

“Continuous Talking:” A Useful Technique to Enhance Verbal Skills

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Before you start reading this article, please answer the following questions. Compared to your friends:

1. Are you more talkative, less talkative, or about the same?
2. Are you more spontaneous, less spontaneous, or about the same?
3. More apt to join a discussion, less apt to join, or about the same?

If you are not as verbal as your friends, it may be due to the fact that you allow stuttering hold you back from being an active, verbal participant. Do you allow let stuttering dictate how much you choose to talk? After all, it's hard to talk, hard to be spontaneous, and hard to be an active verbal participant, when you are busy doing things to minimize stuttering in general, or to avoid stuttering all together.

One of the things you can do to increase your skills with language expression is to engage in “continuous talking.” In this article I'll share five activities I have found helpful: (1) Shadowing, (2) Play-By-Play Announcing, (3) Weather Reporting (4) Branching, and (5) Story Construction. These are fairly “Low-Risk” activities because you can either do them alone, or with a buddy, sibling, parent, speech therapist or another kid who also stutters.

1. **SHADOWING.** This is a task you can do alone. Your job here is to listen to someone speaking on the television or radio and to shadow along behind the person as you echo what the other person has just said. Listening to a new report is often a good challenge. Your task is to follow along as closely as possible, and repeat what the other person has just said. Before you start, you will need to realize in advance that you will not be able to follow the person exactly. If you are unable to keep up with the person, or if you miss a few words, this is perfectly all right. If you fall behind, just jump ahead and chime in as best you can and keep going.

2. **PLAY-BY-PLAY ANNOUNCING.** This is an activity you can do alone, or you can take turns doing this with someone else. Turn on your television to a channel that is broadcasting a sporting event. Pick a sport that you know something about, but not necessarily the names of the players engaged in it. Turn down the volume so that you cannot hear the announcer. Your task is to be the play-by-play announcer, and just make up a narrative to describe the action you are watching. Don't worry if you are not totally accurate, for this is not the goal of the activity. The purpose is to give you practice generating a story to describe the action. Here is an example:

“Well, folks, the tension is mounting. The Badgers are one run down in the bottom of the ninth, with one out, and runners on first and second. A solid hit to the outfield will probably drive in at least one run and tie the game. Marshall Edwards is at the plate and Preston Graham is on deck. Johnson has pitched well to this point, but the question is whether he might be getting tired. His control is not as sharp as it was in the earlier innings. Edwards stands in, waiting for the pitch. Here's the windup— and the pitch. WOW !!! What a crack!!! It's a long fly ball, carrying way back– back– back— It hits off the top of the wall and bounces toward the corner of the outfield away from Jenkins in left field. The runners are on the move. Jenkins finally tracks down the ball and fires

it to the plate, but the throw is too late and the two runners have scored. Holy Cow!! The Badgers have done it!!! What a great victory for the badgers. They now advance to the semifinals of the tournament. The Badgers have swarmed the field, and Edwards is being carried off the field..... GO BADGERS !!!

3. **WEATHER REPORTING**: For this task you will need to generate a weather report that could apply to your part of the country. Here is an example:

“Good evening, folks. This is WTNT Meteorologist Stefan Woods welcoming you to the TV-7 Accu-Weather Weekend Forecast for the greater Nelsonville viewing area. Doppler Radar shows the potential for severe weather continues, and we remain under a severe weather warning from now until ten o’clock this evening. If you own a weather radio, you will want to be sure to keep it turned on all night so that you will be alerted if warnings are issued while you are sleeping. Gale force winds, dime-size hail, and from four to six inches of rain are likely. Flash flood warnings have been posted for low-lying areas along the Omaha, Sioux and Apache Rivers. By tomorrow the weather will be ideal with no bad weather to “hamper your scamper” and nothing to “slow your go.”

4. **BRANCHING**. In the “Branching” exercise, your task is to select an *unfamiliar* topic and then challenge yourself to talk continuously on this topic for a given amount of time: for example, forty-five, sixty or even 120 seconds. You can practice doing this alone, and then do it for real with other people. To get started, each person writes the names of about four different topics on four different 3" x 5" index cards. When you first start trying this exercise, you might want to pick some fairly common topics, but later, you can challenge yourself with more difficult topics. Put the cards in a hat and mix them up. Each person takes a turn drawing a card out of the hat, and then begins talking. (If you pick one of your own cards put it back and select another card.) You need to engage in continuous talking, and this will be difficult after you run out of things to say. This is where you can use the technique called “*branching*.” Think of a tall tree with many branches. Toward the base of the tree the branches are thicker than at the top of a tree. Begin talking about the topic, and when you run out of things to say, branch off onto a topic that is related. Although it is difficult to capture this in written form, let’s see if the following example will be helpful as I try to explain how you might do this with the difficult topic of “CURLING.” The **(**B**)** signals where branching takes place. You will see how the original topic of curling branches off to cover ice hockey, professional and amateur athletes, and finally the fact that curling is not as rough a sport as ice hockey.

CURLING: “Yikes !! I really don’t know very much about Curling, except that I think it is a game sort of like shuffle board, except they play it on ice. I watched it a little this winter during the Olympics up in Vancouver. They try to curl these heavy curling stones down the ice and land them in a target. **(**B**)** Well, I guess that’s all I know about curling, but speaking of the Olympics, this reminds me of ice hockey, and I watched ice hockey a lot during the Olympics. (I talk about the USA-Canada gold-medal final for a little while.) **(**B**)** But the hockey players were professionals from United States and Canadian teams, and I think this is wrong because the Olympics should only use amateurs, like they did back more than about 12 years ago **(**B**)** I remember seeing a great movie called “Miracle on Ice” about the hockey game between the United States and Russia back around 30 years ago, and it was great. **(**B**)** I guess one thing about curling is that nobody gets hurt. I didn’t see anybody wearing shin guards or helmets or shoulder pads so I guess it is pretty safe, but I don’t know enough about it so say any

more. (**B**) But I'm pretty sure that all of the curlers were amateurs, and I still think that the Olympics should only use amateurs. Besides, summer Olympic sports like gymnastics and track don't have professionals. Gosh – I sure hope that golf and tennis don't become Olympic sports.”

5. **STORY CONSTRUCTION**: For this exercise you'll need to find another person to do this with. Ideally, it can be another person who stutters: otherwise, you might do it with your speech clinician, a sibling, friend or parent. Your task will be to generate a story – any story, just so long as you and the other person can keep the story going for a predetermined length of time – maybe twelve minutes. To do this, one of you starts the story and talks for about sixty seconds. Then it is the other person's turn to talk for about a minute. Go back and forth from one person to the other until you have developed a story that has lasted for twelve minutes. Start a story and pass it along to the next person, with each person adding to it, and keeping it going. Here is an abbreviated example of a story between Ted and Mark.

T: “We went camping last summer up in Minnesota. We were canoeing down one of the rivers and did not know there were white-water rapids we would need to get through. (45 seconds later) We had never shot any rapids before and all of a sudden.....”

M: “We realized that the rapids were just a little bit in front of us and it was too late to get to the shore and so we had no choice except to keep on going. I was scared that we might tip over. We were both good swimmers, but what would happen to all the camping gear that we had in the canoe, or what if we banged our head on a submerged rock? (45 seconds later) Things were getting tense.....”

T: “We tried to line up the canoe to go straight down through the rapids, but the swift current turned us and we were totally side-ways when we got to where the rapids started, and all of a sudden water came pouring over the side of the canoe and the canoe started sinking. All of our stuff started floating out of the canoe and all over the place.”..... (45 seconds later)

M: “We held on for dear life until we got to the end of the rapids and the current was not too strong, but our camping gear was all over the place. Luckily the current took most of it toward the shore and we could pull some of it out of the water..... (45 seconds later)

T: “Our clothes and sleeping bags were waterlogged and there was no way that they would ever get dry by bedtime.....” Etc, until twelve minutes have elapsed.

I hope these activities will help you enhance your expressive language skills. Good luck in your future endeavors.

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