

Classroom Observation – Stuttering

Observer: _____ Student: _____ Date: _____

| Factor | Observation Notes |
|---|--------------------------|
| <p><u>Setting</u> Physical environment (noise level and seating) Peer interactions Emotional climate Classroom norms School culture</p> | |
| <p><u>Curriculum</u> Speaking demands Language complexity Oral participation Grading parameters Presentation requirements Classroom discussions Group dynamics Curriculum pace and time pressure</p> | |
| <p><u>Instruction</u> Teacher speaking style Participation expectations Visual supports and scaffolding Teacher response and support Classroom management</p> | |
| <p><u>Learner</u> Emotional responses and stressors Non-verbal cues Coping strategies Participation Educational impact Social communication Self-awareness and attitudes</p> | |

See following pages for more detailed information on observation parameters.

Setting Factors: Observe and analyze environmental factors to identify ways to reduce communication barriers and create a more supportive setting for the student to succeed.

Physical Environment:

- **Noise level:** Is the classroom loud or quiet? Background noise can increase speaking difficulty.
- **Seating arrangement:** Does the student have opportunities to face their listeners, or do they speak from the back of the room?
- **Distractions:** Are there visual or auditory distractions that may affect the student's focus and communication?

Why it matters:

A noisy, distracting environment may increase the impact of stuttering, while a structured, supportive physical setting can help reduce anxiety and improve overall communication.

Social / Emotional Environment:

- **Peer interactions:** How do peers react to the student's speech? Are there signs of teasing or negative responses (not listening, interrupting, etc.)?
- **Emotional climate:** Is the classroom a safe, supportive space for communication?

Why it matters:

A positive and supportive social/emotional environment can reduce anxiety and promotes the student's confidence in speaking, while negative reactions and stressful environments can lead to avoidance behaviors and increased impact of stuttering.

Cultural/School-Wide Environment:

- **School culture around speech differences:** Does the school promote acceptance and understanding of speech differences?
- **Communication norms:** Are there communication norms that impact the student's participation (e.g., fast-paced conversations, frequent interruptions)?

Why it matters:

A positive, inclusive school culture can reduce the student's anxiety about stuttering and promote communication confidence.

Curriculum Factors: Observe factors that influence how often the student is required to speak, the complexity of their language, and their overall communication confidence in classroom activities. By observing these curriculum factors, we can identify how academic demands may be affecting the student's communication and tailor recommendations to support their participation in class.

Speaking Demands in Academic Tasks:

- **Subjects that require verbal responses** (e.g., reading aloud in language arts, class discussions in social studies, explaining math solutions).
- **Frequency of oral participation:** How often is the student called on to speak in various subjects?
- **Task type:** Are the speaking tasks spontaneous (e.g., answering questions) or planned (e.g., giving a presentation)?
- **Group vs. individual tasks:** Are speaking tasks primarily in front of the whole class, in small groups, or one-on-one with the teacher?

Why it matters:

Different subjects and tasks pose varying communication challenges. For example, spontaneous speaking tasks may cause more anxiety for a student who stutters, while planned presentations may allow them to prepare and feel more confident.

Language Complexity Requirements:

- **Vocabulary demands:** Does the curriculum require the student to use subject-specific or complex vocabulary?
- **Sentence structure:** Are students expected to produce complex sentences when speaking?
- **Oral vs. written language:** Are students required to explain their written work orally (e.g., explaining answers to math problems)?

Why it matters:

Higher language complexity increases the cognitive load on the student, which may result in more difficulty communicating. Reducing language complexity or scaffolding responses can help the student succeed.

Opportunities and Grading for Oral Participation:

- Are there structured opportunities for the student to speak (e.g., presentations, reading aloud)?
- Are oral responses required for participation grades?
- Are students graded on oral fluency, clarity, or speed of responses (delivery)?
- Does the student have alternative ways to participate (e.g., written responses, assistive technology)?

Why it matters:

If the student is graded on their oral participation or delivery, it can increase pressure and anxiety, which may exacerbate stuttering.

Presentation and Public Speaking Requirements

- Does the curriculum include formal oral presentations?
- Are students expected to speak in front of the entire class?
- What supports are provided for public speaking (e.g., visual aids, scripts, practice time)?

Why it matters:

Public speaking is often a high-anxiety task for students who stutter. Providing appropriate accommodations, such as using note cards or pre-recording parts of a presentation, can help the student succeed.

Classroom Discussion Expectations

- Are students expected to participate in class discussions?
- Are there spontaneous question-and-answer sessions?
- Are students expected to debate or express opinions verbally?

Why it matters:

Open-ended discussions and debates can be particularly challenging for students who stutter. Providing structured opportunities to participate can help reduce anxiety and increase success.

Curriculum Pace and Time Pressure

- Are students given enough time to formulate oral responses?
- Does the curriculum emphasize quick verbal responses (e.g., timed activities)?
- Are there high-pressure speaking tasks (e.g., oral quizzes, “popcorn” reading)?

Why it matters:

Time pressure increases cognitive and emotional load, potentially leading to more stuttering. Allowing additional time for oral responses can help the student feel more comfortable participating.

Instructional Factors: Observe general education classroom instruction factors that may influence the student's communication success. These factors include how instruction is delivered, the level of speaking demands placed on students, and how teachers facilitate classroom interactions. By observing these instructional factors, we can identify areas where classroom instruction may need to be adjusted to support the student's communication needs.

Teacher’s Speaking Style and Communication Patterns

- **Pacing of instruction:** Does the teacher speak quickly, or do they allow pauses for processing?
- **Questioning style:** Does the teacher ask open-ended questions (which require longer responses) or yes/no questions (shorter, simpler responses)?
- **Wait time:** Does the teacher provide sufficient wait time after asking a question, or do they expect immediate responses?
- **Interruptions:** Does the teacher interrupt or finish students' sentences?

Why it matters:

A fast-paced speaking style or lack of wait time can increase pressure on a student who stutters. Providing more wait time and avoiding interruptions can reduce anxiety and improve participation.

Classroom Participation Expectations

- **Turn-taking rules:** How are speaking turns managed in the classroom? Is there a predictable system, or are students randomly called on?
- **Time pressure:** Are students given enough time to respond, or are they rushed?
- **Question type:** Are students asked open-ended questions (which require longer responses) or yes/no questions (shorter, less complex answers)?
- **Popcorn reading or round-robin reading:** Are students expected to read aloud without advance notice?
- **Group discussions:** Are students encouraged to share ideas verbally in small groups or whole-class discussions?

Why it matters:

Unpredictable turn-taking and high-pressure or unexpected speaking demands (e.g., popcorn reading) can create anxiety for a student who stutters. Structured turn-taking and predictable or alternative participation methods can reduce this pressure. Providing more time and using a variety of question types can ease speaking anxiety.

Speaking Demands in Instructional Activities

- **Speaking demands:** What are the speaking expectations in the classroom (e.g., oral reading, answering questions, presentations)?
- **Whole-class instruction:** Does the teacher frequently ask students to share answers aloud in front of the class?
- **Small-group work:** Are students required to verbally share ideas in small groups?
- **Presentations:** Are students required to give oral presentations?
- **Oral reading tasks:** Are students expected to read aloud in class? If so, is there an option to opt out or prepare in advance?

Why it matters:

Certain instructional activities, such as oral reading and presentations, can trigger anxiety and avoidance behaviors in students who stutter. Providing alternatives, such as written responses or pre-recorded presentations, can help.

Use of Visual Supports and Scaffolding

- Does the teacher use visual aids (e.g., slides, charts, anchor charts) to support verbal instruction?
- Are sentence starters or prompts provided to help students formulate responses?
- Are students allowed to write down their responses before speaking, if desired?
- Does the teacher provide modeling or practice before requiring verbal responses?

Why it matters:

Visual supports and scaffolding can reduce cognitive load and help the student feel more confident when speaking.

Teacher's Emotional and Behavioral Support

- **Teacher's reaction to stuttering:** How does the teacher respond when the student stutters? Are they supportive and patient, do they interrupt, or do they show signs of frustration?
- **Encouragement and reinforcement:** Does the teacher encourage the student to participate verbally, even if they stutter?
- **Emotional climate:** Is the classroom a safe, supportive environment for communication?

Why it matters:

A teacher's reaction to stuttering can significantly impact a student's willingness to participate. Positive reinforcement and patience can build the student's confidence, while negative reactions may increase avoidance behaviors.

Classroom Management and Time Pressure

- Does the teacher rush through activities or allow time for students to formulate responses?
- Are there frequent timed activities (e.g., rapid-fire questioning, timed games)?
- Is there a balance between oral and written tasks?

Why it matters:

Time pressure can increase moments of stuttering or tension. Allowing more time for responses and balancing oral tasks with written alternatives can help reduce communication pressure.

Learner Factors: Observe learner factors that can impact the student's communication in the classroom. These factors include the student's emotional responses to speaking tasks, coping strategies, participation habits, and how stuttering affects their academic performance and social interactions.

Emotional Responses to Speaking Tasks

- **Anxiety or fear:** Does the student show signs of anxiety when asked to speak (e.g., fidgeting, avoiding eye contact, hesitating)?
- **Stressors:** Are there any observable stressors that might impact the student's communication (e.g., high academic demands, social conflicts)?
- **Non-verbal cues:** Does the student appear anxious or frustrated when speaking? Do they appear frustrated or upset when they stutter?
- **Avoidance behaviors:** Does the student try to avoid speaking tasks (e.g., by not raising their hand, giving short answers, or pretending not to know the answer)?
- **Confidence level:** Does the student appear confident or hesitant when speaking in class?

Why it matters:

Students who feel anxious or frustrated when speaking may avoid participation, which can impact both academic performance and social relationships. Identifying emotional responses helps the SLP develop strategies to reduce anxiety and build confidence.

Coping Strategies for Managing Stuttering

- **Natural strategies:** Does the student use any spontaneous strategies to manage stuttering?
- **Avoidance behaviors:** Does the student avoid specific words, sounds, or speaking situations?
- **Physical behaviors:** Are there any secondary behaviors (e.g., eye blinking, head nodding) associated with stuttering?
- **Self-correction attempts:** Does the student try to “correct” their stuttering or restart their sentences?

Why it matters:

Observing the student’s coping strategies provides insight into how they manage their stuttering and whether they need more effective ways to make talking easier.

Participation in Classroom Activities

- **Willingness to participate:** Does the student raise their hand to answer questions or participate in discussions?
- **Task avoidance:** Does the student avoid oral tasks, such as presentations or group work?
- **Persistence:** If the student stutters, do they continue speaking or stop and give up?
- **Speaking situations:** Does the student participate more in small groups than in whole-class discussions?

Why it matters:

A student who frequently avoids speaking tasks may miss important learning opportunities. Understanding participation patterns helps the SLP develop recommendations for increasing the student’s involvement.

Impact on Educational Performance

- **Accuracy of oral responses:** Is the content of the student’s responses affected by stuttering (e.g., giving short or incomplete answers to avoid stuttering)?
- **Length and complexity of responses:** Does the student give shorter or simpler answers than expected for their age and grade level?
- **Written vs. oral performance:** Is there a noticeable difference between the student’s written and oral performance?

Why it matters:

Stuttering may impact the student’s ability to demonstrate their knowledge orally.

Impact on Social Communication Skills

- **Peer interactions:** How does the student communicate with peers? Do they engage in conversations, or do they avoid social interactions?
- **Turn-taking in conversations:** Does the student wait for their turn to speak, or do they interrupt to avoid losing their chance?

- **Reactions to stuttering:** How do peers respond when the student stutters? Does the student appear affected by these reactions?

Why it matters:

Social interactions are critical for a student's overall well-being. Stuttering can impact social relationships if the student avoids communicating or if peers react negatively.

Self-Awareness and Attitudes Toward Stuttering

- **Awareness of stuttering:** Is the student aware of their stuttering? Do they acknowledge it when it happens?
- **Attitudes toward stuttering:** How does the student feel about their stuttering? Are they embarrassed or open about it?
- **Self-advocacy:** Does the student ask for help or accommodations when needed (e.g., asking for extra time to speak)?

Why it matters:

A student's self-awareness and attitude toward stuttering can influence their motivation to participate in therapy and use communication strategies in the classroom.