as a non-stutterer who sometimes stutters. This is a self-image that I've developed and honed over time. It works for me and may work for you....One way or another, if you stay focused on 1-9 above, the self-image thing will sort itself out.