

Winston Churchill, Stutterer

Churchill's speeches kept Britain alive for the 12 months when it stood alone against Hitler after the fall of France. Where did the force of his speaking come from? Harold Begbie had the answer in 1921:

from even attempting to enter public life; it has always been a handicap to Mr. Churchill, but he has never allowed it to stop his way, and I think it is significant both of his courage and the nervousness of his temperament that while at the beginning of a speech this thickness of utterance is most noticeable, the speaker's pale face showing two patches of fiery pink in his cheeks, the utterance becomes almost clear, the face shows no sign of self-consciousness, directly he has established sympathy with his audience. It is interesting to notice an accent of brutality in his speaking, so different from the suave and charming tones of Mr. Balfour; this

accent of brutality, however, is not the note of a brutal character, but of a highly strung temperament fighting its own sensibilities for mastery of its own mind. Mr. Churchill is more often fighting himself than his enemies.

Begbie, Harold *The Mirrors of Downing Street* pp. 105, 106 (1921)

Begbie did not know that 20 years after he wrote this analysis the world would be immensely grateful that Churchill had developed the strength to defeat even the toughest of enemies.

Recording: [Recordings\Churchill Truman call, semi-controlled stutter at 48 seconds.mp3](#) (This, made in 1945, can also be heard at the Churchill War Rooms Museum in London. Like other recordings made late in Churchill's life and made generally available to the public, such as the 'Iron Curtain' speech and the 'money' speech to the U.S. Congress, the stutter is not a show-stopper but is noticeable)

Sources

Below is a collection of references confirming that Churchill stuttered. This knowledge may enable Churchill to continue to spread determination and optimism, this time among stutterers.

While other boys were going their holiday ways, Churchill was seeking a way to cure his lisp. Moreover, he found that excitement of any sort would cause him to stutter. In later years, in his preparation of speeches, he had to be careful

by some of the people who have known and who have worked with Churchill. Audax tells us that,

Abrams, Mason M *The Persuasion of Winston S. Churchill from 1933 to 1941*, (University of Wisconsin-Madison) p. 17 (1941)

author of the book *Two-way Passage*. She smiled to Stella.

"Yes, yes," growled Churchill, "I'm . . . I'm r-reading it." He stuttered a little.

He extracted a letter from his coat pocket, then said to his hostess in a warm friendly tone: "Just

"Someone sent me a . . . c-corn-cob pipe," said Churchill and stuck his fat cigar into his mouth, making it glow.

"I received one too," F.D.R. said. "I get several a year."

"Is yours . . . w-worm-eaten too?" asked Churchill.

The President grinned. "How about a refill,

So I said, "It's a privilege to meet you, Mr. Prime Minister."

"I'm r-reading your book," he said, "and I—I find it—int'r-resting."

"Thank you, sir," I said. "May I ask how . . . how f-far you've got into it?" I felt my own stammer, usually under control, coming back; and I 31

Adamic, Louis *Dinner at the White House* (Harper & Brothers, New York) (1946) pp. 29, 30, 32

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ISOLATIONISTS

CHURCHILL HAS MASTERED A STUTTER AND A LISP TO BECOME AN ORATOR

British Prime Minister Is Not a Good Extemporaneous Speaker and He Used to Rehearse Before a Mirror—Successful Struggle of Statesman to Learn the Art of Expression in Heroic Tradition Is Described in Current History & Forum.

An illuminating study of Churchill the orator is published in the current number of *Current History & Forum* under the title, "Churchill, Lipping Cicero," by Louis J. Alber with Charles J. Rola. Mr. Alber managed Churchill's last lecture tour in America. Following are excerpts from the Alber-Rola article:

WINSTON CHURCHILL grew up with a lisp and a stutter, the result of a defect in his palate. It is characteristic of the man's perseverance that, despite this handicap, he has made himself one of the greatest orators of all time. Churchill has never cured the lisp. And the stutter still breaks out when he gets excited—which is often. But on the public plat-

audience and rises magnificently to a difficult occasion.

On an occasion when he was addressing 20,000 persons in Toronto, the amplification system broke completely down. Naturally there were cries of "Louder! Louder!" In a few seconds the audience might have degenerated into a howling mob.

Churchill knew exactly what to do and did it quickly. Grasping the portable microphone which hung from his left lapel, he held it aloft for all to see and with a dramatic gesture flung it to the ground where it smashed to pieces. Facing the crowd he thundered in a fine clear voice: "Now . . . that we have exhausted . . . the resources of science . . . we shall fall back . . . upon Mother Nature . . . and do our best!" And to the last he held his audience spellbound.

The outstanding orators of our time have

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Kuhlmann in Pittsburgh, sir.”

Churchill struggled to express his feelings, but his stutter caught him in the throat and his face turned purple. Still grasping the

Born with a stutter and a lisp, both caused in large measure by a defect in his palate, Churchill was at first seriously hampered in his public speaking. It is characteristic of the man's perseverance that, despite his staggering handicap, he made himself one of the greatest orators of our time.

Perhaps most of Winston Churchill

Alber, Louis J. *American Mercury*, Vol 55, p. 173, 174 (1942)

Mr. Churchill was at times difficult to follow, his stammer being very apparent. It seemed to me that he was on surest ground in the final passage and then his voice rang out clearly. But I cannot help feeling that it was the previous day when the House met after

Australia, Government of, Dept of Foreign Affairs, *Current Notes on International Affairs* p. 249 (1937)

How to talk well



James Frederick Bender - 1949 - 262 pages - Snippet view

Winston Churchill, perhaps the greatest living orator, tells us about the long hours he spent to conquer a lisp and **stutter** before he made his first public speech. He still practices. Thank goodness, most of us don't have such tough ...

books.google.ca - More editions

Bender, James Frederick *How to Talk Well* p. vii (1949)

Three Presidents and their books



Arthur Eugene Bestor, David Chambers Mearns, Jonathan Daniels - 1955 - 129 pages - Snippet view

Talk passed on to more important things. According to Adamic all **Churchill** said about his book during the evening were two **stuttering** remarks, "I'm ... I'm r-reading it" and "I ... I ... find it interesting. ...

books.google.com - More editions

Bestor, Arthur Eugene et al. *Three Presidents and their books* (1955)

and when punishment was normally corporal. Winston suffered a lot there, and not just from the headmaster. He was not big or strong for his age, and would have liked to have ended up a bit taller than he did. He was prone to illnesses, and would remain so. He had a **stammer** and slight lisp (the former, he worked hard to conquer when he set out on public life), and he was a natural target for bullies, to whom schools like this one gave ample opportunity. It is an easy mistake to suppose that the man who talked tough, and liked to look tough, was actually (at any rate physically) particularly tough. In some ways he was not. He liked luxuries and cossetting. **Churchill** the man could be tough when he had to be (as, for instance, during his escape from Pretoria in 1899, his weeks in the trenches in 1916, and his journeys in unheated aeroplanes in 1942–44), but that came from colossal will-power, not colossal physique. And while he was a small school-

Best, Geoffrey *Study in Greatness*

Winston Churchill, a Biography

by Charlie Lewis Broad

Page 28

Winston **Churchill** could sum up a military situation, and his judgment on ... he suffered the **impediment** of a **stutter** that took him years to overcome. ...

No preview available - [About this book](#) - [Add to my library](#) - [More editions](#)

Broad, Charles Lewis *Winston Churchill, a Biography* p. 28

Winston Churchill and Harrow: memories of the Prime Minister's ...



E. D. W. Chaplin - 1941 - 101 pages - Snippet view

Churchill, after some hesitation and much **stammering**, replied, " W-ell, sir, as I entered this r-oom, I tr-tripped over the do-do-or m-mat and I am afr- fr-aid I ss-aid Ddd-amn." At the beginning of the South African war, ...

books.google.com

Chaplin, E.D.W. *Winston Churchill and Harrow* (1941)



Memorials of Robert Hugh Benson - Page 85

Blanche Warre Cornish, Shane Leslie - [Biography & Autobiography](#) - 1915 - 95 pages

He was an ecclesiastical Winston **Churchill**, to whom he was curiously comparable, even to the **stutter**, commanding and conquering men's attention against ...

Snippet view - [About this book](#) - [Add to my library](#) - [More editions](#)

Cornish, Blanche Warre *Memorials of Robert Hugh Benson* p. 85 (1915)



Rhetorical Analysis of Speeches - Page 30

by Lionel Crocker - [Rhetoric](#) - 1967 - 229 pages

Indeed, **Churchill** had to correct a lisp and a **stutter** which naturally interfered with his early parliamentary career. He developed a baritone delivery which ...

Snippet view - [About this book](#) - [Add to my library](#)

Crocker, Lionel *Rhetorical Analysis of Speeches* p. 30 (1967)

The Correction of Stammering

by William D Dennison - [Stuttering](#) - 1941 - 37 pages

Page 8

Winston **Churchill** are two men very prominent in the world today, who have suffered from ... A person usually begins to **stammer** because he is sensitive, ...

No preview available - [About this book](#) - [Add to my library](#)

Dennison, William D *The Correction of Stammering* p. 8 (1941)



[The Art of Speaking - Page 321](#)

by E. Floyd Elson, Alberta Peck - [Oratory](#) - 1957 - 544 pages
There are few more famous speakers in the world than Winston **Churchill**; yet he overcame severe nervous stuttering to become the most powerful voice against ...
Snippet view - [About this book](#) - [Add to my library](#)

Elson, E. Floyd, Alberta Peck *Oratory* p. 321 (1957)



[My Darling Clementine: The Story of Lady Churchill - Page 226](#)

by Jack Fishman - 1963 - 384 pages
Mrs. **Churchill** sat beside him until he fell asleep. ... When he is tired the **impediment**, which Clementine worked so hard with him to overcome, returns. ...
Snippet view - [About this book](#) - [Add to my library](#) - [More editions](#)

[My darling Clementine: the story of Lady Churchill](#)



[Jack Fishman](#) - 1966 - 404 pages - Snippet view
To make himself a great Parliamentary speaker and platform orator was the most difficult task **Winston Churchill** ever ... He was often reduced to an agonizing **stammer**, and at times there was a fierce, silent struggle to voice the first ...
[books.google.ca](#) - [More editions](#)

Fishman, Jack *My Darling Clementine* p. 226 (1963 and 1966)

[Social education: Volume 5](#)



[Erling Messer Hunt](#), [National Council for the Social Studies](#), [American Historical Association](#) - 1941 - Snippet view
In the third are fuller portraits of Ernest Bevin and Herbert Morrison, written by Patricia Strauss, wife of GR Strauss, left-wing Labour MP **Winston Churchill** as a boy had a lisp and a **stutter**, but he has overcome these handicaps to ...
[books.google.ca](#) - [More editions](#)

Hunt, E.M. *Social Education: Volume 5* (1941)

overwhelming force of Hitler's conquering hordes . . . who, as Edwin Morrow said, "mobilized the English language and made it fight," . . . this man who has been called the greatest speaker in the world today, in youth was bedeviled with a **stutter** and

Karr, Harrison M., *Your Speaking Voice*, p. 21 (1946)

It is an extraordinary coincidence that this greatest orator of modern times should have an **impediment** of speech similar, we may imagine, to that of the greatest orator of ancient times, Demosthenes. **Churchill** has almost overcome the **impediment**. His delivery is not what we would consider the best. He depends not at all on gesture. Now and then he pauses to glance over the top of his spectacles with defiance or curiosity. His stance is determined, not graceful. For the most part he stands quietly in the same spot, and only moves a step backward or forward when he wishes to emphasize a passage. His voice is sonorous, strong, not the golden voice of a William Jennings Bryan, but also not the vulgar guttural of Hitler. Yet when **Churchill** speaks of Hitler there comes into his tone a note that promises to meet all the Nazi's brutality and pay interest. Churchill's voice is ideally adapted to the radio and

Knickerbocker, H.R. *Is Tomorrow Hitler's? 200 Questions on the Battle of Mankind* p. 172 (1941)

The end of a chapter



Shane Leslie - 1916 - 201 pages - Snippet view

His career was that of an ecclesiastical **Winston Churchill**, with whom he offered a parallel even to the **stutter** in his speech. Yet both could command the irritated attention of the elder men they addressed. In each case a father's son ...

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Leslie, Shane *The End of a Chapter* p. 89 (1916)

Mr. Roosevelt



Sir Compton Mackenzie - 1944 - 256 pages - Snippet view

When Franklin Roosevelt reached the political status which **Winston Churchill** had already attained between 1900 and 1904, his exploitation of it was entirely unlike that of the fair and florid young man with a severe **impediment** of speech ...

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Mackenzie, Sir Compton *Mr Roosevelt*, (1944)

Churchill; the struggle for survival, 1940-1965



Baron Charles McMoran Wilson Moran - 1966 - 877 pages - Snippet view

He grew up full of apprehension and he spoke with a **stutter**. But from the beginning, the will to conquer was there. ... Lord Randolph **Churchill** in two volumes, Marlborough in three and The World Crisis in four had established his ...

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beaten. He grew up full of apprehension and he spoke with a **stutter**. But from the beginning, the will to conquer was there. "Never" — they were his own words — "never give in." There followed years of struggle and public neglect. But before the outbreak of the First World War he had learnt to disguise his natural apprehension and

Moran, Baron Charles McMoran Wilson *Churchill; the struggle for survival, 1940-1965* (1966)

this subject. He defended the army, saying it would readily accord a brave foe the honors of war. He was so much in deadly earnest that he **stammered** more than usual, but on the whole his speech was well received. Parliament is always generous to young men who make their first speech. Not so long afterwards the War Secretary presented

While he liked the military life and fighting, Churchill realized that he was no leader like his great ancestor. Looking around for something else to do, he naturally turned to politics as his father had before him. Naturally, he was a Conservative. And naturally he wanted to be elected to the House of Commons. The Conservative party machine tried him out on the stump. Sometimes he stuttered. He also lisped because of a defective palate. But he had something to say and a fresh way of saying it. He managed to get his audiences interested. These were the freshman years for the future resplendent orator.

Manning, Paul and Milton Bronner *Mr England: The Life Story of Winston Churchill* p. 48, 59 (1942)

Mr. Churchill was quite enchanted. "It's gorgeous. It's magnificent. It's s-s-simply s-s-splendid," he stuttered—as he always did when excited. ~~his language that he is today.~~

Winston Churchill was born and grew up with a stutter and a defect in his palate that caused him to lisp. You could ask for no more impressive tribute to the man's perseverance than the fact

[147]



[I was Winston Churchill's Private Secretary - Page 148](#)

by Phyllis Moir - 1941 - 219 pages

Mr. Churchill has never fully cured the lisp. I found it very pronounced all the time I took dictation from him. And the **stutter** still breaks out violently ...

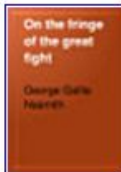
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Moir, Phyllis, *I Was Winston Churchill's Private Secretary*, pp. 103, 147, 148 (1941)

... interests, it would surely be admitted that the number of ...
the course of legislation was even ludicrously small." At this point in
his speech Churchill stopped. *Hansard* went on to report: "The
honourable member here faltered in the conclusion of his speech,
and, amid sympathetic cheers, resumed his seat, after thanking the
House for having listened to him."⁷² Driven to exhaustion by the
stress of events, Churchill had fumbled with his notes, sat down, and
covered his face with his hands. Some of the younger Tories were
tempted to jeer, but others remembered the collapse of his father. He

Morgan, Ted *Churchill-Young Man in a Hurry 1874-1915*, Simon & Schuster, p. 182 (1982)

[On the fringe of the great fight](#)



[George Gallie Nasmith - 1917 - 263 pages - Snippet view](#)

Mr. Bonar Law was the smoothest of the speakers; **Churchill** gave one the impression of having much force of character, despite his **stuttering**, but Bonar Law was the man you felt could be trusted to look upon any proposition with coolness ...

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Nasmith, George Gallie *On the fringe of the great fight* (1917)



[These Four Men: Radio Biographies of the Four Most Talked-about Men in the ... - Page 10](#)

by National Broadcasting Company, inc - [Radio plays](#) - 1941 - 67 pages
... **CHURCHILL: CHURCHILL:** (Music Orchestra tops organ then fades for) (Chuckles)
... (Trying to overcome his speech **impediment**) I want to tell — tell— ...
Snippet view - [About this book](#) - [Add to my library](#)

National Broadcasting Company *These Four Men* p. 10 (1941)

[Brown book: war and Nazi criminals in West Germany, state, ...](#)



Nationale Front des Demokratischen Deutschland, Germany (East). Staatliche
Archivverwaltung. Dokumentationszentrum - 1965 - 402 pages - Snippet view
When one compares the great statesman-like tasks Hitler set himself with the frightened
stammer of **Churchill** one cannot help thinking, for example, of a wrestling bout in the
streets of Bombay, after which the beaten contestant tries to ...
[books.google.com](#) - [More editions](#)

Nationale Front des Demokratischen Deutschland (East Germany) *Brown Book* (1965)

[Churchill](#)



[New York Times Company](#) - 1965 - 160 pages - Snippet view
He overcame a severe **stammer** and a lisp; indeed the traces of those disabilities
made his voice the more compelling. ... At the bedside when death came were Lady
Churchill and their three living children— Randolph, Sarah and Mary, ...
[books.google.ca](#)

New York Times Company *Churchill* (1965)

[Queen's quarterly: Volume 52](#)



Queen's University (Kingston, Ont.) - 1945 - Snippet view
... as we were disturbed by Mr. Churchill's enunciation, his **stammer**, and the lisp
of his Vs'. ... In spite of our enthusiasm Mr. **Churchill** was defeated. That Mr.
Churchill has great courage, no one will deny who recalls his ...
[books.google.ca](#) - [More editions](#)

Queen's Quarterly Vol. 52 (Kingston, Ont, 1945)

[Winston Churchill: being an account of the life of the Right Hon. ...](#)



[Carl Eric Bechhofer Roberts](#) - 1928 - 272 pages - Snippet view
As he begins, the **stutter** with which he is afflicted in moments of stress, asserts
itself. ... **Churchill** begins, not with a hothouse plant, but with a witty impromptu. Mr
Lloyd George, he says, intended to move an amendment, ...
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[Winston Churchill: Being an Account of the Life of the Right Hon. Winston ... - Page 27](#)
by Carl Eric Bechhofer Roberts - 1927 - 272 pages
To the latter he confides that "I want you to cure the **impediment** in my speech.
... On the eve of the ordeal, therefore, **Churchill** puts the names of all ...
Snippet view - [About this book](#) - [Add to my library](#) - [More editions](#)

Roberts, Carl Eric Bechhofer *Winston Churchill* pp. 27, 85 (1927, 1928)

During his state visit Adenauer had long discussions with **Churchill** and Eden, and gave an address at Chatham House. Official London spared nothing in its efforts to signal that, under his leadership, West Germany was well advanced on its road from an occupied country to an ally. In Oxford, to which he had been attracted all his life, he visited half a dozen of colleges. Here he saw with his own eyes, in case he should ever have forgotten, further **evidence** that Britain was as much part of the 'community of western Christian culture' as the Catholic states on the continent.³¹ Nevertheless, he did not change his fundamental view of the British: 'They are just different from us'³² – perhaps because, unlike their counterparts in Europe, the leading British politicians did not speak German!

His discussion with **Churchill** was respectful but far from easy. The British statesman was visibly eager to treat his German guest according to the maxim described in his memoirs: 'In victory magnanimity.' However, old age was taking its toll on **Churchill**. As Blankenhorn noted: 'His way of speaking is jerky, sometimes stuttering, hesitating, indecisive, until suddenly four, five sentences emerge which are reminiscent of the big stones of an enormous building.'³³ From time to time he made utterly undiplomatic comments. Of course, there is always the possibil-

Schwarz, Hans-Peter, *Konrad Adenauer*, p 640



[An autobiography, Volume 1 - Page 129](#)

[Viscount Philip Snowden Snowden - Biography & Autobiography](#) - 1934 - 1094 pages

Mr. **Churchill** was a recent convert to the Liberal Party. ... The slight **stammer** from which he still occasionally suffers was more pronounced in those days. ...

[Snippet view](#) - [About this book](#) - [Add to my library](#) - [More editions](#)

Snowden, Philip *An Autobiography* Vol 1 p. 129 (1934)

The United States addresses of Winston Churchill



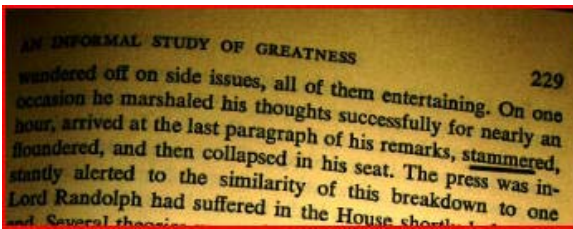
E. D. Steele - 1952 - 276 pages - [Snippet view](#)

A study of **Churchill's** address affords an opportunity to analyze the work of a man who started his career with a speech handicap, a **stutter**, and by his own admission with very little talent, yet rose to the first rank of statesmen ...

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Steele, E.D. *The United States addresses of Winston Churchill* (1952)

dismal level. Besides the borrowed wisecrack, the body of Churchill's first speech was regarded as commensurate to the House of Commons standard. The topic under discussion was the Boer War, and he got off many positive statements that he assured them were made from firsthand knowledge: "I have traveled a good deal about South Africa during the last ten months, and I should like to lay before the House some of the considerations which have been very forcibly borne in upon me during that period." At the beginning of his remarks, he was heard to stutter rather badly, and he looked nervous. "Here and there he paused in his sentences as if searching for a word," says one witness. "But the more he stumbled and halted, the more determined his expression grew, and there was no doubt in any listener's mind that he would be heard through and often."



Taylor, Robert Lewis *Winston Churchill: An Informal Study of Greatness*, Doubleday p. 216, 229 (1952)

English are like tha



1941 - Snippet view

Churchill is not a great natural orator. He is a man who, with indomitable perseverance and power of will, has made himself into a great orator in the face of almost insuperable natural disabilities. He has a lisp and he has a **stammer**. ...

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The English are like that (1941)

The English review: Volume 22



1916 - Snippet view

Mr. **Churchill** is, of course, too well known to need any further presentation. I judge solely on results — the results ... **stutter** of his, the Navy shivered, in which connection I earnestly recommend every Minister and politician to read ...

books.google.ca - [More editions](#)

The English Review, Vol 22 (1916)

The Reader's digest: Volume 38



De Witt Wallace, Lila Acheson Wallace, Lila Bell Wallace - 1941 - Snippet view

Winston Churchill was born with a palate defect which caused him to lisp and he grew up with a pronounced **stutter** as well. Few men with a speech defect would even think of attempting a political career, and it is an impressive tribute ...

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Wallace, De Witt, *Readers Digest Vol 38* (1941)

This site was set up (thanks to Google Books) to make available an instantly accessible strong body of evidence that Churchill stuttered. Any comments, questions or additions please to [Keith Sharp](mailto:Keith.Sharp@ex-stutterer.com) (ex-stutterer awed at the achievements of Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill, November 30, 1874 – January 24, 1965).

Jan 4, 2011

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