

COMMUNICATION ANXIETY: THE FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

***Dynamic Presentations* by Amanda Quibell**

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In this chapter...

- Why am I so nervous?
- Overcome Communication Apprehension by Hacking Your Brain
- Overcome Communication Apprehension by Hacking Your Body

WHY AM I SO NERVOUS?

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you'll be able to

- describe some of the causes for the fear of public speaking
- identify some coping strategies to help build your confidence

Why do we get so nervous?

If you feel nervous when speaking in public, or even just *thinking* about speaking in public, you're not alone. In fact, public speaking is a common fear; some people are terrified just thinking about it.

Most of us can talk to our family and friends without fear, but when facing an audience – especially if it's people we don't know – we get nervous. Why?

Watch *The science of stage fright (and how to overcome it)* on TED-ed (4 mins)

(https://www.ted.com/talks/mikael_cho_the_science_of_stage_fright_and_how_to_overcome_it)

Four things contribute to our public speaking fears:

1. Experiences
2. Expectations
3. Biology
4. Lack of practice



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1. Experiences

We tend to remember situations in which we have been hurt or suffered in some way; it's our brain's way of protecting us from being hurt again. When we think about presenting, we remember past experiences of presenting. If you didn't know how to present well, maybe you were boring or forgot what to say. Maybe people laughed at you, or you felt embarrassed and ashamed. Your brain will remember presenting as painful and embarrassing – something to avoid.

The good news is that as you create new, positive memories of presenting in public, they'll replace those earlier negative memories.

2. Expectations

We may have beliefs about what will happen when we speak in public. These are sometimes reinforced by past experiences, and can include the following:

I might...

- *Forget what to say*
- *Look nervous*
- *Be boring*
- *Not make sense*
- *Be shy*
- *Be the only bad presenter in the class*
- *Say the wrong thing*
- *Forget how to speak English*

What beliefs do you have about speaking in public?

3. Biology

When faced with a stressful situation, our brain activates the ***fight or flight*** response, an ancient mechanism designed to protect us from danger. When we go into fight or flight response, our body releases adrenaline, which can cause:

- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Increased heartbeat
- Sweating
- Stomach discomfort, dry throat
- Feeling like you need to pee
- Mind going blank
- Tunnel vision
- Muscles tense or tremble
- Feeling too hot or too cold
- Goosebumps
- Hunching
- Changed perception of time
- Difficulty sleeping the night before your presentation

The fight or flight response is useful if we're under attack and need to protect ourselves, but not if we're delivering a presentation! These reactions are the exact opposite of what helps us present well. But they *are* normal – even professional presenters experience them. And they don't mean that you're a bad speaker; it's just biology! Luckily there are lots of strategies to reduce or eliminate your fight or flight symptoms.

Take a moment to think about what happens to your body when you're feeling nervous. Imagine that you're about to present in front of a large audience. What physical symptoms do you notice?

4. Lack of practice

If we don't have a lot of public speaking experience, or haven't done it for a long time, it can be scary. And if we don't know how to manage our fears, it can become terrifying. One of the great benefits of taking this course is that you'll have a chance to present in a safe environment. We'll work on how to present well, how to manage the fear, and offer some opportunities to practice your skills. The more you present, the easier it gets. Promise!

Coping strategies

These practices help keep your nerves in check before, during and after your presentation.

Practice

Practice is the most effective coping strategy. When you know your content, you're more confident. And

because you're not struggling to remember the content, you can focus on delivery. We recommend that you practice any presentation at least ten times.

- Practice delivering & timing your speech: rehearse in front of family, friends, pets, a mirror
- Practice silently on transit or walking down the street
- **Record yourself**
- Practice until you don't need notes

Before your presentation

Calming techniques

- Take slow, deep breaths
- Meditate
- Visualize success
- Workout earlier in the day to regulate your hormones
- Substitute negative thoughts with positive ones
- Remind yourself that you're only presenting to a few classmates, not thousands of people
- Remind yourself that your audience wants you to succeed

Biology hacks

- Stay hydrated
- Use the bathroom
- Ensure you're cool / warm enough (wear layers or adjust thermostat)
- Adopt power poses, as described by Dr Amy Cuddy in her famous TED Talk (https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_may_shape_who_you_are)

Preparation

- Create a presentation that uses *your* language (don't try to be someone you're not) Speak like you do in conversation; don't be formal or try to impress your audience with fancy words.
- Practice! (At least 10 times is best)
- Familiarize yourself with the setting/room ahead of time
- Familiarize yourself with the equipment ahead of time
- Dress comfortably & appropriately
- Bring water to drink

- Arrive early

During your presentation

- Remember to breathe. If you get anxious, pause and take a long slow breath in through your nose.
- Have water nearby (in a spill-proof container)
- Nobody knows exactly what you're planning to say, so if you stumble, just continue on
- If you feel overwhelmed, try to concentrate on *what* you're saying, not *how* you're saying it

When to seek help for anxiety

It's natural to experience some nervousness when speaking in public. But for some people, significant anxiety makes it really difficult to "press through the fear." If you're feeling distressed, overwhelmed, or have concerns about your wellbeing, please know that there are many resources available. You may want to start by speaking with your instructor, health care provider, or contacting the your college's Counseling Department.

Shame Waves

Read the article below or listen to the audio clip.

Shame Waves

Shame Waves – Article/Text

You just gave the best presentation ever. You were calm, confident and engaging. The audience loved you!

But now you're done. Flooded with adrenaline, your brain works quickly, evaluating your

performance — your dreadful, awful performance. In high resolution, your brain replays the errors, the omissions, the failures. Moments ago you were proud, now you're embarrassed.

What happened?

You've been hit by a shame wave. It may feel like you're drowning in shame, but you can and will survive.

What's a shame wave?

A shame wave is a strong, sudden tidal wave of shame and embarrassment that slams into many people right after they do something in public, whether it's giving a presentation or speaking up in class. Shame waves attack beginners and experts.

Where do shame waves come from?

Humans are social creatures. We crave community. Community helps us survive and thrive.

But our community has to accept us or they might abandon us. Public actions – like giving a presentation – are risky. If the community doesn't like our performance, they might not want us. So our brains use embarrassment as a tool to stop us from doing things the community might not like.

Embarrassment keeps us safe, but too much can cause a shame wave.

Why are shame waves bad?

Although their intentions are good — to protect us — shame waves drown us in powerful negative messages. Shame Waves tell us “for our own good” that:

- You're not perfect
- Failure is bad
- Because you're not perfect, you're a failure

Those messages are evil. Failure is a normal, necessary part of learning. We do very few things perfectly the first time — almost everything you've learned took more than one attempt. If you refuse to do things you're not good at, you won't learn. And you need to be a lifelong learner to have a great life.

How do shame waves affect our confidence?

It's human nature to evaluate our own performance. This helps us learn and improve. But shame waves are destructive. Not to be confused with useful feedback, which is gentle, timely and appropriate, shame waves are violent, inconsiderate and hateful.

- Shame Waves damage your self-confidence
- They also damage your learning-confidence — the belief that you can improve at something
- Shame waves can make you give up

Shame waves focus on the negative. Reviewing our performance, we tend to remember only mistakes and problems. Even if 99% was perfect, shame waves focus on the 1% that wasn't.

Try this simple perspective trick: Hold your hand at arm's length. How big is it? Now hold it right in front of your eyes. How big is it now? Huge, right? It's the same with shame waves; if we focus on the 1%, it feels like *everything* was terrible. Now we feel ashamed, embarrassed and hopeless.

Grab a strategy and enjoy the ride

We need coping strategies to support ourselves. Good coping strategies are like surfboards that help us ride shame waves to safety. Good strategies can decrease the number of shame waves that hit, and the amount of damage done.

Coping strategies can be simple, like taking a few slow breaths. They can be complex, like retraining our thoughts. Here are some useful coping strategies:

Coping strategies

1. Expect shame waves. They're normal; most people experience them. When it hits, just say to yourself, *There's my shame wave, right on schedule.*
2. Remind yourself that your brain's being mean but its intentions are good. Thank your brain and tell it to be nicer.
3. Expect to be imperfect, and to make mistakes. Focus on what you learned from the experience.
4. Think about next time: What will you do better next time?
5. Meditate. Do nothing except sit with the shame. Allow it to wash over you. Don't try to fix it. Just sit and feel shame's heat. Let it blaze and rage until it burns itself out.
6. Breathe. A long, deep, slow breath in through your nose, then out through your mouth.

Relax.

7. Tell someone you trust about your shame wave. Talking can help weaken its power. And you'll probably discover that you're not alone.
8. Practice the 10-10-10 rule: How will you feel about your performance in 10 hours? 10 weeks? 10 years? Adjust as necessary.

You'll find that some of these strategies resonate with you and some don't. That's fine. Find what works, and make your own surfboard of strategies. Next time a shame wave hits, grab your coping strategies surfboard and ride to the Beach of Calm Self-Acceptance.

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Test your knowledge

Fears Quiz – Test your Knowledge (Text version)

1. True or false? Fears associated with public speaking are normal. They can stem from past experiences, beliefs about ourselves, our biology, and a lack of practice.
2. Complete the sentence by adding the following words in the correct place: equipment, practise, early, dress, setting:
In order to set yourself up for success in advance of a presentation, familiarize yourself with the (a)_____, such as where you and the audience will be situated, and the (b)_____, such as a microphone or presentation remote control. You should also arrive (c)_____, (d)_____ comfortably and appropriately, and (e)_____ ahead of time.
3. Some calming techniques that you can engage in before your presentation include:
 - a. Working out earlier in the day to regulate your hormones, visualizing success, and replacing negative thoughts with positive ones.
 - b. Working out after your presentation, visualizing a past time when you were nervous,

and replacing positive thoughts with negative ones.

- c. Taking quick, shallow breaths.
 - d. Drinking lots of tea or coffee
4. Fill in the missing words:
Some biology hacks when getting ready to deliver your presentation include: drinking water to ensure you're properly (a)_____, wearing layers or adjusting the room temperature to ensure you're comfortable, and adopting power (b)_____, as recommended by Dr. Amy Cuddy.
5. Complete the sentence by adding the following words in the correct place: talking, breathe, perspective, learned
Shame Waves are normal. Some coping strategies for dealing with them include: Focusing on what you (a)_____ from the experience, remembering to (b)_____ deeply, (c)_____ to someone you trust about the experience, and taking (d)_____ to remember that you may not feel this shame as intensely in the future.

Check your Answers: ¹

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Attribution & References

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Notes

1. 1. a, 2. a) setting, b) equipment, c) early, d) dress, e) practise. 3. (a). 4. a) hydrated, b) poses. 5. a) learned, b) breathe, c) talking, d) perspective.

OVERCOME COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION BY HACKING YOUR BRAIN

*There are two types of speakers:
Those that are nervous and those that are liars.
Mark Twain*

Normal People Get Nervous

Most people will tell you the thought of making a speech makes them apprehensive. In fact, a poll by the National Communication Association found that only 24% of Americans are very comfortable giving a speech. You may be part of the 24%, or you may be like the rest of the population—uncomfortable at the thought of speaking in front of others. “According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.” This quote from actor and comedian Jerry Seinfeld is funny because it is true. Researchers at the University of Nebraska conducted research to see if indeed students feared public speaking to that extent, so they surveyed 2,543 college students. The answer was “yes.” Public speaking ranked up there with death as the most common fear.

So, there you have it. If the thought of a speech makes you feel apprehensive, you are Normal. Normal people have all kinds of physical reactions when delivering a speech or even thinking about delivering a speech:

- Sweaty palms
- Accelerated heart rate
- A knotted stomach
- Dry mouth
- A lump in the throat
- Shortness of breath



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Can you relate to any of these feelings? If you have any of these, you are not broken, you are not doomed for speech failure, quite the contrary. If you experience any of these, you are NORMAL.

At this point, you may be thinking pointing out your anxiety does not make you feel any better. Hang in there and keep reading. The goal of this chapter is threefold. It is to help you to realize that if you are anxious, apprehensive, or nervous about public speaking, then you are normal. It is to help you understand most people will have some physical responses to being anxious and it is how you think about these responses that make a difference. The biggest takeaway of all is for you to learn to be intentional with your thoughts and to change your mindset. In doing these things, you will prepare the path for future speaking success.

Time to Check Your Brain's Check Engine Light

*A man's life
is what his thoughts
make of it.
Marcus Aurelius*



“Audi B5 A4 Check Engine Light” by Stephen Mellentine, licensed under CC BY-NC-ND

There is a dashboard warning light in my car that lets me know something is wrong. When I take it to specialists, they plug in my car and “read the code” and they tell me exactly what the problem is. Let’s assume, your brain’s dashboard warning light is on and letting you know you may have a thinking problem. Let’s “read the code” to see what the issue is so we can fix it. You may have some faulty reasoning happening that is causing your speech anxiety. Time for a diagnostic. See how many of these relate to you.

All or Nothing Thinking:

All or nothing thinking assumes your self-meter has two options: all perfect or total failure. If you have ever given a speech and forgotten a part or misspoke a word and then declared the speech a disaster, you might have all or nothing thinking. A speech can be good- even great-and still contain speech mistakes. In fact, most speeches contain at least one mistake.

What’s the Fix for All Or Nothing Speaking? The fix for all or nothing thinking is to realize a perfect speech rarely exists. A great speech is one that communicates an idea to an audience. If you do that, you have

accomplished the goal. If you mess up, or should I say *when* you mess up (because normal people make mistakes), then all is not lost. Recognize that the speech can be good and contain mistakes. You might say, “Overall the speech was great, I just wish I would have had a stronger ending. I will write it out next time.”

Overgeneralization:

Overgeneralization is the belief that a single failure is a universal sign of failure. If you are on a diet and you eat a cookie and then declare yourself a diet failure, you have overgeneralized. If you *have* a failure, it doesn’t mean you *are* a failure. If you have ever had a less than perfect speech moment, and then declared yourself a bad speaker, you have overgeneralized.

What’s the Fix for Overgeneralization? The fix is to recognize that one mistake does not make *you* a mistake. One failure, does not make *you* a failure. If you make a mistake, recognize it and make a plan to correct it in the future. The most important thing of all is to realize you are not defined as a failure because you made a mistake.

Fortune Telling:

Have you ever told yourself, “I know this is going to be a disaster?” If you predict your speech will go badly, then you have a fortune-telling problem. The more you fortune tell your speech will be a disaster, the more you undermine your own success. By fortune-telling (also known as self-fulfilling prophecy), you are wishing you will fail and then you will make your own negative predictions come true. Some people even delight in their own misfortune, “See, I told you I wasn’t cut out for public speaking.”

What’s the Fix for Fortune Telling? The fix to the fortunetelling problem is to take control and to stop. Predicting your own failure is just your own way of not trying. If you want to predict something, predict that if you practice, you will get better. If you focus on the needs of the audience, you will connect with them. If you do vocal exercises, you will strengthen your voice. Throw the darn crystal ball away, it was negative, unreliable, and you have outgrown it now.

Reality Check

At one time or another, most of us have gotten caught up in our failures or we have created scenarios in our head about the terrible things that may happen. It is just plain silly the way we torture ourselves. Most of us get worked up and miss out on sleep worrying about things that never even happen. Sometimes you just have to have a reality check.

So, what if you say the wrong word and they laugh....
 Will they fire you—probably not.
 Will they walk out—unlikely.
 Will they hate you—not likely

Will your face turn red—maybe, but so what?
Is it really that awful? —no

One professional speaker commented no matter what happens in a speech that she can turn it into something good. She suggests if everyone walks out on her, she can still use that. Next time I speak, I can say, “Last time I gave this talk the whole room walked out on me.”

Change Takes Effort

Whether you are a seasoned speaker or just getting started, it is important to realize everyone’s mind and motivation need a tune-up from time to time. It is difficult to break out of faulty patterns of thinking and it is not enough to just recognize it, you have to do something about it. Motivational speaker, Mel Robbins, illustrates this in a talk to executives. After reminding them that they came to the conference to network and to make new connections, she asks each of them to raise a hand if they sat by someone they already know. Most people laughed and raised their hands because they know they are supposed to network and yet most of them are playing it safe and sitting with friends. They, like us, were motivated to change, and yet they fell back on old patterns of behavior. As a conference activity, Robbins then proceeded to make them change seats and sit by someone new. They looked uncomfortable, grumbled a bit, and then changed seats. She reminded them we want to change, but change is hard and change is uncomfortable.

It is one thing to be motivated to think about change and it is another thing to be motivated to actually make the change. Making the change causes discomfort and leads to resistance, even if you are the one telling yourself the do it. Change is uncomfortable, but growth is worth it.

What’s the point? The point is you likely recognize that there are areas you need to work on. You likely already know what you need to do. You are already motivated to think about improving (that is why you are reading this book or taking a speaking class). It is not enough to want to change, you have to act on it. To do the next step, you must recognize that change causes discomfort. You are going to have to be vigilant to begin making those changes. Change is uncomfortable, make a plan, and stick to it.

Choose Which Self to Wear to Your Speech

In the morning, I go into my closet and I look at all the clothes that I have to wear. I pick out which ones to put on for the day. I decide whether to dress like *casual Lynn* or *professional Lynn*. I make a decision on how to dress each day. In the same way, I decide which self to wear each day. I decide who to be each day. One of the most powerful things I learned about identity is that I don’t have one identity, I have many to pick from. Just like picking which outfit to wear for the day, I pick which “me” to be for the day.

Think about the “self-clothes” you wear every day. If you are like me, there are times when you have felt unsure of yourself, maybe you lowered your eyes when people looked at you, maybe you talked in a powerless

voice—on that day, you were wearing your shy self. On a different day, you felt like the expert, you were able to tell people how to accomplish a task, and you used your assertive voice—on that day, you were wearing your powerful self. Which was the real you? They both were. The people around you, the situation you were in, your mood at the moment, all contributed to which self you brought out for the day.

This is also true for which speaker you will be. You make the decision about which self you bring to your speech. You can bring the brave, outspoken “you” that has great things to say or you can bring the “you” that decides to play small.

A lot of growth can happen when you learn you are *not* an attribute, but rather you *act* out an attribute. You are *not* shy, you *act* shy. You are *not* bold, you *act* boldly. You are *not* nervous, you *act* nervous. Once you realize you are not going against your biology or against your personality to be a powerful, confident speaker, then you can give yourself permission to wear a powerful self to your speech. That “power self” outfit will look good on you, so try it on!

Consider This

I often have students play a game where they stand up in groups and each group talks at the exact same time as the other group with the goal of competing for the audience’s attention. In this game, students wave their arms, make direct eye contact, and raise their voices. They laugh and they have fun. I do this to let them know that they can speak loudly, use gestures, and have fun in front of an audience. I remind them they have just demonstrated to me they are capable of expressive movement and dynamic voice projection. Later when they tell me, they “just can’t project their voice” or they “just aren’t a person who gestures,” I remind them of the exercise where they demonstrated to me they can do both. I let them know they are capable of it; sometimes they decide to do it and other times they decide not to do it but they must own the fact that it is a choice they made.

Even after this activity, an occasional student will try to tell me, “I can’t project my voice” or “I’m just not assertive.” I never argue, I ask them if they have siblings. If they answer, “yes,” I ask them if they have ever yelled at their sibling to get out of their stuff. They usually laugh and say, “Oh, yes.” I then ask them to tell me of places they feel comfortable, and they act assertively. They tell me of a club they are in, a friend pack they hang out with, or a role where they feel confident. I remind them that clearly, they know how to project their voice because they have done it before. Clearly, they know how to be assertive because they have been assertive before. I remind them they know how to talk to others and be confident because they have acted confidently before. They have the ability; they just choose when to use that ability.

Now, I want you to think of a time you have chosen to define yourself as weak, shy, or unassertive. I want you to ask yourself why did you decide that for yourself? Think of at least three settings where you brought your “big self” to the situation. Think about a time, you have projected your voice. Think about a time you felt the power of your own words. You know you have the ability, what causes you to not want to bring it out?

We All Feel Like Imposters

Feel powerless or insecure? You are not alone. When interviewed, top executives, college professors, leaders of all kinds admit they often feel powerless. They often feel like they don't belong, they aren't smart enough, they are not good enough, and they don't speak clearly enough. And yet, they put on their assertive selves and act the part until they begin to fully feel the part. They decide just because they have feelings of smallness does not mean they should act small. They have the choice not to act on the powerlessness they feel. In fact, for most, it pushes them to try harder. These leaders decide even if they sometimes feel like an impostor, they can still act the part and be powerful. They can put on their "big self" and so can you.

What's the point? You decide how you are going to act in a speech. You control which you to wear for the day, you control whether you act powerful, and you control whether you bring your "big self" to the presentation. I hope you decide to try on the powerful you. You owe it to yourself to see what you can do. You might just decide it is a good fit.



"For this With Those with Imposter Syndrome" by Alan Levine, [licensed under CC BY](#)

Who Will You Decide to Be?

Do or Don't?

Don't Do This	Do This Instead
Awfulizing Me "What if I mess up? I always mess things up."	Overcomer Me "I'm tough and can take on any challenge." "It may not be easy, but I can do it."
Insecure Me "What if they don't like me? They will hate me."	Confident Me "I've got this because I have practiced and I know my stuff."
Hater Me "Speech is stupid. I can't believe I have to do this."	Powerful Me "I've got great things to say, and I know it will cause them to think."
Downer Me "I know I'm going to mess it all up. I always do. Why even try?"	Optimistic Me "I may not be perfect, but I have something important to share." "I've been given this opportunity to speak, I'm going to make the most of it."

*You are capable of being all these.
Which one will you pick on your speech day?*

What's the Worst That Could Happen?

Sometimes, you can create fears to keep yourself from fully trying. If that happens, the best thing you can do with your fear is to take it to its logical absurdity.

What if I mess up?

So what?

People will laugh at me!

So what?

They won't like me!

So what?

No one will be my friend.

Really, So what?

If no one in the class will be my friend, then I will be lonely.

So what?

No one will talk to me outside of class and I will be so lonesome I will drop out of college.

Are you sure? So, then what?

I will drop out of college, never have good relationships which means I will never get a job.

So what?

I will be homeless living under a bridge with a stray dog.

All that because you messed up on your speech in college. Really?

As I said, we take it to its absurdity. So, what if you mess up. Usually, the worst that can happen is you get a little embarrassed at the time and have a good story to tell for a lifetime.

Use the A.W.A.R.E Method to Beat Anxiety

If you feel anxiety is getting too much, do what nurses are trained to do and be aware. The **A.W.A.R.E.** method can help:

Accept that you feel anxious. Fighting it will not take away the anxiety.

Watch your anxiety. What changes are you noticing in your body, your thoughts, and your perception?

Act normal. Breathe normally and act as if you feel confident and calm. This will pass and your anxiety will fade away.

Repeat the three steps above until your anxiety reduces to an acceptable level.

Expect the best. Invest your time and energy in what can help you, don't worry about what might go wrong.

Day-Calder, M. (2017). Conquer your fear of public speaking. *Nursing Standard (2014+)*, 32(3), 37.

I was once given the advice to think of emotions like a river. Emotions flow into us and will flow through us and out of us as long as we don't try to dam them up.

Know That They Can't Tell How Nervous You Are

You know the feeling that goes through your mind: "I'm so nervous. I bet everyone can tell"? Well, guess

what—they can't. At least this is what research suggests. If you have felt like people could peer into your very soul and see your insecurity, you are not alone. The illusion of transparency is the tendency for people to overestimate the degree to which their personal mental state is known by others. Because our emotions feel so strong to us, we are sure that they “leak out” and that everyone can tell just how we feel. When researchers put it to the test, they found that observers just are not very good at picking up on a speaker's emotional state. The speakers thought the audience could sense their insecurity and could see their hands shaking and could hear their voice shaking, but the audience noticed very little or not at all. Researchers in an article titled, *The Illusion of Transparency and the Alleviation of Speech Anxiety*, suggest:

What's inside of you typically manifests itself too subtly to be detected by others. You should just relax and try to do your best. Know that if you become nervous, you'll probably be the only one to know.

The researchers found simply telling people the audience could not see through them made them less anxious as speakers. The bottom line is this: speaker anxiety is not very accurately detected by audiences. Simply knowing this can help set you free. Do not worry, they can't see through you. Now you know, you can let it go.

Know That You Are Likely Misinterpreting Cues

“I saw that guy in the back make an angry face, I know he hated my speech.” It is easy when you are nervous to look at the audience and the looks on their faces as hostile. I once got a note from a student who told me he thought I hated his speeches because I gave him mean looks. I thought about it long and hard because I really liked the student, and I really liked his speeches. Maybe it was because I had been wearing the wrong glasses and squinted a little, maybe it was because the room and windows created weird light streaks that made it hard to see his slides, maybe it was because I had a headache that day, or maybe it was because I just make weird facial expressions (my kids tell me this one is true). The problem is I liked his speeches and he thought I hated them.

I found an article in the *Psychophysiology Journal* that might explain what happened. In this study, researchers told participants that they would have to give a speech. While waiting for their turn to give the speech, participants looked at a series of facial expressions and were tested by an electroencephalogram. The researchers found that participants who thought they were fixing to give a speech were more likely to judge the faces they saw as angry.

Think about it. This implies that when you are ready to give a speech, you may see neutral faces as angry. The famous lawyer Gerry Spence wrote about something similar. Every time he spoke, he noticed one of the jurors would look stern and cross his arms across his chest. He just knew that juror was really opposed to his message. He was shocked when all the jurors voted in favor of his client. How could that be? What about the man with his arms crossed? Later, the juror said, his crossed arms weren't in opposition, he just had a big

belly, and it is a nice place to rest his arms. Be aware of the tendency to interpret other's nonverbals in a negative way.

You do not know what is going on in the minds of your audience so always assume the best.

Realize That Stress Can Be Helpful

Health psychologist Kelly McGonigal shares her surprising revelation—stress can be a good thing. In her TED Talk, *How to Make Stress Your Friend*, she reveals that when it comes to stress, a rapid heartbeat and fast breathing are not the problem. The problem is what we *believe* those physical reactions mean. It is how we label the stress that matters most. Think about it. Your heart pounds and your breath quickens in moments of joy. Your heart pounds and your breath quickens before acts of great courage. Your heart pounds and your breath quickens in anticipation of special events. A pounding heart and quickened breath can be a good thing. When you interpret those physical symptoms as something good, it opens your blood vessels and sends extra oxygen to your brain and you feel energized and prepared. When you label that fast heartbeat and rapid breathing as helpful, you feel more confident, less anxious, and less stressed out. McGonigal suggests it is when you interpret these reactions as bad that it constricts your blood vessels leading to health issues.

Football players and other athletes often do things to get pumped before running out on the field. These players believe an adrenaline rush means they are going to play well. They think of adrenaline as a gift that means they are charged up. They believe the adrenaline will help them run faster and be more alert. If you are a speaker and you experience an adrenaline rush, be like these players and think of it as a sign your body is awake, alert, and ready to go. Just remember that most people experience some version of butterflies before they speak. If you are nervous, you are normal. Good speakers channel energy into making a good speech. Good speakers know you do not want to get rid of the butterflies, you just want them to fly in formation.

So, what does that mean for you? It means your pounding heart and heavy breathing have prepared you for action.

Watch How to make stress your friend | Kelly McGonigal on YouTube (15 mins)

(<https://youtu.be/RcGyVTAoXEU>)

The Surprising Side Effect of Stress

Ready for the bonus feature?

Now you have watched the video, you know there is another great side effect to stress—you become more social. McGonigal suggests that when you are stressed, not only do you release adrenaline, but you also release oxytocin. It is the release of oxytocin that makes you want to spend time encouraging people and being around people. All these years, I have joked that my public speaking students have bonded so fiercely because

they bonded through pain, and now I know it is literally true. Since they were together in times of high excitement during speeches, they felt closer and more bonded (much like a sports team).

McGonigal also suggests that an oxytocin reaction is a form of self-healing. When you have an oxytocin reaction, you tend to want to seek and give support. All of this wonderful oxytocin protects, regenerates, and strengthens your heart.

What does this mean for you? It means if you feel anxious about an upcoming speech, call a friend or get a hug from your mom. That feeling you have makes you want to tell someone how you feel is your body's way of helping you to be successful and healthy. Your body knows what it needs, it doesn't need to run from speech, it needs to connect with people who care about you. In your anxiety, you should encourage others. In doing so, you help yourself along the way. Your body knows what to do- listen.

Let Fear Propel You

It is normal to have physical reactions when thinking about public speaking and it is how we frame these feelings that makes all the difference. Many famous speakers tell of wrestling with fear and Gerry Spence, lawyer and author of *How to Argue and Win Every Time and Win Your Case*, is one of them. I will let him describe his battle in his own words.

“In the courtroom, I sometimes carry on a silent conversation with myself about my fear, while the jurors look on wondering, as they must, what occupies this strange man who stands silently before them looking down at his feet. My conversation with myself most often sounds like this:

“How are you feeling, Gerry?” I ask.

“The jury is watching, waiting for me to begin my argument,” I reply. “I can't just stand here saying nothing.”

“I asked you, how are you feeling?”

“You know how I feel.

“What is the feeling?”

“You know what the feeling is.”

“Are you afraid to say it?”

“All right. I'm afraid.”

“Well, you should be. Big stakes. The prosecutor wants to destroy your client. He wants to destroy you.”

“I don't want to think about it. Not now. Not standing here.”

It's all right to be afraid. You should be afraid. Go ahead. Feel it.

“But the jury's watching.”

“They can wait a few seconds more.

Fear is energy.

If you feel your fear, you can also feel its power, and you can change its power to your power.”

Suddenly, I look up at the waiting jury. I hear myself address them in a clear, quiet voice, “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury.” Suddenly, I am vaguely aware that something is happening to my fear. I have looked it

in the eye. I have stared it down. It retreats like a whimpering cur that is now afraid to face me! The pain of it recedes. I feel a new power well up. And my argument begins...

I have learned not to be ashamed of my fear, but to embrace it. One cannot be brave without it, for is not our bravery merely the facing of our fear?"

Can you see a pattern emerge with these things? Fear is not the problem, it is how we allow fear to cripple us or give us the power that matters.



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Believe That with Practice, You Can Improve

When you think about speaking are you tempted to believe, “Some people are just born good speakers” or “I just wasn’t made for this public speaking stuff.” If that is you, you may have what Stanford researcher Carol Dweck calls a “fixed mindset.” It does not have to be that way, Dweck found when people left their options open and believed that they could improve, they did. One way to keep your mind open is to add the word “yet” to the end of the sentence. It’s easy. Let’s try it: “I haven’t mastered this...yet. I haven’t learned to gesture without thinking about it...yet.”

Another way you can help yourself have a growth mindset is to pick a few growth mindset quotes and place them where you can see them every day. Look at them, read them out loud, and think about

where you want to be. Let a growth mindset become your new habit.

Here are a few of my favorite quotes:

- It’s not always about being the best. It’s about being better than you were yesterday. –Jigoro Kano
- No matter how many mistakes you make or how slow your progress, you are still way ahead of everyone who isn’t trying. –Tony Robbins
- Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it. –Charles Swindoll
- Courage is like a muscle. We strengthen it when we use it. –Ruth Gordon
- Sometimes what we call “failure” is really just that necessary struggle called learning. –Louis Armstrong
- May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears. –Nelson Mandela
- A comfort zone is a beautiful place but nothing ever grows there. –John Assaraf
- You won’t always be motivated; you will have to learn to be disciplined. –Author unknown
- Doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will. –Suzy Kassem
- You have not failed unless you have quit trying. –Gordon B. Hinckley

Change the Way You Think About Things

Whatever you do, do not think about the pink elephant. Stop!

Don't think about the pink elephant with cute pink ears. Do not think about an elephant with a hot pink tail. How are you doing? If you are like most people, not too well.

Now, try this. Think about a green monkey. Go ahead. Picture its green curly tail and its fluffy green fur. So, here's the question, when you were thinking of the green monkey, did your image of the pink elephant go away? For most people, it did.

What's the point? The point is before a speech, most people tell themselves, "I won't be nervous, I won't be nervous, I won't think of the pink elephant." Do you see where I'm headed with all of this? Telling yourself not to be nervous rarely helps. The more you say, "I won't be nervous," the more you feel nervous.

So how do you stop thinking of the pink elephant? By thinking of the green monkey of course. Apply this to speaking. Instead of saying, "I won't be nervous" or "I won't forget what to say," say things like, "This speech is going to be great! I can do this." or "My audience will love the part where I..." Speech teacher, Donn King calls this harnessing your green monkey, and researchers call it cognitive restructuring. You will restructure the way you think about things.

Conquer your fear with positive self-talk. Tell yourself you will be relaxed, articulate, and confident...and you will be.



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Cognitive Restructuring

Don't say (Pink Elephant)

- I'm afraid my voice will crack.
- I'll mess up and say the wrong words.
- I'm so nervous.
- I hate doing speeches.

Do say (Green Monkey)

- I can do this.
- The audience will like my topic.

- I am confident.
- I know my stuff.
- I am smart and capable.
- I will speak with power and authority.

I often use the green monkey analogy when making presentations to groups. I say, “When you think about the green monkey, the pink elephant goes away. Except for some of you, some of you imagine the green monkey riding the pink elephant (the audience always laughs). You are the special ones who do things differently.” I said this in a special presentation to Panamanian Engineering students and their director Michael Rau sent me a picture and a note that said, “This is me.”

This made my day and I keep it on my desk as a reminder—we all do things differently. Sometimes the green monkey (positive thinking) can erase the pink elephant (negative self-talk). For others, the self-doubt may still be there but the monkey (positive thinking) eventually learns to drive the fear to work towards great things. Each of us finds different ways to believe in ourselves and harness our fears. Each of us is working to find our way, so find what works for you.



Thanks to Michael Rau for the use of his illustration. “Green Monkey Pink Elephant” by Michael Rau, licensed under CC BY

Focus On What You Want More Of

If you think, I am energized.

If you think, I am going to speak confidently.

If you think, I am going to share important things and they will want to listen

Then, you’ll get more of those feelings.

Think about things you actually want to increase.

Plan on Recovering Well

I Hope You Mess Up At Least Once—I Really Mean It!

I hope you mess up so you can get it over your unrealistic expectation of perfection.

I love hearing stories of how people messed up in speeches. My favorite one is of a mega-church pastor who

attempted to say ‘the church is a living organism’ but he accidentally said another much more embarrassing “O” word. Guess what? He is still preaching.

I love showing videos of where Obama says there are 52 states and I laugh at how Bush says “Americans are working to put food on their family.” Guess what? They still managed to get things done.

I love to see the video of where the local TV anchor’s tooth falls out during a broadcast. Guess what – he is still the anchor.

Being human and making mistakes makes you human; how you deal with those mistakes can make you more approachable. One of my first jobs was as a cashier at a convenience store. Whenever I made a mistake, I would lower my eyes and look ashamed and repeatedly tell the customer how sorry I was. One day, my boss came up to me and said I needed to find a better strategy for when I messed up. He said by repeatedly apologizing, I was making it a bigger deal than it was. The next time, I messed up, I looked at the customer and said, “This very special hamburger is only sixty-five dollars and twenty cents.” The customer laughed and made a remark about how it had better be a darn good burger. I assured him it was a great hamburger while I fixed my mistake. He left smiling.

What’s the point? The point is that mistakes will not kill you. Mistakes give you good stories to tell. I hope you mess up at least once so when you are sitting around with friends who are willing to listen to your stories that you can tell them of your most embarrassing speech blunder. I hope everyone can have a good laugh. And laughter after all...is good for you.

Besides, perfect people are boring. Robert Glover, psychotherapist, and author says, “In general people are not drawn to perfection in others. People are drawn to shared interests, shared problems, and an individual’s life energy. Humans connect with humans. Hiding one’s humanity and trying to project an image of perfection makes a person vague, slippery, lifeless, and interesting.”

Just remember the audience doesn’t expect perfection. They don’t judge that you made a mistake, but rather how you recover from it. When you do mess up, don’t make a big deal of it. Most of the time, you are better off not even mentioning it at all. If you are quick on your feet, you might say one or two funny words but then go on. You have great things to say, don’t let a little bump in the road slow you down. Practice your speech and plan on being perfect, but if that doesn’t work out, plan on recovering well. Try again. Fail better.



“Persistence (lock)” by Brett Jordan, licensed under CC BY

If you pretend you didn't make a mistake, chances are the audience won't notice, and certainly won't dwell on it. Interrupting your speech by apologizing or panicking will make your mistake more noticeable and will throw you off.
 Jennifer Conner
 University of Arkansas Speech Student

Realize the Audience is On Your Side

Chris Anderson of TED Talks gives the following wisdom:

Acknowledging nervousness can also create engagement. Showing your vulnerability, whether through nerves or tone of voice, is one of the most powerful ways to win over an audience, provided it is authentic. Susan Cain, who wrote a book about introverts and spoke at our 2012 conference, was terrified about giving her talk. You could feel her fragility onstage, and it created this dynamic where the audience was rooting for her—everybody wanted to hug her afterward. The fact that we knew she was fighting to keep herself up there made it beautiful, and it was the most popular talk that year.

I share this example for a couple of reasons. One, notice you can hear her nervousness and yet you get so carried away with her message you forget about it quickly. Two, many of you may think of yourself as an

introvert who is just not the “public speaking” type, and yet, here she is speaking powerfully and giving examples of other introverts who speak powerfully.

Watch The power of introverts (19 mins) on TED (https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts)

Key Takeaways

Remember this!

- Most people get nervous at the thought of public speaking. If you are nervous, you are normal.
- It is not the physical reaction of stress that is the problem, it is how you think about it. Think of the adrenaline rush as excitement. The way you feel is your body getting you ready to succeed.
- You have permission to be powerful. Have a growth mindset and allow yourself to try.
- Decide what you have to say is more important than any discomfort you have.
- Focus on what the audience needs to hear. Move your focus from what the audience needs to hear more than your need you have to be comfortable.
- By now, you should have identified you have some ways of thinking that may be holding you back. You are armed with the knowledge that you can choose which self to bring to your speech. Now, it is time to try it out.

Attribution & References

Except where otherwise noted, this chapter is adapted from “Overcome Communication Apprehension by Hacking Your Brain” In *Advanced Public Speaking* by Lynn Meade, licensed under CC BY 4.0.

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OVERCOME COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION BY HACKING YOUR BODY

You will never be more aware of your body than when giving a speech. Things like eye contact and gesturing, suddenly feel unnatural. The good news is there are many ways to harness your fear and turn it into power. There are many thought experiments you can do and many ways to “hack your body” to deal with the anxiety that comes from giving a speech. In this chapter, we will talk a little about thought and a lot about action.

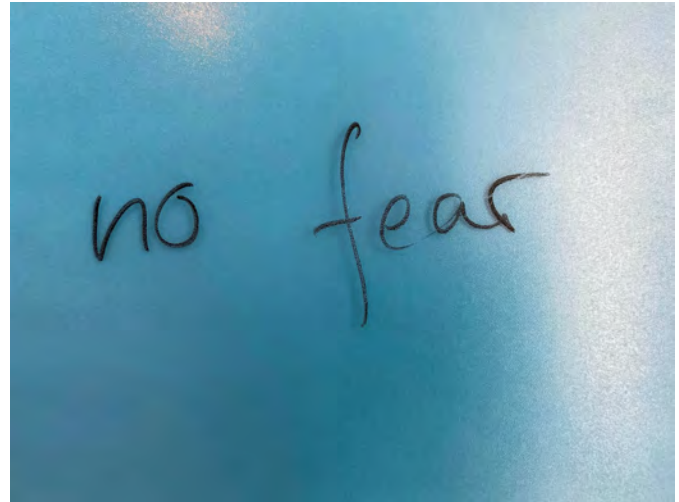


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Visualize Yourself Giving Your Speech

Visualize yourself giving your speech. Imagine yourself rising from your chair and walking towards the podium. Imagine delivering your first few words with power. Imagine your audience smiling and nodding. Imagine using your visuals effectively. Imagine thunderous applause at the end and imagine confidently walking back to your chair.

Researchers who study communication apprehension in public speaking reported that 80% of college students who used positive visualization strategies were able to reduce their level of apprehension. When students visualized giving a speech, they could reduce negative thinking and lower their communication anxiety. Not only that, but students who visualized giving their speech had better gestures and fewer “ums.”

Visualization, it is easy, it is free, and it works. Try it!

Watch Visualization and mental rehearsal (6 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/2dS63aaXjGo>)

Talk About Yourself in Positive Ways

It’s time to start talking nice to yourself. In the book, *Communicating from the Inside Out*, the authors noted the thoughts you have about yourself trigger up to 100 times more brain activity than random thoughts. In addition, when you talk out loud to yourself, your brain activity increases 1,000-fold. Did you catch that? When you talk about yourself, you activate your brain in a powerful way. When you hear your own voice talk

about you, you activate your brain even more, because not you have involved the listening center. It makes sense when you think about it. When I say, “I’ve got this,” I activated the part of my brain that had the thought, I activated the part of my brain associated with speech, and I activated the part of the brain associated with listening. That is a lot of brainpower given to one sentence. When you say things, good or bad, you hear yourself loud and clear. It is as if you sat in the car and cranked the volume up. When you do that, make sure the “song” you are playing to yourself is a good one.

The lesson here is this—be careful what you tell yourself because you are listening more than you know. Take charge of your thoughts and replace any negative thoughts with positive ones. Talk nice.... Your brain is listening.

Say Positive Things About Public Speaking

Your brain communicates with the firing of neurons. These neurons are like an interstate system in your brain. The more often a neural route is used, the larger it becomes. When you take the same road over and over in your thoughts, the messages transmit faster and faster. If the road is used repeatedly, then those thoughts become automatic. Think of it like the familiar road back to your house, you can drive there without even thinking about it—it’s automatic. That’s why when you practice — playing the piano, driving a car, or putting a golf ball, it becomes easier. Eventually, it is like you are on autopilot.

If you think positive thoughts over and over, then those positive thoughts become automatic. If you think negative thoughts over and over, those thoughts become automatic. That is why you have to beware of any negative thoughts you have about public speaking because if you keep thinking negative thoughts, you will make the pathway so large and strong it eventually becomes your default setting. Once those thoughts are on autopilot, they will keep playing over and over until you do something to consciously stop them.

To stop the automatic negative thoughts concerning public speaking, you need to consciously take control. You need to (1) recognize that negative thoughts are a choice and you can choose to think positive thoughts, (2) say positive things out loud and often and, (3) use visualization techniques to visualize yourself being successful at presentations. Repeat this often so these pathways become automatic.

Say “I Am Excited”

Never say, “I am nervous;” instead say, “I am excited.” When you feel nervous acknowledge it. Acknowledge that you are having a physical reaction and then take control of the interpretation. Think, “I can feel my heart beating fast. I’m nervous because I’m about to do something of consequence. It is normal for me to feel like this. I am going to interpret this feeling as excitement. I am excited.”

Give a Talk, Instead of a Speech

Instead of saying, “I have a speech to give on Monday”, say, “I am giving a talk on Monday.” A speech is fear-inducing. A talk is something simple that you do every day. Think about it, they are called TED Talks, not TED Speeches.

Exercise, Laugh and Breathe to Reduce the Effect of Cortisol

Cortisol is the stress hormone released when you are anxious, upset, or scared. Since public speaking can be a source of stress, it benefits you to work on ways to reduce the cortisol reactions. Changing how you think about stress helps, but you also need to “burn off” stress.

Exercising before and after a speech can be a powerful way to help your body reduce the effects of cortisol. A Psychology Today article, *Cortisol: Why “the Stress Hormone” is Public Enemy Number One*, suggests several ways to lower your cortisol levels.

1. Physical activity: exercise, walk, do yoga.
2. Meditation and deep breathing.
3. Spend time with friends.
4. Laughter.
5. Listen to some of your favorite music.

Get started on your public speaking playlist today! After that, go hang out with friends. Take a walk together.

Tips from Toastmaster’s International

- **Breathe out.** Take slow deep breaths in and then release your breath from the bottom of your abdomen to get the maximum benefits of release and relaxation.
- **Get rest.** Try to get an adequate amount of sleep prior to your speech to ensure optimal mental alertness.
- **Fuel your mental engine.** Eat a light meal at least 20 minutes prior to your speech.

Release the Tension in Your Body

How can you make your body work for you, you ask? You can stop many of your nervous reactions by releasing the tension in your muscles.

- Roll your shoulders, loosen your arms.
- Close your eyes and notice any tight muscles. When you notice a tight muscle, first tense it– then relax it.
- Sit with your palms open and facing up on your lap.
- Consciously try to slow down your breathing.
- Make funny faces to relax your cheeks and facial muscles.
- Notice if your neck and facial muscles are tense. If they are, make a point to relax them. (See video below)

In this video, family therapist, Emma McAdam illustrates a quick way to release stress. She suggests stress is like an angry toddler that won't be ignored and has to be acknowledged.

Watch Quick stress release: Anxiety reduction technique: Anxiety skills #19 (3 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/lrhPTqholcc>)

Fake Confidence

When you get nervous, your body responds in very direct ways. Your breathing gets short and your muscles begin to tense up. Here's the good news! Your body and your mind work in a feedback loop. Let me give you an example: If I am mad, I make a mad face and if I make a mad face, I feel mad. Now that you know there is a feedback loop, you can break into it. In the example I just gave you, I could break the mad feedback loop by smiling. If I smile long enough and add a "happy thought," then my body tells my mind that I am happy.

The same is true with what happens when you experience communication apprehension. When you begin to feel nervous, your muscles tighten, and your breathing becomes shallow. The more your body acts nervous, the more your mind believes you are nervous. The good news is you have the power to break into the cycle. You can stop or slow down the physical reaction of nervousness.

The Facial Feedback Hypothesis states that when you make a facial expression, it can influence the emotion that you are feeling. For example, when you force yourself to smile, you begin to enjoy the moment more. The more you smile, the more you may alter your own perception of the situation. As a speaker, when you fake confidence with your body and face, you may actually begin to feel more confident. Amy Cuddy says, "Fake it until you become it." Watch this quick video to explain more about the facial feedback effect.

Watch Facial feedback effect – Intro to Psychology (1 min) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/Lh0bL7p5eN4>)



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Stand like Wonder Woman

Stand like Wonder Woman (or Superman) with your legs spread and your hands on your hips. Now hold that pose for two minutes. Do you feel powerful yet? Amy Cuddy, Harvard Researcher, had test subjects' power pose (tall stance open arms, open torso) for as little as two minutes before subjecting them to a stressful job interview. Those who stood in a power pose reported feeling more confident and less nervous.

But wait, there's more. When they asked the job interviewers what they thought of the interviewees, those conducting the interviews preferred those who had power posed before the job interviewer. The effect not only influenced the speakers, but also the listeners.

When observers view you acting confidently, they treat you like you are confident which guess what....makes you feel more confident. (Dominus, 2017).

Act confident to feel confident.

Pretend To Be Someone Else

Are you still feeling a little unsure about yourself? No worries—just pretend like you are an actor playing the part of someone who is confident. Think about a confident speaker you know. When you are mentally preparing for your speech, imagine you *are* that person: How would *they* walk, how would *they* talk, how would *they* gesture? When I make a professional presentation, I often think about my former boss who is a powerful communicator. I ask myself, how would he enter the room and shake hands? How would he walk to the podium? How would he move around during the speech? I steal his confidence to get started. When you start your speech, imagine you are that powerful person. Use their confidence going into the speech. I'm always amazed at how much confidence I gain by starting my speech as someone else. As I continue to speak that confidence that I borrowed slowly becomes mine.

Gesture to Help Release Nervous Energy

I love the movie clip from Talladega Nights where the race car driver, Ricky Bobby, is being interviewed and he keeps making his hands float up awkwardly. After struggling with his hands a while, he finally blurts out, "What do I do with my hands?" I am always amazed at how I don't even think about my hands most days,

but when I get up to give a speech, suddenly, I am aware they exist, and I have no idea what to do with them. If you are like me and like most speakers, you struggle with your hands during presentations.

Nonverbal researchers did a study where they had people describe what they did that day. When the participants told the story using their hands, they added more details to their story, spoke more fluidly, and were able to think better. Gestures seemed to help the speaker to recall information and to speak more fluidly. Did you know that even people who are blind from birth, gesture? It seems to serve the purpose of helping the speaker to think of words and maintain a flow in the speech.

Gesturing doesn't just help the listener; it helps the speaker. But what does this mean for you? It means you are meant to gesture. It suggests that when you gesture, you will be able to think of ideas more clearly and thus speak with better fluidity. In addition, gestures can help you to release nervous energy. When you gesture, you can relieve cognitive stress, you can relieve nervous energy, and which makes you appear more confident.

Gestures also help the audience listen and understand. Studies show that speakers who gesture are seen as more persuasive, more likable, and as having more leadership potential. In a major study of the most popular TED Talks, the researchers discovered that the more gestures, the more views, and likes for the speech.

Gesturing—good for the speaker, good to relieve stress, and good for the audience!

Quick Tips with Your Hands

Make the OK sign with one hand. The act of touching your fingertips together relieves stress. This is a good trick to try when you feel a little anxious because it really is going to be “OK.”

Sweaty palms? Have an ice-cold water bottle that you hold in your hand to reduce the temperature of your hands.

Memorize Your Opening and Closing

Opening and closing a speech are the times when speakers tend to get the most nervous. For that reason, you should memorize the first few sentences and the last few sentences of your speech. When you start off powerfully, you feel powerful, and the audience expects you to be powerful. Carefully write out the first few words. Practice those over and over until you can say them with confidence and power.

When you begin to wind down your speech, your audience is preparing to clap. They don't want to clap too soon or too late, so they are on high alert. Having a planned out closing, not only helps you own the last point, but it also gives them a definitive notion of when to clap. If you are like most of us, you might get a little extra nervous near the end. That's why you should memorize your ending. By memorizing the closing,

you are helping to relieve that tension and finish in a way that demonstrates your confidence and knowledge.

Practice until it feels comfortable

Practice at least five times

The best way to practice speaking is to practice speaking. It may sound obvious, but it is true. Make sure you practice your speech at least 5-10 times from start to finish.



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Practice getting funky

After you have practiced your speech with your notes, I suggest you go someplace comfortable and practice your speech without note cards. Don't worry if you don't know all the details—just wing it! I like to call this “Getting funky.” Do something a little crazy like sing your speech, do your speech in a wrestler's voice, rap your speech, or dance around while saying your speech.

Relax, have fun, get funky. This will help you associate speech with being relaxed and having fun. For “funky” speech practice, it is less important to get the words right and it is more important to relax your body, put a smile on your face, and have fun. After doing this exercise, go back and do your speech with notes and in a serious tone. You will be amazed at how much more relaxed you feel.

Practice to a live audience

It is one thing to practice to a mirror, it is another to practice to a living thing. Find a friendly face, a roommate, a friend, or a dog, and practice your speech to a live audience member. Practicing with a set of watching eyes makes a big difference.

Practice by recording yourself

Record yourself giving your speech. Sit back and watch your video recording and make notes of areas where you need to make adjustments.

Practice by visualizing your speech

Sit in your chair and imagine yourself giving your speech. Imagine your confidence as you walk to the podium. Imagine your strong opening, image the audience smiling at you. Imagine their nods of approval as you give your powerful ending.

*We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence is not an act
but a habit.
Aristotle*

Write yourself encouraging notes

On top of your speech notes, put positive messages to yourself. Write “I’ve got this” in bright colors on the top of the page. Add a little cartoon character that makes you smile. Put a picture of your loved one making a funny face, a picture of your dog, a cartoon picture that makes you happy. One TED Talk speaker said she wrote on her notes, “This Matters, I’ve got this!”

I still get nervous on the first day of class, so I draw a smiley face on my notes and the phrase, “I love being a teacher.”



Photo by Max van den Oetelaar, used under Unsplash license

Breathe: Belly Breathing

One way to manage stress is to do deep breathing. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach. Take a deep breath in through your nose. Feel the breath go in. Let the breath completely fill up your lungs—inhale for 15 seconds. You should feel the hand that is on your stomach rise. Now, open your mouth and let the air out slowly over 15 seconds. Repeat this. Each time try to fill up your lungs fully. Taking as few as 3

belly breaths can increase your oxygen allowing you to relax.

Watch Deep breathing exercises for beginners (4 mins) on YouTube (https://youtu.be/acUZdGd_3Dg)

Breathe: The nostril switch

Put your finger on the side of your nose and push the nostril closed.

Breathe in through the nose and out through your mouth.

Now, push the other nostril closed.

Breathe in through the nose and out through your mouth.

Do this until you have taken 3 breaths on each side.

Now, take 3 big breaths in through the mouth and out through the nose with both nostrils open.

This should deepen your breathing and relieve some of the stress.

Most importantly—Don't just read about deep breathing— DO IT!

*Taking a deep breath, faking that I'm confident,
and focusing on the topic helped me manage my anxiety.
After a few seconds, I would forget about the anxiety
and really get into what I was speaking about!*

Tara Johnson

Advanced Public Speaking Student, University of Arkansas

Think of Giving a Speech as a Conversation with Friends

*Your goal is not to be Winston Churchill or Nelson Mandela. It's to be you.
If you're a scientist, be a scientist; don't try to be an activist.
If you're an artist, be an artist; don't try to be an academic.
If you're just an ordinary person, don't try to fake some big intellectual style; just be you.
You don't have to raise a crowd to its feet with a thunderous oration.
Conversational sharing can work just as well.
In fact, for most audiences, it's a lot better.
If you know how to talk to a group of friends over dinner,
then you know enough to speak publicly.
— Chris J. Anderson, Curator TED Talks*

Key Takeaways

- Visualize yourself being successful at speaking.
- Talk about public speaking in positive ways. Say, “I’m excited!” instead of “I’m nervous.”
- Exercise, laugh or meditate to reduce the cortisol reaction.
- Do exercises to release tension. Beware of tension and relax your muscles.
- Pretend to be confident, borrow someone else confidence if needed. Fake confidence and it will become you.
- Memorize your opening and closing.
- Write yourself positive notes.
- Practice, practice, practice.

Additional Resources

Sources of Anxiety and Ways to Overcome

1. **Situational** — When talking to friends, we may not be nervous but if asked to say the same thing as a speech, we get nervous. The solution is to think of a presentation as a conversation rather than a performance.
2. **Audience** –Sometimes we are nervous because of who is in the audience. The solution is to visualize your speech and the audience’s positive reaction.
3. **Goal** –We may get anxious when we think about the goal of the speech. Often times we have a future goal that we are worried about. The solution is to focus on the moment—exercise, play a video game, do a tongue twister.

Watch No Freaking Speaking: Managing Public Speaking Anxiety (11 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/ZH5GpdMmIO8>)

Developing Self Confidence

Lessons from soccer coach, Dr. Ivan Joseph on how to develop self-confidence.

- Practice and keep practicing. Repetition is important for learning a skill.
- Self-talk. Be aware of the things you say to yourself.
- Get away from the people who will tear you down.
- Catch yourself doing good and record it.

Watch The Skill of Self Confidence (13 mins) on YouTube (<https://youtu.be/w-HYZv6HzAs>)

Video source: TEDx Talks. (2012, January 13). *The skill of self confidence – Dr. Ivan Joseph* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/w-HYZv6HzAs>

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