



IIT Madras

BSc Degree

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English – I (Basic English)
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Speak Slowly

Welcome to this course. As we said, contents are important and then it is almost equally important that the speaker should be understood by the listener. And the best way any speaker can be understood by any listener is by speaking slowly, speak slowly much more slowly than many of us in ancient countries, in African countries do. The session today we will talk about why we should speak slowly and how we can acquire the habit of speaking slowly, unless of course, as some of us do, we are already speaking slowly.

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Speak Slowly

- English is a slow tempo language.
- English speakers pause after groups of words, after each clause, after each sentence. Click on the link given below and listen to the audio sample.



English, unlike many other languages, is a slow tempo language. For many reasons, they have a good number of long vowels, unlike many other European and Asian languages. Unlike many other languages, English also takes a pause within the sentence. In unit 3 of this course, we will talk about pauses within the sentence. But just now let us agree and admit that in English you pause not only at the end of the sentence but also before also within the sentence, at the end of a phrase, at the end of a clause.

So, that makes English a slow tempo language, unlike Asian languages where mostly we pause only the end of the sentence. That is why English speakers pause after, standard speakers of a standard varieties pause after each group of words such as a phrase, clause, sentences.

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VIDEO CLIP



Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dKimoybmEo>

Please watch the section 00:00 – 3.55

Source: English Speeches (YouTube)

Video description: Speech delivered by Martin Luther King Jr.

We are using 3.55 minutes of this video for academic purposes.

The kind of time that Martin Luther takes in this public speech is good tempo, is a good speed at which we should talk. Almost anyone would understand us without difficulty, if you like, you can look at your time, look at your watch and see how many words Martin Luther King produces within this time and you can compare it with the time we use to produce many more sentences, many more words. In about 20 seconds, King takes, King produces only about 20 words, whereas many of us produce many more words within the same time. As a result, we cause stress to the listener, and listeners have to understand so many more words within the same time.

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VIDEO CLIP



Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aO5R6ezqio>

Please watch the section 4.03-4.57

Source: Oscars (YouTube)

Video description: Speech delivered by Colin Firth after winning Best Actor at the 83rd Academy Awards.

We are using 54 seconds of this video for academic purposes.



About 40, 41 seconds to be precise has the computer before me tells me and how many words, fewer than maybe 50. So, that is the kind of tempo we should use when we speak on public occasions, in formal situations, when we make presentations even to our teachers, even in our classrooms, even to friends. Slow speech is our best chance to be understood. Let us go to the next screen.

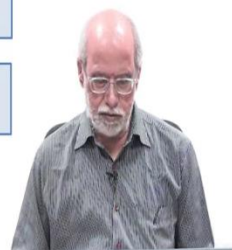
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- Pause is like the punctuation mark of spoken language.
- “A woman without her man is nothing.” This sentence can have different meanings depending upon how you pause. Find other examples.



A woman, without her man, is nothing.


A woman, without her, man is nothing.



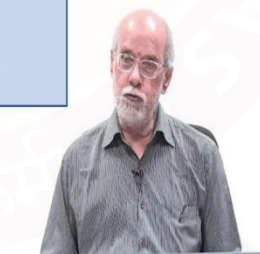
The more frequently you pause, the better you convey meaning to the listener. Words flow one after the another, and unless you speak slowly, it is not very clear to the listener which word belongs to which group. Slow speech keeps that unmistakably clear and you can convey meaning unambiguously through tones. See, for example, look at this very popular, very famous example of how in English; different tones, different kinds of pauses can convey different kinds of meaning.

So, for example, look at this sentence quote on quote “A women without her man is nothing”. Now, this can have two meanings as the slide on the computer shows. First, A women, without her man, is nothing. It can also be the other way. A women, without her, man is nothing. It should be very clear to all of us that slow speech gives us time to articulate each word carefully, correctly and to place each word together with the other words where it belongs so that the meaning is unambiguously, meaning is most clearly conveyed to the listener.

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- Rapid speech causes distortions in sounds; they merge into one another, some sounds are dropped, some sounds change form and shape, and become difficult to understand.

Icannneverforgetmyfirstparajump




Rapid speech, on the other hand, which is what many of us do, many of us produce more than 11, 12 words per second. So for example, in the time that Martin Luther King took to produce 20 words, some of us would produce maybe 100 words. Now that is called rapid speech. A rapid speech causes distortions in sounds if you do not give enough time to each sound, the sounds merge into one another, they overlap, they interpolate, they get covered, collapsed, pushed, it is

like an overcrowded railway train compartment, meant to take 20 people but carrying 200 people. So, imagine the discomfort that everyone feels there is almost the same way.

I will give you an example of how sounds get distorted, how would they change for and shape when you produce too many sounds, too many words within the limited time. Look at the first strip on the PowerPoint slide before me. Can you make out what it is? Take about a minute if you like, can you make out what it is? Perhaps you can get with some effort. But if the letters were clearly written, if words were separated from one another, then it would be easier for you.

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I can never forget my first para jump.

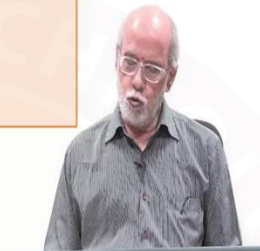


Look at this next, the second strip on the PowerPoint slide is very clear; you do not need one minute; you do not need even 10 seconds. In one look you get it clear, it says, I can never forget my first para jump.

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**I can never forget # my first para jump #
There were seven of us # each more
scared # than the others #**



And actually, you can take right pauses; you can say rather than say I can never forget my first para jump. You can say, I can never forget my first para jump. There were 7 of us each more scared than the others. This is a slow tempo language. You gave time to every word, and you gave time to every listener to take every word. This is our best chance to be understood by our listeners, no matter who they are and where they come from?

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- Slow speech is easy for the listener to understand.
- It is a mark of politeness.
- Slow speech gives the speaker time to think and use correct words in a correct manner.



Slow speech is easy for the listener to understand. We know a lot about how we speak, lungs produce speech air which is manipulated by our vocal cords which is further manipulated by our tongue and jaws, and we produce a whole range of different kinds of sounds. We also know how these sounds are transmitted through air, through airwaves, through the turbulence caused by speech air going out of the speaker's mouth into the air.

We know how speech sounds are transmitted from the speaker to the listener. But we know nearly nothing about how listeners understand these sounds. We only know that his speech air strikes cochlea inside both our ears. But what next? What mental processes, what cognitive processes separate road from the load, wet from the vet, wet from fret?

What mental processes keep one sound distinct from another? We hardly know anything about, and therefore, lots of people say that when you speak slowly, politely, when you are relaxed when you are comfortable when you give your listener time and attention, then listening happens best.

Each listener regardless of their proficiency in the language, then gets enough time to understand you. So, please cultivate the habit of speaking slowly, it is much more important than the pronunciation of than learning the pronunciation of any one particular sound or word. Some cultures you see, language goes with cultures. Language is not synthetic. Language is not divorced from the community and society. Each language belongs to, or each dialect of a language belongs to a group of people, a speech community, and it goes with the culture of the language.

In many Asian countries, when you greet people, you also make a different kind of physical gesture with it. When we say Namaste, we fold our hands and bow our head. So do Arabs, so do many other people in South East Asian countries like Japan, Korea, China. Similarly, with English speaking cultures. Speaking rapidly, speaking fast is not considered polite in those cultures. You should look at the listener, you should be relaxed, and you should talk slowly to the listener; otherwise, it seems like you were in a hurry, you are not giving enough time and therefore enough respect to the listener, it is not considered polite. It is considered rude.

Slow speech is polite speech, it is a mark of respect, you can talk to the Prince, you can talk to the Pope, or you can talk to the King, you can talk to the Minister, anyone you like. Even if you make some mistakes so you should not, even if you make some mistakes of grammar or vocabulary, it will be understood, you may be pardoned so long as you speak respectfully and slow speech is a mark of respect, polite, is a mark of politeness.

The slow speech also gives the speaker time to think and use correct words in a correct manner. If you speak slowly, it is hardly likely that you will make mistakes because before you utter another word, you get time to think, you get time to see your word, you get time to hear your own word before you speak. Therefore, from no matter what angle you think from the listeners or from the speakers, slow speech is our best bet for being understood in formal situations, in business situations, in our times.

In today's time particularly when the entire world has come together through the internet, through mobile phones, in businesses we transacted across the world using a variety of accents for the same language, for the same words, it is of utmost importance to admit, to realise and to cultivate the habit of speaking slowly.

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- It may not be easy to learn to speak slowly; changing habit of a life time can be difficult. But it is not impossible.
- If we learn one thing about Spoken English, we must learn to speak slowly, comfortably. All else will follow.



Nothing helps more, but how do we learn it? How do we learn to speak slowly? It is easier said than done. It is like changing your habit of a lifetime, and you began talking when you were

about 8 or 9 months, and now you may be in your late teens, 17, 18 or older or much older, how do you change the habit of a lifetime? You walk in a particular manner, you write in a particular manner, you speak in a particular manner, and here suddenly somebody comes and tells you, please speak differently.

And it is not that you have one kind of tempo for English and another kind for your mother tongue or any other languages that you talk. These things go together. Those who speak rapidly in English also speak rapidly in their mother tongue, in their second language, in their other languages. In a country like India, where almost everyone is multilingual, we should know and realise that if somebody speaks rapidly in one language, they speak rapidly in all languages they know.

So, it is not easy to change the habit of a lifetime. These things are easier said than done. But is it impossible? No, it is certainly not impossible, and nothing is impossible for a determined person and particularly when we are learning is certainly not impossible. All it requires is some determined practise not just in English, today after this session when you talk to your friends and family in your mother tongue, try and speak your mother tongue also slowly. Because you are not used to it, in the beginning, it may sound funny.

Your friends and your family might also think that something is gone wrong with you, but nothing has gone wrong with you. It is only that you are learning another language and once you get used to this tempo, then you can switch between your normal, in formal situations, please speak the way you like. Be your natural self, but when you talk in a formal situation, when you talk to strangers, when you give a public presentation, then definitely switch to this slow tempo. It is just like switching between 2 languages or two dialects of the same language. It is not impossible.

It is only that you need some determined practise just as you do for learning another language, a foreign language. A lot of adults learn a foreign language in India, for example, like we learn Spanish or Chinese or French, how do we do that? It is just the same way, 2 to 3 weeks, and if you try and speak slowly, for the rest of your life, you will have no difficulty. Every time you

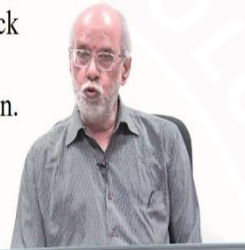
chose, you will speak slowly, every time you chose, you will speak rapidly, and all else will follow. People will understand you without difficulty.

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Activity



1. Record a minute long speech on your favourite topic.
2. Count the number of words.
3. Now take another minute, and record your speech again. On the same topic. But this time speak slowly. Count the number of words. You may have fewer words. Check with a listener What is understood better?
4. Listen to some “good” speakers on television. Are they slow or fast?



How do you know whether you are a slow or a rapid speaker? It is not difficult; it is easy. Do give a self-test. Give yourself a test. Take a printed page, take about some ordinary, easy paragraph of any book you like in English. Count the number of words before you begin. Once you know the number of words, make a note. Now switch on your recorder. I am sure your mobile phone has a recording device. Switch on your recorder and read other the way you speak.

Once you finish reading that paragraph, switch your recorder off and look at the time and look at the number of words. You will immediately know if you are a rapid speaker or if you are a comfortable and slow speaker. If you are a comfortable and slow speaker, you have to do nothing, you already know it. You can continue to speak the same way. But, if you are not, then try and speak slowly. Tell yourself after every group of words that I am going to take time; I am going to speak slowly. Keep reminding yourself not only while you talk in English.

But also when you talk in your mother tongue, also when you talk in your second language, also when you talk to friends and family, let them laugh at you, they will soon imitate you and believe me without knowing they will also relearn, they will also become good speakers, slow speakers of the English language and of their own language. It is not difficult, all you have to do is, to

count the number of words you spoken in your recording device and look at the time you have taken and you will know.

If you speak faster than 3 or 4 syllables per second, then you are a rapid speaker. If you speak faster than 100 words per minute, then you are definitely a rapid speaker. The international standard as many agencies will tell you; there is a body of research which says that even speakers from the same community are not understood by listeners from their own community if they talk faster than 300 words per minute, but even that is rapid.

International agencies like the International Civil Aviation Organization which regulates civil aviation, the flight of commercial aircraft, non-military aircraft around the world and a lot of it happens through language, through the English language actually. There the rigid rule is that all pilots should speak to all traffic controller at speed lower than 100 words per minute. Actually, they are tested, they are licensed if they speak rapidly, they fail the test, and they have to relearn and reappear at the test.

Therefore, count the number of words, give yourself this test, and you will know whether you are a rapid speaker or a slow speaker. If you are a rapid speaker, change, and your recording device will help you and then you know you can also play both your recordings, the rapid speech recording and the normal comfortable slow speech recording to listeners and ask them what they understand better and you will have no doubt what you should cultivate and why?

Also, listen to some great public speakers, listen to some television presenters, listen to some popular television presenters, in newscasters, public speakers and you will see that they all speak slowly and this can be a good model for you, like the two we played before, you can find anyone. There are lots of them on various sites on the internet, and you can profit from them. Once again, more important than learning the pronunciation of individual sounds or words, is the habit of cultivating slow and comfortable speech.

Invest your time and energy in it, and you will know that it makes you a comfortable and confident speaker in any situation, whether talking to one as they say or to 1000. That will be your best bet for being understood. I am not saying you do not have to learn other things; you have to learn other things. We made a list of things that we will learn on this course. But this is about one of the first few things.

Once you have got once you know what you are going to say, you must also know how you are going to say that, and among the things that you should do in order to say how you are going to say, slow speech comes at the top. Learn to speak slowly. Thank you, have a good day.

