

# The Fluency Questionnaire

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Most people who stammer are put, all too frequently, into situations where they feel unable to stammer openly due to the risk of being stereotyped, stigmatised, or discriminated against. This can place a considerable burden in terms of feeling the need to conceal or mask their dysfluency to pass as fluent. Discussing ableism (i.e. social prejudice in favour of people who are able-bodied) is complex and is an emerging and evolving cultural notion. To give people who do not stammer an insight into how it feels to experience the ableist expectations and norms that are pervasive in today's society, the following satirical questionnaire was devised. Inspired by *The Heterosexual Questionnaire* attributed to Martin Rochlin (1972), it is based on fluency-phobic premises, rather than the fluency-philic premises which currently dominate. The Fluency Questionnaire aims to upend the typical dynamics between stammering and fluency and parody the formal assessment measures that people who stammer are frequently asked to complete.

## ----- QUESTIONNAIRE -----

This questionnaire is designed for fluenters only (i.e. people who speak fluently). Fluency is a neurodevelopmental difference that leads to highly predictable and consistent forward execution of speech sounds produced in the context of language. The effects of this on a person have been shown to be wide-ranging and go far beyond the impact on speech itself. Common public perceptions of fluency are that it is dull to listen to due to its regularity and predictability. Fluenters are widely seen to be less creative, spontaneous, and interesting than stutterers. Research has also shown that fluenters lack insight into the subtle social and interpersonal dynamics of communication. If you do not identify as fluent, please pass this questionnaire on to a friend who does. Please try to answer the questions as candidly as possible. Your responses will be held in strict confidence and your anonymity fully protected.

1. What do you think caused your fluency?
2. When and how did you first realise you were fluent?
3. Is it possible that your fluency is just a phase you will grow out of?
4. Did preschool therapy as a child help you with your fluency or did your fluency persist?
5. Could it be that your fluency stems from emotional trauma rather than a neurological or genetic difference?
6. To whom have you disclosed your fluency? How did they react?
7. Why do fluenters place so much emphasis on uniform, smooth, and polished delivery?
8. Why do you attribute fluency to so many famous people? Is it to justify your own fluency?
9. Why do fluenters feel so compelled to seduce others into their way of talking?
10. Fluenters are notorious for assigning themselves and one another rigid, time-bound speaking roles and expectations. Why must you cling to such homogeneous speaking norms?
11. How often as a young flunter, were play dates turned down for fear of catching your fluency?
12. Why are fluenters so boring and predictable?
13. To what extent do you feel that your fluency is a sign of lack of creativity or a need to conform?

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14. What social penalties have you experienced as a result of your fluency?
15. How often do listeners give you 'the face' and look at you in confusion when you find yourself being fluent?
16. When you are having a moment of fluency, how often do listeners break eye contact, not wait for you to finish talking, finish your utterance for you, laugh at you or walk away whilst you are mid-sentence?
17. How often have you been complimented by people you have just met that they would hardly know you were fluent?
18. How often have you not given a presentation, applied for a job or put yourself forward for a promotion because of your fluency?
19. How do you find being seen as an inspiration for everything you have achieved despite your fluency?
20. Could you trust a fluent therapist or doctor? Don't you fear they might be inclined to influence you in the direction of their own speech orientation?
21. There seem to be a lot of unhappy fluenters. Techniques have been developed that might enable you to change your speaking pattern if you really want to. After all, you never chose to be a flunter, did you? Have you considered fluency restructuring therapy, fluency modification or Fluency Anonymous?
22. Due to the chronic nature of fluency, do you agree that attaining completely normal and lasting dysfluency may be an unrealistic goal for fluenters?
23. Shouldn't you ask your radical fluency pride activists to keep quiet? Wouldn't that encourage more funding of medical research and therapy into improving the lives of those afflicted with fluency?
24. If you've never experienced dysfluency, how can you be sure you wouldn't prefer it?

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We hope that you have learned something from completing this questionnaire.

If you took it seriously, you may be feeling somewhat uneasy about the ableist attitudes, understandings, and beliefs it shines a light on. It is easier to understand another person's experience if you are able to walk in their shoes. That is what this exercise aims to achieve. It was never intended to suggest that fluency is wrong or that you have to defend it in any way, but rather to give you a better understanding of fluent privilege and the attitudinal barriers people who stammer can face in relation to their own unique way of speaking. Recognising privilege and oppression present in our society enables us to see that much of what is accepted as 'normal' is socially constructed. You now have a better idea of the stereotypes, stigma and discrimination people who stammer can experience in a world that is designed for the fluent majority.

Going forward, we hope this thought experiment helps you to respond to unhelpful stammering stereotypes and ableist attitudes with greater insight, compassion and understanding. In so doing, you will contribute to creating a world that celebrates diversity and supports the right of all people to engage in life fully without question and without having to defend natural communication variation.