

# Slow down , you're talking to fast!

**F**ast speech is like fine print. It's easy to ignore. Radio and television commercials sometimes rely on this. At the end of an otherwise great offer you hear an announcer running through a list of restrictions and qualifications that water down the offer. This part of the commercial is spoken so fast that you can barely understand it. More importantly, you tend to tune out.

Listeners tune out if speakers don't make listening comfortable. It's the speaker's job to make it easy and comfortable for the audience to listen.

## Speed Is Not the Only Issue

In fact, speed by itself is rarely the issue. The constant speed is what causes the trouble. People who speak at a constant clip, whether slow or fast, are likely to frustrate their listeners. They not only bore us with their own special brand of monotony (sameness of speed), they undermine the natural physical aspect of speech.

Speech is physical because it comes from the body. We need to remind ourselves of that. It's not just a mental exercise. Talking engages the muscles of the abdomen, the throat, the tongue, and the lips. Speech literally embodies ideas—it brings ideas, thoughts and logic onto the physical plane.

But speech carries more than words and logic. Since it comes from the body, it creates physical sensations in listeners. It is, at bottom, sound. And we are all familiar with the power of sound to create mood and feeling. Think of chalk on a blackboard, a door creaking open, wind in the branches of pines at night. Many sounds, not just music, have qualities that stir us deeply. Your voice, used effectively, has that same power. But speaking too fast tends to rob your voice of its physical resonance, creating sound that is divorced from the rhythm of a good, deep breath.

## Pauses Punctuate Speech

If you habitually talk fast, you need a variety of ways to punctuate your speech, and the most natural punctuation for speech is the pause you take when you reach for a breath. Writing without punctuation is ambiguous and cumbersome. Speech, without the punctuation of pauses, is unclear and hard to listen to. It makes listeners uncomfortable, not just because of the speed itself. The unrelenting stream of sound never gives us a chance to rest and ponder the movement of the speaker's thought.

## Here's how to gain some verbal punctuation:

**Look people in the eye when speaking.** That will slow you down because you get feedback from your listener. You can see whether or not your listener understands what you're saying. That sense of connection with your target will help you pace your words so they hit the mark.

**Breathe more often.** You will have more energy for your voice. You will feel calmer. You will have enough air to keep the energy in your voice right through to the end of the phrase.

**Pause between phrases.** The pauses will give your listeners a chance to digest what you've said. Speech that comes from a person who is breathing deeply and regularly is easier to hear and understand.

**Slowing down is a question of punctuation.** Make sure you punctuate your speech by controlling and varying your pace, using focused pauses, and taking more frequent breaths. You'll not only hold the attention of your audience, you'll also deliver your points more powerfully and persuasively.