

OVERCOMING STAGE FRIGHT AND PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

Fear of public speaking, or even just anxiety about speaking in large groups, is one of the most common fears, and nothing to be embarrassed about. Anxiety is caused when you feel threatened, and your body reacts to raise your heart rate, increase your breathing, and start perspiration.¹ Sound familiar? Luckily, there are simple and easy ways to overcome this reaction, and allow you to give you an amazing presentation!

- **Know your material** – If you can pick a topic that you’re really passionate about, it’ll help a lot when you talk about it to a larger group of people. Make sure you know all about your topic; you can be confident that your information is all accurate. Become the expert!²
- **Prepare notes** – If you’re allowed type up your notes or write them out, have some easy-to-see notes with you. If you freeze up and forget some information, you’ll have a solid safety net that you know you can depend on.
- **Practice makes perfect** – Practice in front of a mirror and maintain eye contact with yourself. It’ll help you become comfortable with saying the words, as well as keeping your eyes fixed on something other than your notes- don’t be afraid to look up.
- **Feel the bottom of your feet, and breathe** – Specifically, where they touch your shoes and the ground. It will help you feel more grounded, and keep you from shifting your feet around. Try some deep breathing while you do this as well, maybe before you start your presentation. The breaths will help you calm down, and give you a moment to gather your thoughts.
- **Pick a point in the room to look at** – An object or point one towards that back that you can consistently look at during the presentation. Look at something like a window, a light switch, or even an outlet on the far side of the room. If you dislike making eye contact, this will really help; it gives the impression of looking at the class, without the anxiety associated with it.
- **Bring something to hold onto** – Most people fidget when they’re nervous, so bringing a small stress ball, eraser, or paper to hold onto while you speak may help. It will help you channel your anxiety towards something more concrete, and will keep you from fidgeting. If you have something small that brings you comfort, like a lucky object, don’t be afraid to have it there with you. If you don’t have a podium to stand behind, try to find a clipboard, notebook or a stack of papers. One sheet of paper shakes a lot if your hand does, so try

These tips don’t have to apply strictly to presentation settings- use them anytime you feel nervous about speaking.

¹ Sue, David, et al. *Understanding Abnormal Behavior*. 10th ed. N.p.: Wadsworth, 2013. Print.

² Hall-Flavin, Daniel K., M.D. "How can I overcome my fear of public speaking?" *Mayo Clinic*. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, Web. 3 Oct. 2014.
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/phobias/expert-answers/fear-of-publicspeaking/faq-20058416>

something heavier to steady your hands. Plus, research shows it'll also make you feel more important!³

- **Don't hurry through it** – It may be difficult to speak slowly, but not only will your words become harder to hear for the audience, speaking quickly may actually increase your anxiety. We associate hurried breaths with fear and panic, which might make you feel even more frightened; be sure to take it slow.⁴ No one minds!
- **You've got this!** – You're the expert on your own topic, and no one knows it better than you do. You have something valuable to contribute, and people want to hear about it. Don't be afraid to share your information, and know that everyone wants to see you succeed.

If you find that your anxiety for public speaking is leading you to taking some extreme measures- like avoiding classes that you might want to take- consider talking to The Center for Writing and Speaking or Wellness for some coaching on how to handle your anxiety. It's so easy to get help, and so easy to get more tips to help your speaking. Don't hold yourself back.

Additional Resources

Staneart, Doug. *Mastering Presentations: Be the Undisputed Expert When You Deliver Presentations (Even If You Feel like You're Going to Throw Up)*. Wiley, 2013. E-book.

³ Jostmann, N. B., Lakens, D., & Schubert, T. W. "Weight as an embodiment of importance." *Psychological Science*, 2009. 20, 1169–1174. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02426.x

⁴ Carbonell, David, Ph.D. "Fear of Public Speaking: the Fear that Stalls Careers." *Anxiety Coach*. Web. 3 Oct. 2014. <http://www.anxietycoach.com/fear-of-public-speaking.html>