Stuttering vs. Cluttering

Symptom	Stuttering	Cluttering
What gets stuck	Word, sound, syllable	Message
Know what want to say?	Yes	No (or less clear; know but they get derailed in mazes)
Awareness	Typically yes	Yes and No
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	Yes; mandatory for a diagnosis of cluttering (note that rate has to be rapid OR irregular, but does not have to be both)
Disfluencies	Mostly stuttering-like disfluencies (SLDs), such as repetitions, prolongations, blocks	Mostly non-stuttering-like disfluencies (NSLDs), such as interjections/filler words, phrases repetitions, revisions
Examples of disfluencies:	**Repetitions of sounds of syllables:** y-y-you wa-wa-watermelon **Prolongations:** sssso; thiiiis **Blocks:** sound gets stuck and person has difficulty moving forward to next sound: p---eople	**Interjections/filler words:** um, uh **Phrase repetitions:** I love, I love NSA **Revisions:** I would like ice cream, no, please make that a shake
Articulation difficulties (i.e. difficulties pronouncing sounds in words)	Not in pure stuttering (i.e. stuttering without any additional communication disorders)	May sound "Mushy" and "Slurred", typically can be corrected by such strategies as slowing rate
Prosody (i.e. the rhythm and 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
Affective and cognitive components	Can be	Negative reactions and communication avoidance have been identified by consumers
Pragmatics (i.e. social aspects of language)	Typically okay	A secondary consequence to decreased communication effectiveness; if decreased awareness may be more difficulties here

Please note that the highlighted sections are those which are part of the criteria outlined in the cluttering definition described above.

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To find out more about the communication disorder cluttering, visit:

www.associations.missouristate.edu/ICA

National Stuttering Association
Changing the lives of people who stutter

What is Cluttering?

Cluttering is a fluency disorder that is often misunderstood. Even more confusing can be the distinction between cluttering and stuttering, especially since the two commonly 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. To be sure, much more research is needed to determine the underlying factors in the speech of those with cluttering. What we do know, however, is that 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 (in press) propose a working definition of cluttering that focuses upon the most specific aspects of speech that must be present to qualify a person with a diagnosis of cluttering.
The definition is as follows:

> *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.

Can stuttering and cluttering be present in the same person?

Yes, these two fluency disorders commonly co-occur.

What is the difference between stuttering and cluttering?

While there is some overlap between stuttering and cluttering, there are also distinct differences. The table below outlines some major differences between cluttering and stuttering. Please note that the highlighted sections are those which are part of the mandatory criteria outlined in the cluttering definition described above. The non-highlighted items represent differences that have been reported by those with cluttering who have been kind enough to share their experiences. 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.

Aren't people with cluttering unaware of their communication disorder?

In many cases, the person with cluttering may be unaware. However, the fact that there is an active online support group for cluttering (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cluttering/links) as well as smaller support groups for cluttering demonstrates that lack of awareness is not true for all people. Many consumers have reported that they always knew from the comments of others that something was different about their communication. Since there is little awareness among the public about cluttering, consumers received only vague feedback from others about improving their communication skills. Therefore, they may be aware that something is amiss, but not aware of exactly what.

I am not sure if I (or my family member, friend, etc.) has cluttering. What should I do?

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 also treat cluttering, but many do have experience in this area, or may be able to guide you to someone in your area with experience.

I want to find out more about cluttering. Where can I go for 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. Visit its website (http://associations.missouristate.edu/ICA/) to join the group for free or simply to browse the wide range of free resources available on the topic of cluttering.