

1. Facts & figures

- Stuttering is characterized by **dysfluent speech** where the flow of speech is interrupted by **involuntary repetitions and prolongations of sounds, syllables, words or phrases** as well as **involuntary silent pauses or blocks**.
- Stuttering occurs in **0,72%** of the **general population**. Stuttering occurs three to four times **more often in men** than in woman.
- Students in higher education that stutter, **differ a great deal** in the level of speech disfluency and the extent to which general functioning is hindered. The amount of stuttering **depends on the specific situation**:
 - Symptoms often **increase in situations that involve an element of social judgement** e.g. a presentation, talking in crowded places where a large number of people can hear what is said
 - **Time pressure and fatigue** increase the symptoms.
 - Dysfluent speech is often **absent when singing, reading or talking to objects or animals**.
- Besides problems with speech fluency, **secondary problems** can arise, such as **negative emotions and cognitions**. These secondary problems consist of:
 - symptoms of **fear, stress, fatigue**. These symptoms occur frequently and increase the number of disfluencies.
 - **irrational thoughts** on oneself, his/her abilities and the reactions of the environment. These cognitions hamper his/or her functioning.
 - **speech anxiety and avoidance behavior**. The student that stutters can fear specific sounds, words or situations. The **avoidance behavior** can include avoiding problematic words, replacing them with synonyms, describing the words or reordering sentences. The most pronounced form of avoidance behavior is not speaking at all or avoiding situations that required speech.
 - **low self-esteem**. The stuttering can control the whole pattern of action and discourse. These negative cognitions and feelings can eventually

lead to the student not seeing himself as a person with abilities but as someone who cannot speak and should not speak at all.

2. Focus points, tips & tricks

Attending classes

Focus points

- Communication with lecturers, teachers and student is often very stressful and tiring. Answering questions or participating in presentation rounds in a group increase the level of stress leading to more dysfluencies.

Tips and tricks

- Providing the student with the discussion questions/topics and implementing variation in work forms, enhances participation in the discussion.
- An empathetic attitude towards the dysfluencies (e.g. not interrupting the speech, not completing the speech and sustaining eye contact) is supportive.

Assignments

Focus points

- Participating in group assignments and giving oral presentations can create barriers and cause large amounts of stress.
- Time pressure can increase the number of dysfluencies.

Tips and tricks

- For oral presentations and group assignments it is best to implement a growth path (e.g. at the beginning of the study program the recording

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of the presentation on video, in a next step before a small group, finally in a larger group and support in group assemblage and work load division e.g. taking interviews, making phone calls).

- An **empathetic attitude** towards the dysfluencies (e.g. not interrupting the speech, not completing the speech and sustaining eye contact) is supportive.
- Formulate the learning goals by providing **clear and constructive feedback**.
- Postponing **deadlines** or an alternative assignment be necessary in some cases.

Exams

Focus points

- An **oral exam** can increase the number of dysfluencies. They also cause stress and fatigue.
- During an oral exam attention is **focused on fluency and the associated cognitions** at the expense of the content of the answer.

Tips and tricks

- **Extra preparation time** at an oral or written exam allows to compensate for the slow reading speed, the writing problems and the slower processing skills.
- An **empathetic attitude** towards the dysfluencies (e.g. not interrupting the speech, not completing the speech and sustaining eye contact) is supportive.
- Providing this is not in contradiction with the learning goals, an **alternative written exam** is sometimes recommended.

Internships

Focus points

- During the internship the student can **worry over new acquaintances** and how new people will react to the dysfluency.
- During meetings the student may seem **detached** and not eager to learn.

Tips and tricks

- For **verbal reports** it is best to implement a growth path (first to the mentor, then to near colleagues, then in team meetings).
- An **empathetic attitude** towards the dysfluencies (e.g. not interrupting the speech, not completing the speech and sustaining eye contact) is supportive.
- It can be helpful to **monitor the progress** during the internship on a regular base and provide **clear and explicit feedback**. Learning points that are formulated very concretely provide more learning opportunities.
- Putting effort in organizing **more practice time and extra learning opportunities** results in more opportunities for learning.

Student life

Focus points

- **Social contact** with peers and **participation in student activities** are sometimes avoided.
- **Additional problems** such as fatigue, stress, anxiety and low self-esteem are possible.

Tips and tricks

- The **exploration of activities within the field of interest**, give extra opportunities to establish a social network.

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- A **fixed contact person** in the study program can help monitor the load limit and help look for solutions in case of difficulties.
- Staff members of student facilities provide for **coaching in case of psycho-social problems** such as stress and fear of failure.