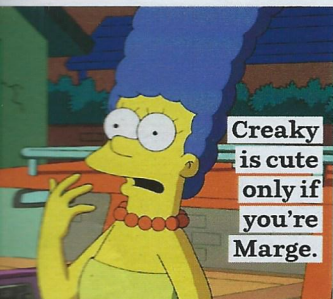


## THIS WAS MY BRILLIANT

Monday morning plan: Lay out the genius concepts I'd devised over the weekend and dazzle my colleagues. But I sped through my talking points, squeaked when answering tough questions, and said *totally* at least seven times. I'd hoped to make a good impression. Instead, I sounded like a helium-huffing Busta Rhymes protégée.

"To a certain degree, you *are* your voice," says Patricia Fletcher, a voice coach in NYC. "If your voice is free, relaxed, and expressive, it's more likely your message, ideas, and persona will be perceived the same way." And if your voice is tight, small, or constricted? "You run the risk of having your message—and you—perceived in kind." Oof. I began working with Fletcher to cultivate a powerful workplace voice.



**Creaky is cute only if you're Marge.**

## SMOOTH IT OVER

Oh vocal fry...that gravelly, "is she hungover?" tone you hear when Britney Spears and Emma Stone speak. It's widespread among young women, but it doesn't project clarity or confidence in the workplace. Eliminate fry and you take a huge step toward "coming across as capable, expressive, and clear," Fletcher says.

Like fryers, my voice sometimes tenses as I hold my breath between words. To help replace shallow breaths with deep, relaxed inhalations that use my diaphragm, I stand with a pillow on my head, which falls if I wiggle around or jut my chin forward when speaking. Then I hold my thumb in front of my mouth, extend it toward an imaginary person I'm talking to, and visualize my voice following that path.

## SHUT DOWN THE UPSPEAK

You know how sometimes? Everything someone says? Rises up and sounds like a question? That's upspeak, and it conveys hesitation, insincerity, surprise, and confusion, Fletcher says. Do a DIY diagnosis: Record yourself reading a short news article, then play it back. Draw an arrow above the words, moving the pen in upward or downward



**"It sounds like I'm asking a question?" says New Girl's Jess.**

motions depending on your intonation. If your sentences tend to end on the upswing, try this visualization exercise: As you speak, use your hand to "draw" a straight, steady line out of your mouth at the same time. My voice is more confident when I do it.

## QUIT THE BABY TALK

Logically, I know that speaking in a little-girl voice when I'm uncomfortable doesn't say badass career woman. So if my voice isn't naturally high-pitched, why do I slip into Chipette mode when I'm feeling the heat? "Women may be, consciously or subconsciously, using the same ammo that worked for them in their adolescence," Fletcher says. But while playing the innocent-and-cute card may have helped us get our way or avoid criticism as a kid, it doesn't project authority as an adult. Try yawning several times—both with your mouth open wide and pursing your lips. This stretches out your throat and tongue, which helps prevent sound from escaping through your nose—key to eliminating nasally baby voice. And if you have a naturally high-pitched voice, you can help it project more strength and confidence by spending a few minutes humming while you get ready for work each morning. "Make sure to slide around into deeper pitches to really wake up your lower register," says Fletcher.



**NSFW: Sarah Silverman's itty-bitty voice schtick.**

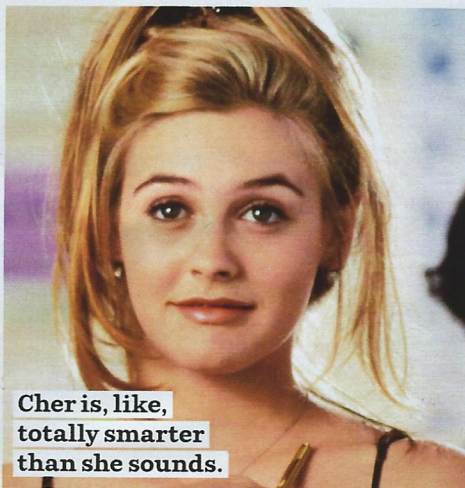
## PHASE OUT THE FILLERS

Subconsciously dotting sentences with *likes*, *ums*, and *ya-knows* is very common...and unfairly or not can make people question your intelligence.

To see if you do it, record yourself during a phone conversation to see what words you toss in the mix without realizing it—or ask a trusted friend to be brutally honest with you.

My own five-minute recording shows I reflexively use *like*. The fix is easy: Replace your *likes* and *ums* with a breath. "Take the silent second to gather your thoughts instead of filling everything with a sound," Fletcher advises.

I try it, along with the other strategies Fletcher has taught me, and find that my colleagues no longer interrupt me or lose interest while I'm talking. Instead, they look at me like I have something important to say. And you know what? I do.



**Cher is, like, totally smarter than she sounds.**