



Sixteen Ways to Overcome Stage Fright When Speaking in Public

by Antony Maina

There are two types of people in the world: those who love speaking in public and those who are scared stiff at the thought of it.

Performance anxiety and stage fright are perfectly normal phenomena that occur

to many people. It is important for you to understand what stage fright is, so that you can fully overcome it.

Stage fright or performance anxiety is a persistent phobia which is aroused in an individual when required to perform in front of an audience.

So how do you overcome stage fright when speaking in public?

1. Know Your Stuff

Nothing will stop stage fright in it's gripping tracks like being prepared. Know your content, your speech and more importantly your audience. If you know what you are talking about then you have no reason to be nervous.

Understanding your topic will enable you to speak more naturally and hence more confidently. Also, should a technical hitch occur, this won't faze you as you are already confident on the subject.

2. Practice, Practice, Practice

Knowing your stuff helps, but it doesn't necessarily eradicate the problem. You need to practice as much as you can before the performance or public speaking d-day.

Really know your content inside out and practice (preferably in front of a live audience) as much as possible to build your confidence.

3. Talk Yourself Down

You need to realize that even though stage fright is "all in the mind," the fear manifests itself in physical ways. The best offence is to change your negative talk. Stop worrying about, "What if I forget the content?"

Change that into positive talk like, "What if I am great at this?" It may sound simplistic or too easy, but positive affirmation will go a long way in reducing stage fright when speaking in public.

4. Wallow in the Worst

If you can't calm yourself down with positive talk, then maybe it is time you thought about the worst case scenario. Once you do this, you'll realize that the worst case scenario isn't really that bad. This might help calm your nerves.

5. Visualize the Outcome

Call it what you will: reflection, visualization, meditation. Whatever you call it, just do it. Spend time visualizing yourself giving a perfect presentation and speaking in public – filled with humor, warmth, confidence and intelligence.

The more you imagine being great, the more likely you will achieve it.

6. It is Not All About You

Though you might feel like everyone is out to laugh, criticize or judge you, that is not the case. Get over the feeling that the world is going to hang on your every mistake.

Focus on your speech, audience and what they deserve from you. This will ease the pressure that is already accumulating.

7. When Things go Wrong

Sooner or later, something will go wrong. Your projector or microphone might stop working. If you already know your content, then chances are that this won't faze you as much. If, for instance, your microphone stops working, don't stress over it, carry on with a louder voice. Chances are the technical people are already stressing and working to sort the problem out, so you getting worried over the same issue won't help.

8. Keep Calm, Don't Rush It

Don't rush your presentation. Start slow and allow yourself time to get into a comfortable pace. You need time to get used to the audience and the audience also needs time to get used to you.

9. Focus on Getting Through the First 5 Minutes

Imagine your entire presentation is only five minutes long. This will make it less stressful. Focus on just getting through the first five minutes and by this time you will have already calmed down and the rest is downhill.

10. Never Apologize for Being Nervous

Three quarters of the time, no one will notice you are nervous. Why tell them? You may feel yourself shaking and shivering, but your audience might not be aware of it. Don't mention it. It will make your audience nervous too and they will be too worried about your performance to get much out of your presentation.

11. Don't Share Your Mistakes

You have prepared, practiced and feel good about your speech or presentation. Suddenly, on stage you realize you mixed the order of topics or you forgot an important point. But remember, you're the only one who knows about this. Your audience doesn't. So, don't make them aware of a mistake that they didn't even know existed. If you bring it up, some people might start looking for more holes, which ultimately distracts from the whole purpose of your presentation in the first place.

12. Arrive Early

Obviously, if you are late, this will only heighten your anxiety. Arrive early and acclimate to your surroundings. You can even check out the stage and the auditorium as get yourself used to the environment.

13. Stretch

If you are nervous, odds are your body will be stiff and your muscles tight. Fifteen minutes before speaking in public and going on stage, do a few stretches. This will loosen the tense muscles and relax your body.

14. Breathe

Nervousness is always accompanied by fast, short breaths and if this is not addressed, it will throw you off balance. Minutes before you go on stage, take some slow, deep breaths, so that by the time you get to the stage your breathing is relaxed.

15. Double Check Everything

Do you have a laptop or notes? Check that everything works. When you walk on stage and suddenly realize that you forgot your notes, it's too late. Of course, your nerves will take over. Know your speech or presentation so well that should this happen, you can continue without a hitch.

16. Don't Fight Your Stage Fright—Work With It

You have to expect and accept the fact that you will feel anxious, especially the first few minutes of your presentation. The more you resist your anxiety, the more it will work against you. Again, focus on the presentation when speaking in public and the anxiety will slowly ease off.

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Questions

Answer the questions in full sentences, on a blank sheet of paper, without restating the question.

1. Do you have stage fright? What seems to trigger it?
2. What is the key to overcoming stage fright?
3. Why should you practice in front of other people?
4. What is the worst-case scenario for you?
5. What is the best-case scenario?
6. Explain why you agree or disagree with the author that "it's not all about you" but the information being presented?
7. What do you imagine people think about during a presentation?
8. What should you do in case of technical difficulty? How might this affect the audience's impression of you as a public speaker?
9. What is the right pace for a presentation? About how many words a minute?
10. The author says to focus on the first five minutes of a presentation. Since most high school-level presentation total that much, that time frame can be adjusted down. So, how many minutes should you really focus on/get down? What should you always do within that time frame?
11. Why shouldn't you EVER mention that you're nervous?
12. Why shouldn't you EVER apologize at the outset of your presentation OR at the end for mistakes?
13. How might you mentally "arrive early" during a high school-level presentation?
14. How can you "work out the wiggles" or loosen up before a presentation?
15. Why does the author ask readers to take long, deep breaths before presenting? Have you ever "seized up" in your breathing during a presentation?
16. What if you discover, while double checking everything in the last few minutes during your presentation, that you're missing something important, like your notes? What should you do?
17. What last suggestion does the author make about dealing with anxiety before speaking publicly? Explain how one might "resist". What is the opposite of that?
18. Briefly describe the most and least successful presentations you've ever done and explain what made them so.
19. In general, what is your level of anxiety when doing presentations on a 1-10 scale? Why do you give that rating? What makes you nervous?
20. How does speaking to a group of 4-5 friends differ (physically and mentally) from speaking a larger group, such as a class?