

SPEECH ANXIETY

Why am I so nervous about this speech?

You know the feeling...butterflies in the stomach, clammy palms, knocking knees. What you are experiencing is not unusual; roughly 70% of people experience some sort of speech apprehension (or speech fright). Here's what causes this feeling, according to Karen Dwyer in *Conquer Your Speechfright*:

- **Worrisome Thoughts**—fearful thoughts of negative evaluation and failure and the feeling 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 on 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**—novelty (because it's the unknown), conspicuousness (fear of being the center of attention), and audience characteristics like size, status, similarity, & formality

How can I control my anxiety?

The biggest piece of advice is to prepare well in advance, practice over a period of days, and take care of yourself. Here are some specific tips:

In the Short Run:

- **Take deep abdominal breaths.** Take 3-4 deep breaths and help your mind and body relax.
- **Use physical exercise.** Take brisk walk around the campus or some place outside. Practice tensing and relaxing your muscles.
- **Use mental rehearsal.** Mentally prepare yourself by imagining yourself giving a successful speech from start to end.
- **Take good care of yourself.** Make sure you have slept well the night before, had a balanced meal, adequate water, etc.

In the Long Run:

- **Preparation is key.** Work on your presentation well in advance. Do ample research so that you feel comfortable with the material.
- **Get interpersonal support.** Have a social buffer of friends, family, and hall mates that you can talk to about your anxiety. Gather positive affirmations from them and believe in yourself.
- **Think positive thoughts.** Instead of fearing that your speech will be an absolute disaster, replace the image with images of successful *communication* (not a performance!) with your audience.

- **Use Physical exercise.** Follow an exercise routine. It helps your body deal with stressful situations and gives you more mental strength and serenity.
- **Practice Skills Training.** Take a Public Speaking class. Work with a Speaking Center tutor to learn how to give effective speeches/presentations. Read materials such as books, articles, handouts, etc. that help you hone speaking skills.

How do I conceal my fright?

Here are some tips for specific concerns/symptoms:

- **Hands Shaking or Trembling:** This can be hidden easily by resting your hands on the podium and/or trying not to hold full sheets of paper. Notecards can be held and shaking will be less noticeable or you can set your notes on the podium.
- **Voice Shaking or Cracking:** Using more air and speaking at a slightly louder volume will help ensure this does not happen. Also, try to take a small drink of water right before your presentation. For longer presentations (15 minutes or more) it is acceptable to sip on water occasionally.
- **Mind Going Blank:** This is why we always speak from notes! Practicing with your notes and making sure they work well for you can help prevent this.
- **Stuttering or Mispronouncing Words:** In everyday conversation we will mispronounce or stutter occasionally, so giving presentations will be no different. Having realistic expectations of yourself is important. Also, if you continue your speech most people will not remember your little slip up.

Here are some general tips to help ease nervousness:

- **Do Research:** Doing research helps you feel more prepared for speaking, which leads to confidence. It also can help you if you get stuck by being able to draw on more information you can just talk about.
- **Practice Your speech:** The more you practice your speech, the better it will become. Like rough drafts of a paper improve your writing, so does practicing and getting feedback.
- **Practice Visualization:** If you can *visualize* your audience while practicing your speech this will help you remember to make eye contact and see encouragement from your audience. Try to visualize those in the audience that give good non-verbal feedback like nodding and smiling.
- **Connect With Your Audience:** Having a few friendly faces in the audience can help ease feelings of nerves. If we know that the audience has our backs and isn't judging us based solely on this speech it makes us much less nervous. This can also be done using humor or appeals to common ground if we can't interact with audiences beforehand.

Campus support for severe and/or clinical anxiety:

Student Counseling Services

Bond Hall East

Phone: 601.266.4829

