

MANAGING SPEAKING ANXIETY

Understanding Your Nerves and Saving Yourself in Any Situation

Acknowledging your anxiety is the first step towards overcoming it. Understand that nervousness is common: even experienced speakers feel it. Identify the triggers that cause your stress and develop techniques to manage them. Breathing exercises, positive self-talk, and visualization can help you stay calm and focused before and during your presentation.

I. Let's start with a few questions:

1. What situations make you nervous?
2. What are you afraid of?
3. What gives you confidence? How can you use it as you prepare to speak?
4. What is your best relaxation technique?
5. What mental and physical maneuvers can you use if you are panicking?
6. How can you improve your mindset and "tame your inner tyrants" that criticize, judge you, and make you feel ill-equipped?

II. Imposter Syndrome

Many people experience the phenomena of Imposter Syndrome. It's characterized by feeling like you:

- Are a total fraud
- Don't belong
- Aren't worthy of people's attention, even though it's not true

You feel terrified of misspeaking and being exposed as something you're not.

The Imposter Syndrome is fueled by a voice inside your head that insists you are a fraud, regardless of your worth and accomplishments.

This voice can stop a speaker from remembering what they want to say ('Brain Freeze').

The best and most immediate solution for holding back the negative self-talk is to counter it firmly and repeatedly. "They asked me specifically to present, because I'm recognized as an expert on the subject". Then own it.

III. What to do if you have a panic attack

A. The symptoms of panicking before or during a speech

Let's walk through a typical panic attack and discuss how to recover from it.

Your heart is pounding. Your breath is shallow and fast.

You can see your hands shaking! You think, "Everybody is noticing that for sure".

Uh-oh. You've just started speaking and your voice sounds wobbly. You know everybody hears that too.

You can't let go of the thought that everyone knows that you're terrified of public speaking.

You suddenly think you're going to forget what you're supposed to say. All those talking points you've prepared . . . poof!

YOU HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE. But you can't do that because everyone is expecting you to speak.

You're trapped. There's no way out.

B. How to cope when panic hits

What are you going to do? What *can* you do?

If you find yourself in this seemingly impossible position, try these quick fixes that can be effective in those moments when you need them most.

But before you do anything, start to breathe more slowly and deeply.

Now, proceed with these 5 steps:

- 1. Focus your awareness on one single point:** What's the ONE THING you want to say to this group? Now, marshal all your resources into sharing it with listeners.
- 2. Connect emotionally:** Rather than running away mentally from the speaking situation, accept it and open yourself up to it. Blocking your emotions is part of what made you closed off from your audience in the first place. Instead, become fully present in this moment.

3. **Relax your face:** For just a few seconds, allow your face to go completely slack, devoid of any animation; lifeless. Now allow your personality to flow back into your face. You should feel both relaxed and energized after your brief “rest.”
4. **Move!** Find any excuse to move to somewhere else. If it's before your talk, go to the bathroom or check the arrangements on stage. If you're already presenting, change your position on stage, approach the slide screen, or get out from behind the lectern. The concept of “embodied cognition” states that movement itself aids thinking. And you’ll reduce some of your nervous energy.
5. **Ground Yourself:** Place your feet flat on the floor at shoulder-width, which distributes your weight evenly. Feel the ground beneath you. Tell yourself you are solid and steadfast, and that energy flows through the ground into you. Now speak.

Finally, remember that your mind is looking for an escape hatch. But you don't need to escape. You simply need to *become present and connect with your audience*.

IV. 12 Tips for Managing Speaking Anxiety

Everyone can learn how to manage their anxiety. Below are techniques that can help you be more focused and relaxed before your speech.

1. Put your speech in perspective. It is not a life-or-death moment.
2. Be audience-focused vs. self-focused. Shift your attention to what you want the *audience* to get of your presentation.
3. Concentrate on your *purpose*, not on being judged.
4. Be prepared. *75% of nerves can be eliminated with good preparation.*
5. Over-prepare your Opening. It counts the most.
6. Breathe deeply from your belly. You need oxygen to kick your brain into gear.
7. Anchor yourself. Feel your feet in contact with the ground.
8. Create and use a ritual(s) that allows you to warm up in the wings, hallway, your room, even the bathroom!

- Visualize a supportive audience -- with prompts if needed
 - Visualize speaking and feeling really good about it.
 - Visualize making a mistake and moving on – without getting rattled.
 - Visualize a supportive audience that wants you to succeed.
 - Visualize a relaxing image – with prompts if needed.
 - Release tension in your body.
9. Concentrate on putting the audience at ease. It will put you more at ease.
 10. Know where your “Friendly Faces” are in the audience and rely on them when for encouragement at the beginning of your speech.
 11. Practice your speech, from start to finish, until you feel your nerves diminish in the days leading up to your speech. Stand in the mirror or videotape yourself for visual feedback.
 12. “Winging it” is a bad idea. Your adrenaline will overcome your thoughts and send you on a rambling, disorganized journey. Prepare well first and then be spontaneous in the moment.

V. Seek Professional Help if Needed

Deep breathing and relaxation techniques can significantly reduce anxiety and improve your overall speaking experience. Practice deep diaphragmatic breathing to slow your heart rate and relax your body. You can also incorporate mindfulness or meditation practices to cultivate a sense of calm and mental clarity.

But, if public speaking anxiety persists despite your best efforts, seek professional help. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) or working with a speaking coach can provide targeted strategies to manage stress and build confidence. With help, you can identify the root causes of your anxiety and learn tailored techniques to overcome it.