

WHAT IS CLUTTERING

Cluttering is a fluency disorder that is often misunderstood. Even more confusing is the distinction between cluttering and stuttering, especially since **the two can but do not always co-occur**. Researchers have been working toward developing an agreed upon definition of cluttering. While some experts believe that language issues are central to the communication disorder of cluttering, others contend that a person with cluttering might sound like they have a language disorder because they are speaking at a rate that is fast enough to cause the fluency of their message to break down in some way.

Much more research is needed to determine the underlying factors in the speech of those with cluttering. What we do know is not all people with cluttering have symptoms in areas outside of their speech, such as difficulty with writing or organizing what they want to say. Therefore, St. Louis and Schulte (2011) created the Lowest Common Denominator (LCD) definition of cluttering (*below*) that focuses upon the aspects of speech that must be present to diagnose a person with cluttering.

Cluttering is a fluency disorder wherein segments of conversation^a in the speaker's native language^b typically are perceived as too fast overall^c, too irregular^d, or both. The segments of rapid and/or irregular speech rate must further be accompanied by one or more of the following: (a) excessive "normal" disfluencies^e; (b) excessive collapsing^f or deletion of syllables; and/or (c) abnormal pauses, syllable stress, or speech rhythm.

- a. Cluttering must occur in naturalistic conversation, but it need not occur even a majority of the time. Clear but isolated examples that exceed those observed in normal speakers are sufficient for a diagnosis.
- b. This may also apply to the speaker's mastered and habitual non-native language, especially in multilingual living environments.
- c. This may be true even though syllable rates may not exceed those of normal speakers.
- d. Synonyms for irregular rate include "jerky," or "spurty."
- e. These disfluencies are often observed in smaller numbers in normal speakers and are typically not observed in stuttering.
- f. Collapsing includes, but is not limited to, excessive shortening, "telescoping," or "over-coarticulating" various syllables, especially in multisyllabic words.



The National Stuttering Association is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Since 1977, we have dedicated ourselves to bringing hope and empowerment to children and adults who stutter, their families, and professionals through support, education, advocacy, and research.

**COPYRIGHT © ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
NATIONAL STUTTERING ASSOCIATION**

P. 800.WESTUTTER (937.8888) | E. INFO@WESTUTTER.ORG

WESTUTTER.ORG | [f](#) [t](#) [@](#) [in](#)



STUTTERING VS. CLUTTERING



IS IT CLUTTERING?

Because this can be complicated to figure out, contacting a speech-language pathologist with experience with cluttering should be your first step. Not all therapists who treat stuttering treat cluttering, but many do have experience in this area, or may be able to guide you to someone in your area.

STUTTERING VS. CLUTTERING

While there is some overlap between stuttering and cluttering, there are also distinct differences. The chart to the right outlines some major differences between cluttering and stuttering. Please note, the underlined sections in the chart are part of the mandatory criteria outlined in the LCD definition.

Unfortunately, because of confusion about cluttering, many with cluttering are often misdiagnosed with stuttering. Fortunately, these misdiagnoses are becoming less common as more information about cluttering emerges. However, lack of understanding is still a concern, and much more needs to be done in terms of awareness and education about cluttering.

CLUTTERING AWARENESS

In some cases, the person with cluttering may be unaware. However, we have learned a great deal from more and more people with cluttering. Many who clutter have reported they always knew something was different about their communication from listener reactions.

Since there is little awareness among the public about cluttering, speakers receive only vague feedback from others about improving their communication skills. Therefore, they may be aware communication is a challenge, but not aware of why. It is important to note that even if a speaker hasn't been diagnosed with cluttering, they may still be aware of the daily communication challenges they face.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

The International Cluttering Association was founded in May 2007. Part of its mission is to increase awareness and education about the communication disorder cluttering.

Join the group for free or browse the wide range of free resources available on the topic of cluttering.

sites.google.com/view/icacluttering

SYMPTOM	STUTTERING	CLUTTERING
What gets stuck	Word, sound, syllable	Message
Knowing what to say	Yes	The speaker may know but they may have a difficult time getting the message across efficiently
Awareness	Typically, yes	Many clutterers know they face communication challenges, but don't know in the moment that they are cluttering
Rate differences	Can be a secondary strategy (i.e., person who stutters may speak quickly to avoid stuttering), but is not central to stuttering itself	Mandatory for a diagnosis of cluttering (note, rate has to be rapid OR irregular, but does not have to be both or happen all the time)
Disfluencies	Mostly stuttering-like disfluencies (SLDs), such as repetitions, prolongations, blocks <i>Repetitions of sounds of syllables:</i> y-y-you wa-wa-watermelon <i>Prolongations:</i> sssso; thiiiiis <i>Blocks:</i> sound gets stuck and person has difficulty moving forward to next sound: p---eople	Mostly non-stuttering-like disfluencies (NSLDs), such as interjections/filler words, phrases repetitions, revisions <i>Interjections/filler words:</i> um, uh <i>Phrase repetitions:</i> I love, I love NSA <i>Revisions:</i> I would like ice cream, no, please make that a shake
Articulation disfluencies (i.e., difficulties pronouncing sounds in words)	Not in pure stuttering (i.e., stuttering without any additional communication challenges)	May sound "Mushy" and "Slurred", typically can be corrected by such strategies as regulating rate
Prosody (i.e., the rhythm/melody of one's speech)	Typically normal	May be impacted; especially by change in pausing related to irregular rate
How it sounds	Repetitions, prolongations, blocks	Rushes of speech; lots of restarts
Adverse life impact	Negative reactions and communication avoidance have been identified by people who stutter and people with cluttering	

Kathleen Scaler Scott, Ph.D., CCC-SLP Speech-Language Pathologist, Board Certified Specialist in Stuttering, Cluttering & Fluency; Professor, Misericordia University, Former Coordinator of International Cluttering Association