

Overcoming Speaking Anxiety in Meetings and Presentations

According to the book of lists, the fear of speaking in public is the #1 fear of all fears. The fear of dying is #7! Over 41% of people have some fear or anxiety dealing with speaking in front of groups. People who have this fear can experience all kinds of symptoms: Sweaty palms, accelerated heart rate, memory loss and even difficulty in breathing.

Mark Twain said it best, "There are two types of speakers: those that are nervous and those that are liars."

The best way to deal with this anxiety is to first acknowledge that this fear is perfectly normal and you are not alone. To reduce your fear, you need to make sure you properly and thoroughly prepare yourself before you speak. Proper preparation and rehearsal can help to reduce this fear by about 75%. Proper breathing techniques can further reduce this fear by another 15%. Your mental state accounts for the remaining 10%.

If you get nervous before crowds, remember that a little nervous energy is absolutely necessary to give you that excited spark that the audience can share. Even very experienced speakers and actors feel "butterflies" before going on stage because they all want to give their best performances. Only speakers who don't care don't feel anything.

Nothing will relax you more than to know you are properly prepared. Below are 10 steps you can take to reduce your speech anxiety.

1. **Know the Room** – Become familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early and walk around the room including the speaking area. Stand at the lectern/podium. Speak into the microphone. Walk around where the audience will be seated. Walk from where you will be seated to the place where you will be speaking.
2. **Know the Audience** – If possible, greet some of the audience as they arrive and chat with them. It is easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers.
3. **Know Your Material** – Only speak about things you know well or that interest you, so you feel confident you have something to offer the audience. If you are not familiar with your material or are uncomfortable with it, your nervousness will increase. Practice your speech or presentation and revise it until you can present it with ease.
4. **Learn How to Relax** – You can ease tension by doing exercises. Sit comfortable with your back straight. Breathe in slowly, hold your breath for 4 to 5 seconds, then slowly exhale. To relax your facial muscles, open your mouth and eyes wide, then close them tightly.



5. **Visualize Yourself Speaking** – Imagine yourself walking confidently to the lectern as the audience applauds. Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear and assured. When you visualize yourself as successful, you will be successful.
6. **Realize People Want You to Succeed** – All audiences want speakers to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. They want you to succeed – not fail. If you get nervous speaking in front of strangers, try to chat with a few members of the audience before you have to give your speech. This helps establish contact and makes you feel as though you're on friendly ground.
7. **Don't Apologize for Being Nervous** – Most of the time your nervousness does not show at all. If you don't say anything about it, nobody will notice. If you mention your nervousness or apologize for any problems you think you have with your speech, you'll only be calling attention to it. Had you remained silent, your listeners may not have noticed at all.
8. **Concentrate on Your Message** – Your nervous feelings will dissipate if you focus your attention away from your anxieties and concentrate on your message and your audience, not yourself.
9. **Turn Nervousness into Positive Energy** – the same nervous energy that causes stage fright can be an asset to you. Harness it, and transform it into vitality and enthusiasm. Learn a quick stress-reducing routine for relaxing your neck, shoulder and facial muscles just before giving your talk.
10. **Gain Experience** – Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. Most beginning speakers find their anxieties decrease after each speech they give.

If the fear of public speaking causes you to prepare more, then the fear of speaking serves as its own best antidote.

Remember, "He who fails to prepare is preparing for failure – so Prepare, Prepare, Prepare."

Visualize yourself succeeding and enjoy the applause!

Additional Resources maybe found on the 4-H Website: www.four-h.purdue.edu

"Overcome the Fear of Speaking to Groups" by Dr. Carl A. Broady, Extension Specialists, 4-H Youth Demonstration and Public Speaking Ideas, Tips and Guidelines can be found on the website.