Why am I so nervous about this speech?

First of all, it's completely normal to feel nervous about giving a speech; roughly 70% of all people experience some form of speech anxiety (or speech fright). In fact, some nervousness before a speech can be a good thing; it can help you maintain alertness and allow you to be more enthusiastic during your speech. However, when your anxiety overcomes your ability to present your speech effectively, it can negatively affect your presentation. So what causes this excessive anxiety? Here are some of the reasons why people get nervous about giving a speech:

- **Worrisome Thoughts**: fearful thoughts of negative evaluation by your professor or peers; the fear of failure or that you won’t be able to meet expectations.
- **Performance Orientation**: assuming that the audience expects your speech/presentation to be perfectly written and delivered.
- **Perceived Lack of Skills**: feeling that you don’t have adequate speaking skills or that you lack adequate knowledge of your topic.
- **Excessive Activation or Body Chemistry**: physical "out of control" reactions like trembling hands, nausea, rapid heartbeat, wavering voice, and shortness of breath.
- **Situational Aspects of the Circumstance or the Audience**: the novelty of the situation, the fear of being the center of attention, and audience characteristics like size, status, similarity, and formality.

How can I control my anxiety?

The easiest way to control speech anxiety is to prepare well in advance, practice over a period of days, and take care of yourself (eat properly, get enough sleep, etc.) before the speech. It also helps to remember that almost everyone gets nervous before giving a speech; you are not alone in your fear! Here are some specific things you can do to help you with your speech anxiety:

**On the Day of and During your Presentation:**

- **Take Deep Abdominal Breaths**: Take 3-4 deep breaths and help your mind and body relax.
- **Use Physical Exercise to Get Rid of Some of Your Extra Energy**: Take a brisk walk outside. Press your palms together and release, press against a table for a few moments and release, or tense all of your muscles while sitting or standing and then release.
- **Mental Rehearsal**: Go over the speech in your mind, especially the parts that are giving you the most trouble or that are the hardest to remember. Mentally prepare yourself by imagining yourself giving a successful speech from start to finish.
- **Take Good Care of Yourself**: Make sure that you get enough sleep the night before, eat a well-balanced meal, drink plenty of water, etc.
Long-Term Preparation for Giving a Speech:

- **General Preparation Tips:** Work on your presentation well in advance. Try to start working on your speech as soon as it is assigned. Do ample research so that you feel comfortable with the material. Work on your introduction. Most people are the most nervous at the beginning of the speech. If you know your introduction well, you can easily get over the initial anxiety, and the rest of the speech will flow smoothly.

- **Get Interpersonal Support:** Talk to your friends and family about your anxiety. They can help reassure you and give you the confidence you need to give the best speech possible. You can also practice your speech in front of them, and they can give you feedback on how to make your speech better. If you are in a speech class, or an environment where there are several people having to give speeches, you can talk to them about their speeches and find out ways that they deal with their anxiety. Remember, your classmates are usually just as nervous about having to give their speech as you are about yours!

- **Physical Exercise:** Follow an exercise routine. It helps your body deal with stress and gives you more mental strength and serenity.

- **Skills Training:** Take a Public Speaking class to help you learn how to give an effective speech or work with one of our tutors at the Speaking & Writing Center to learn how to give effective speeches and presentations. Read materials such as books, Internet articles, handouts, etc. that help you perfect your speaking skills.

- **Think Positive Thoughts:** Instead of fearing your speech, replace your negative thoughts with positive images of successful communication between you and your audience. Think of your abilities in positive ways. Remember that you can do this. You will be successful. Don’t be so hard on yourself!

**How do I conceal my fright?**

Even with preparation, you may still be somewhat nervous when you get in front of your audience. Thankfully, concealing your fear is not as hard as it may seem; you always appear less nervous than you actually are. However, if you are showing some signs of your fear, here are some tips to help hide them.

- **Shaking Hands:** If you are speaking from a written text, and you are holding a full-sized piece of paper in one or both hands, you will likely start shaking your paper when your hands begin to tremble. If you have a podium available, you should rest the paper on the podium, then either rest your hands gently on the podium, or keep your hands by your side, placing your hands in a comfortable position and only use them to emphasize certain points with appropriate gestures. Use notecards as an alternative, they are less noticeable and conceal shaky hands.

- **Voice Cracking/Wavering:** Remember to take deep breaths while giving your speech. Deep breathing will help prevent your voice from cracking and will help keep you calm. Take pauses between your main points. A well-timed pause will give you time to regroup and the audience time to catch up. Speak at a slightly louder volume than you are used to. You will feel more empowered and confident in your presentation, and speaking more loudly can help mask your anxiety.

- **Losing Your Place/Forgetting Your Point:** Remember to stay calm if you lose your place or your train of thought. Take a moment to collect your thoughts, and move on. Don’t dwell on this as it can affect the rest of your speech.