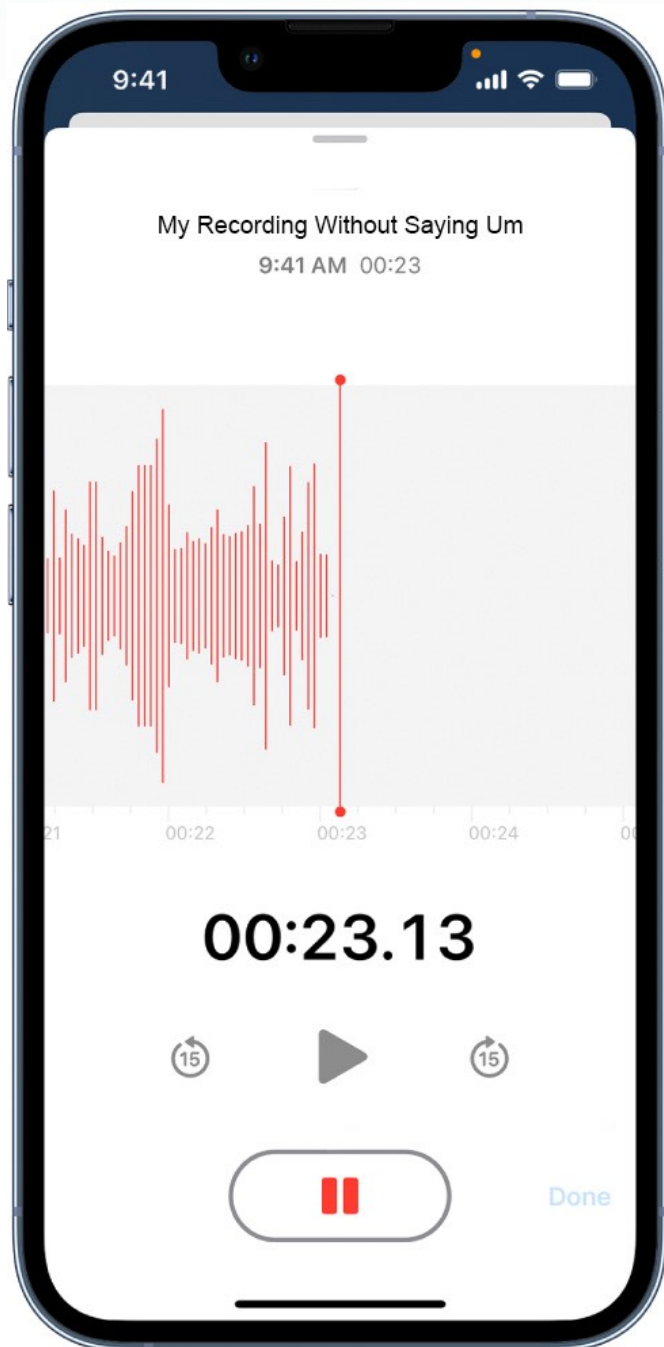


Don't Say Um.

Just, don't say um ok? Should be easy right? Let's give it a try.



Get your phone out, prop it up in front, and get ready to speak your “elevator pitch” (for you or your company) out loud. Okay, get ready to hit record and talk. **But before you do, remember: Don't say, Um. Don't do it. Don't say Um.**

Hit record and go (and Don't Say Um).

Now, watch the video or listen to the audio (we know, we know, no one likes to watch or listen to themselves, you're in good company with the rest of the planet, but just do it this once). How many “ums” or “uhs” did you notice? How about conditional language (like, ya know, sorta)?

How did “not saying um” go for you. Probably not all that well.

That was an experiment with what we call the **General Don't School of Feedback**: vague advice structured as a negative avoiding (don't say um, don't rush through this, don't be nervous). Spoiler alert: That kind of feedback isn't helpful. What is helpful is to focus on a positive doing: something concrete you can actually accomplish in the moment.

Which brings us to this deep dive into one of the bedrock tools we use at GK Training: **The Lego Drill**. Let's get to work on it, and then we'll share a modification that is slightly more workplace friendly.

For this exploration you'll need a stack of...Lego bricks. Well, Duplo bricks actually: big bricks are best; little ones will do. If you have access to four to six stackable interlocking bricks within a minute's reach of you, pause reading and go get them! If you're stealing them from your kids, we won't tell them.



Are you back? Good. Here's how to use them:

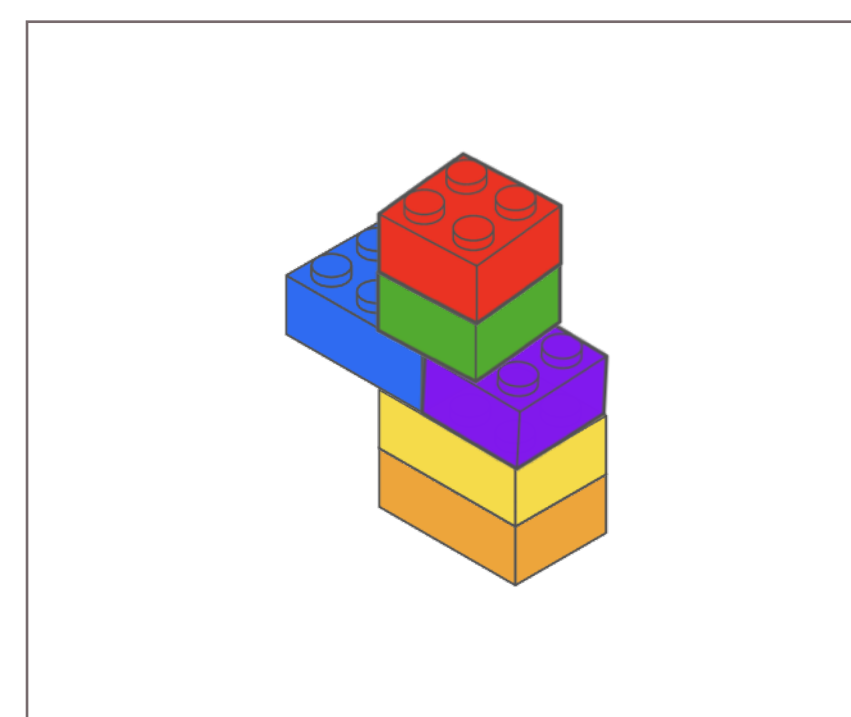
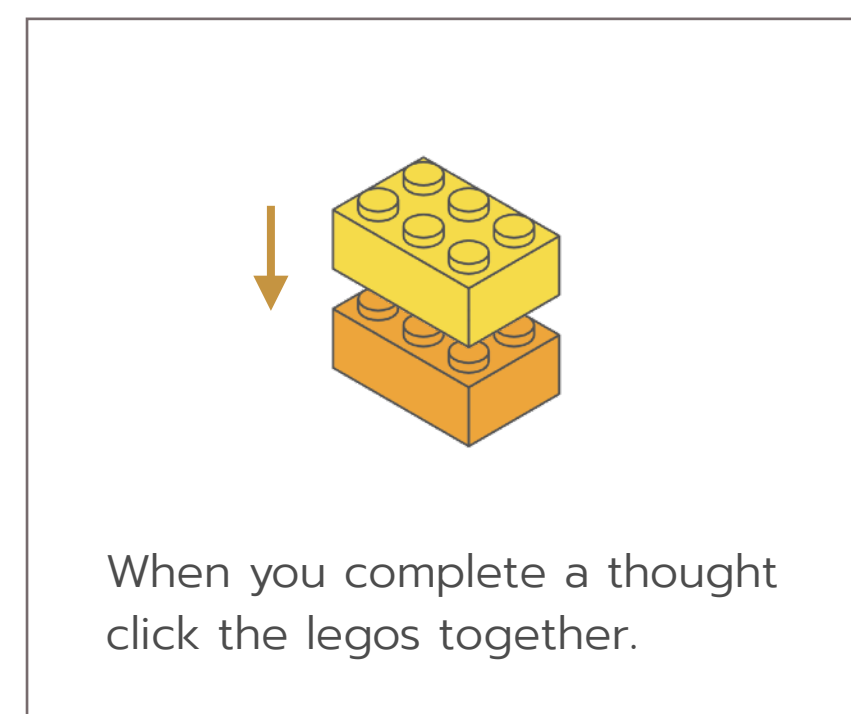
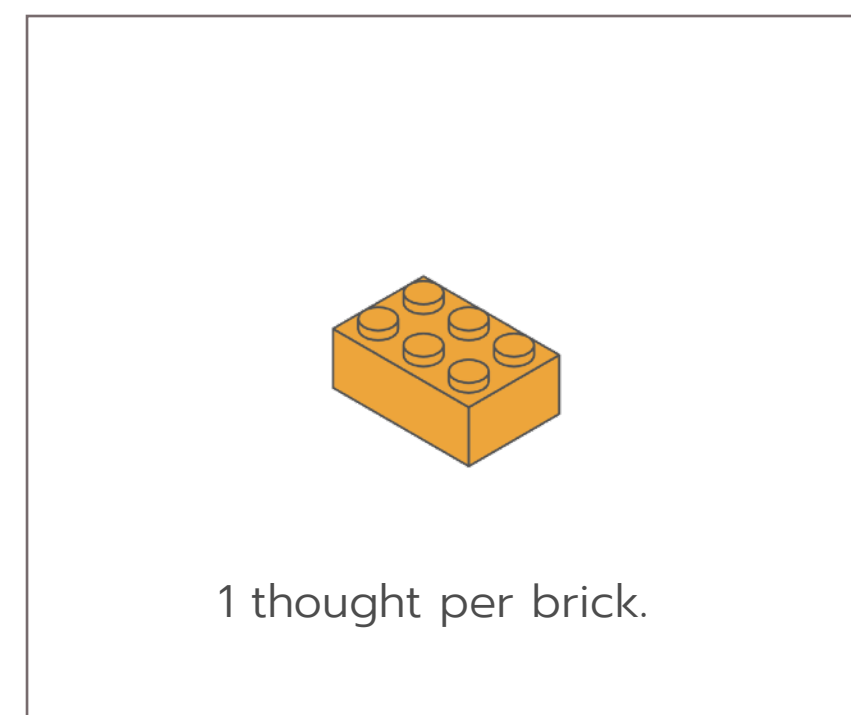
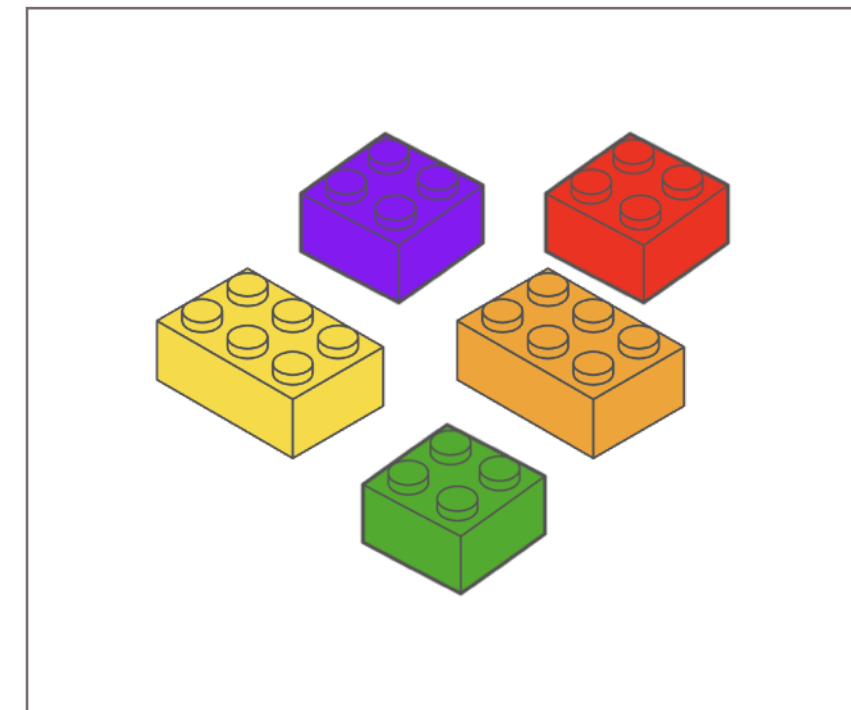
If you want to do a before and after, you can even record yourself again if you want to get completely objective feedback. Recording or not, try saying your content out loud again, but this time you may only share one idea at a time. To help you do that, try the exercise. It works like this:

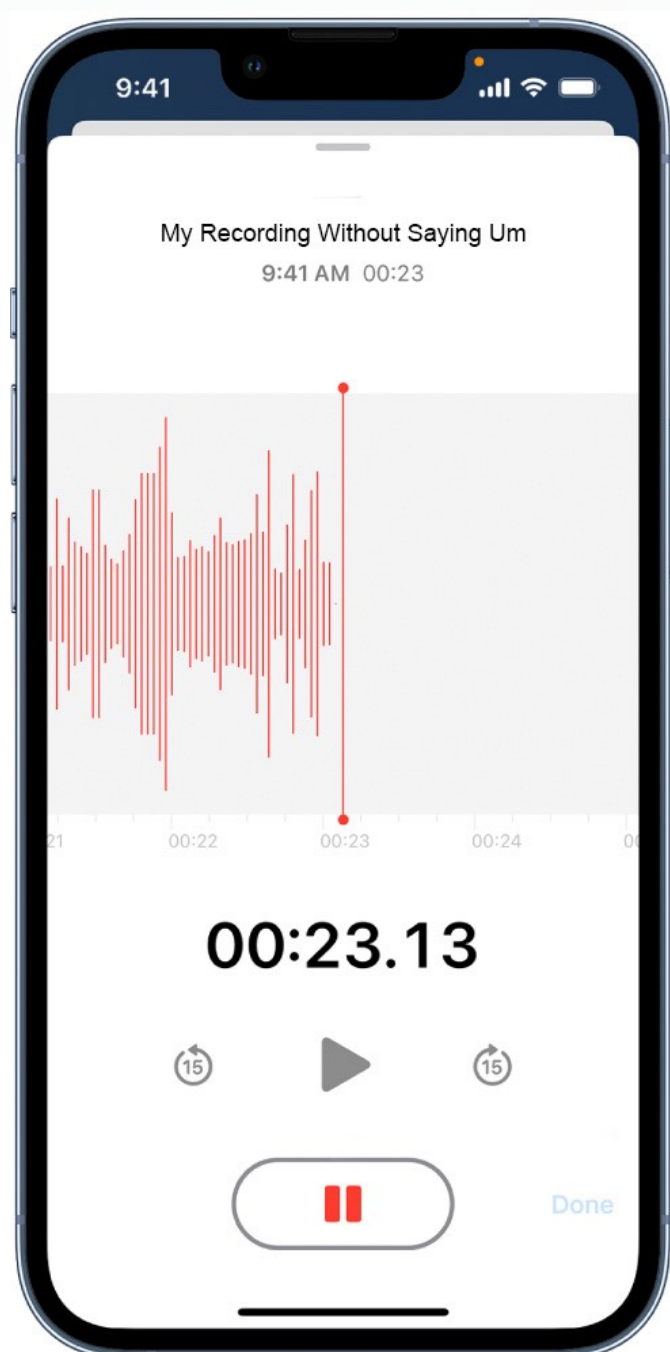
- 1 | Pick up a Lego brick, and – once you're holding that brick in the air – share the first thought of your content.
- 2 | As soon as you have finished that thought – in other words where the period might go at the end of the "first sentence" – **in silence** place the Lego down on a table or surface.
- 3 | **Remaining silent**, pick up the next brick; once in the air, you can share your second thought, and as soon as you have finished that thought (again, where a period might belong at the end of the sentence if transcribed), put down the second Lego – again **in silence** – locking it in place on top of the previous.
- 4 | **Silently** pick up the next block; once aloft, share your third thought. As soon as that's finished, click the third Lego down in place, **still in silence**.
- 5 | **Silently** pick up the fourth brick; start speaking the fourth thought...and so on and so forth until you've used each of the six pieces.
- 6 | If you don't get "all the way through" your content – that's ok! Unlock the 6 bricks and continue where you left off again.

By the way, if you notice you only use one brick while saying 20 seconds or more of content, you are saying too many thoughts per block. Make sure you share only one thought for each brick.

Be disciplined with the exercise! These techniques are similar to athletic drills. Practicing a basketball shot or a baseball swing only helps if the practice is methodical and focused; so too with this drill.

Ok, ready? **Give the drill a try!** If you recorded yourself before, do so again!





Listen or watch the second recording back. How many “ums” or “uhs” did you say? What about little conditional phrases like “sorta”? Fewer, most likely. Maybe none at all. Why? What was different? The simple answer is: the physical activity forced you to pause and helped you tolerate that brief moment of silence. The unconscious habit of filling that space with an “um” or a “ya know” was interrupted. Your communication got more precise.

This drill works because spoken communication is a physical art. **Speaking in a professional setting is much closer to playing a sport or a musical instrument than most people realize.** Because of this, if you want to change how you’re speaking you have to use a physical pathway (kinesthetic learning like this drill) rather than a mental one (thinking “don’t say um”).

Of course, you wouldn’t or couldn’t use these bricks in most professional settings, but you can practice important content you have coming up with them, building muscle memory around pausing and precision. Once you’ve done that you can adjust the drill to use a more business-appropriate prop: the ubiquitous Post-it. We’re including a video demonstration of that **Post-it note modification**, along with the original drill for your reference.



Practice makes permanent, so have a little fun with the Lego Drill every day, and soon you’ll be a concise, pausing, communication master (and those Ums will disappear without a single thought about it!) If you have any questions, comments, or just want to share your success, we’re here for you - reach out anytime at info@gktraining.com and a real live human being will get back to you.