**What Are Filler Words?**

Filler words are words (and phrases) that are used to fill silence when you’re speaking. They’re words that don’t add any real value to the sentence. They simply keep you going while you come up with the rest of your sentence.

Their actual name is “discourse markers,” but they’re much more commonly known as “filler words.”

You might already use filler words without realizing it. When you can’t think of the right word to use in a sentence, you might say “well.” This gives you a break while you think, without an awkward, silent pause.

Since filler words don’t really add any meaning to the sentence, you don’t need to think about using them. This leaves your brain free to think of other things—like the word you’re trying to remember.

Many filler words actually have other meanings, so not every “like” is a filler word, for example. We can see a real example of this in the following conversation from the show “Community,” when Pierce tries to stop Shirley from using filler words:

Shirley: Okay. These brownies are, uh—

Pierce: Uh!

Shirley: They, um—

Pierce: Um!

Shirley: These brownies are delicious. They taste like–

Pierce: Like!

Shirley: That’s not a filler word.

One way to finish Shirley’s sentence would be, “They taste like heaven.” In this example, “like” is used to compare brownies to heaven, so it’s not a filler word in this context.

When Are Filler Words Used in English?

You only need to use filler words when you’re speaking out loud. Generally you won’t use fillers when you’re writing. When you’re speaking out loud, though, you might need some extra time to figure out what to say. That’s when you can use filler words.

Sometimes people use certain filler words (“like,” “literally” or “believe me”) when they’re writing online in website comments, chats or social media. This is fine too, since conversations online are very similar to spoken conversations.

Filler words are used for a number of reasons:

**To show that you’re thinking.** Use filler words when you need to think about your answer or statement. For example:

“I have basically… ten more years of college.”

**To make a statement less harsh.** When your friend has some broccoli stuck between his teeth, you could just tell him, “You have something in your teeth,” but that might make him embarrassed. It might be nicer to say something more like:

“Well, you have, um, you have a little something in your teeth.”

**To make your statement weaker or stronger.** While filler words don’t add anything to sentences, they can be used to change the sentence tone—the attitude of the sentence. See how different these three statements sound:

“I think pugs are cute” is just a regular statement.

“Actually, I think pugs are cute” shows contrast—that someone else doesn’t agree.

“At the end of the day, I think pugs are cute” is something you might say as a conclusion to a discussion about pugs and their ugly (or cute!) wrinkles.

**To stall for time**. To stall for time means to do something to try and gain more time. Filler words are an excellent way to stall when you don’t know how to answer a question, or when you don’t want to. For example, if your teacher asks you “Where’s your homework?,” your response might sound a bit like this:

“Uhh. Umm. Well, you see.. My dog ate it.”

**To include the listener in the conversation without ending your sentence.** A conversation takes at least two people. Some filler words and phrases can include the other person in the conversation. It’s a bit like reaching out to them as you’re speaking to keep their attention. For example:

“It was a really big bear, you know?”

This sentence includes the listener without ending your speaking turn. Your listener might nod in agreement, allowing you to continue telling him about your pet bear.

Even if you’re just starting to learn English, filler words can make you sound more like an advanced English learner. As you can see, filler words seem useless at first, but they can be really important! When you think of someone as being a fluent English speaker, you probably think they speak perfectly without stopping. In reality, even native English speakers use filler words, and they use them often. These words are an important part of sounding natural when you speak English.

**You’re allowed to pause and think, to be unsure of how to answer, or even to forget the right word to use.** The trick is knowing the right filler words to use while you put your thoughts together.

**Use Filler Words in Moderation**

Like with anything else, you could use filler words too much. Overusing filler words (using too many, too often) can make you sound unprofessional. Even worse, it can make it difficult to follow your sentences. So do use filler words when you speak, but don’t use them too much.

If you find yourself using too many filler words when you speak, it might be time to either study some more vocabulary or slow down your speech.

**Common English Filler Words You Should Know**

1. Well

“Well” can be used in a few different ways. You can use it to show that you’re thinking.

“Well, I guess $20 is a good price for a pair of jeans.”

You can also use it to put a pause in a sentence.

“The apples and cinnamon go together like, well, apples and cinnamon.”

You can even use the word to stall.

“Well… fine, you can borrow my car.”

2. Like

“Like” is sometimes used to mean something is not exact.

“My neighbor has like ten dogs.”

In the above example, the neighbor probably doesn’t have exactly ten dogs. Rather, the neighbor has a lot of dogs.

3. Actually/Basically/Seriously

“Actually,” “basically” and “seriously” are all adverbs—words that describe actions. Many adverbs (though not all of them) have an “-ly” at the end of the word, which makes it easier to recognize them. All these words can be used as fillers which change the strength of a statement.

For example, the word “actually” is used to point out something you think is true, when others might not agree:

“Actually, pugs are really cute!”

“Basically” and “seriously” change the sentence in slightly different ways too. “Basically” is used when you’re summarizing something, and “seriously” is used to show how strongly you take the statement.

“Basically, the last Batman movie was seriously exciting!”

Other adverbs that are often used as fillers are “totally,” “literally” and “clearly.”

The word “**literally**” means “something that is true,” but many times in conversation it’s used with a different meaning: to state strong feelings. For example, you’re not just laughing you’re literally dying from laughter.

“Totally” means “completely,” and is used to emphasize (show that you feel strongly) about something.

The word “clearly” means the same as obviously, and is used to state something that is very obviously true.

These three words don’t have to be used together either, but here they are in one sentence:

“Clearly you totally didn’t see me, even though I was literally in front of your face.”

4. You see

“You see” is used to share a fact that you assume the listener doesn’t know.

“I was going to try the app, but you see, I ran out of space on my phone.”

5. You know

“You know” is used to share something that you assume the listener already knows.

“We stayed at that hotel, you know, the one down the street from Times Square.”

It can also be used instead of an explanation, in cases where we feel the listener just understands what you mean.

“When the elevator went down, I got that weird feeling in my ears, you know?”

6. I mean

“I mean” is used to clarify or emphasize how you feel about something.

“I mean, he’s a great guy, I’m just not sure if he’s a good doctor.”

It’s also used to make corrections when you misspeak.

“The duck and the tiger were awesome but scary. I mean, the tiger was scary, not the duck.”

“The cave is two thousand—I mean—twenty thousand years old!”

7. You know what I mean?

“You know what I mean?” is used to make sure the listener is following what you’re saying.

“I really like that girl, you know what I mean?”

8. At the end of the day

“At the end of the day” is a phrase that means “in the end” or “in conclusion.”

“At the end of the day, we’re all just humans, and we all make mistakes.”

9. Believe me

“Believe me” is a way of asking your listener to trust what you’re saying.

“Believe me, I didn’t want this tiny house, but it was the only one I could afford.”

It’s also used to emphasize what you’re about to say.

“Believe me, this is the cheapest, tiniest house ever!”

10. I guess/I suppose

“I guess” and “I suppose” are used to show that you’re hesitant, or not really sure about what you’re saying.

“I was going to eat dinner at home, but I guess I can go eat at a restaurant instead.”

“I guess” is used more often in speech, but “I suppose” can sound classier (a bit smarter).

11. Or something

“Or something” is a sentence ending that means you’re not being exact.

“The cake uses two sticks of butter and ten eggs, or something like that.”

12. Okay/so

“Okay” and “so” are usually used to start sentences, and can be a sign that a new topic is starting.

“So what are you doing next weekend?”

They can also be used to introduce a summary.

“Okay, so we’re going to need to buy supplies for our trip this weekend.”

15. Right/mhm/uh huh

“Right,” “mhm” and “uh huh” are all affirmative responses—they all mean a “yes” response.

“Right, so let’s prepare a list of all the things we’ll need.”

**What Makes Verbal Fillers So Bad?**

Okay, so using verbal fillers when giving a speech or presentation doesn’t actually accomplish anything purposeful. But besides being pointless, what’s wrong with them?

The reason verbal fillers get a (deservedly) bad rap is, when used repeatedly, they can accumulate and cause listeners to think (whether consciously or unconsciously) you don’t know what you’re saying.

One or two verbal fillers, every three minutes? Not a big deal. But one or two a minute? That can seriously undercut your credibility.

Imagine giving a presentation and it sounded like this:

You: “We… umm… have to decide sooner rather than later if we’re… uhh… going to purchase the upgrades because, y’know, it’s a big decision that will basically impact the whole business, so, umm… I think we should buy it and, uh—” (Clarence from Accounting gets up and walks out of the room.)

Practice makes perfect.

请用一下filler words 填空

Believe me I mean I suppose well like basically literally

1. , it may be true. But I find it difficult to believe.
2. I like both of the companies.
3. well, my dad doesn't let me see R movies, but my mom does.
4. ,I could eat hamburgers for any meal.
5. This is the best gift I have ever received.
6. , I didn’t mean it.
7. having a private car is more convenient to get around.