

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Top 7 Tips To Overcome The Fear Of Public Speaking And Engage Your Audience

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Fear of public speaking is a gigantic fear that plagues many people. Some even fear it more than they fear death! Just thinking about standing before a crowd may give you a queasy feeling in your stomach and make your knees weak.

However, this is a condition that we can all overcome, and no one has to live with this fear throughout his life. By showing motivation and perseverance and following a step-by-step guide, you'll be able to hurdle this obstacle and finally face the crowd with genuine confidence.

This comprehensive article will help you overcome the fear of public speaking and learn how to deliver great speeches that capture the attention of the audience. Read on to find out what you can do to be the confident person you've always dreamed to be.

1. UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

Public speaking anxiety has various root causes. These elements lead to a seemingly unconquerable fear that gnaws at your insides each time you attempt to speak in front of many people. The first step to overcome your fear is to understand the problem and figure out what makes you afraid. Try to make a list of the things about talking in public that scare you.

Here are common negative beliefs and misconceptions that persist in the minds of people who have a fear of public speaking:

- I will make a mistake, and I might forget everything that I practiced to say.

Don't focus on the thought of making mistakes and embarrassing yourself. Everybody makes mistakes, but here's the trick: each time you say the wrong word or forget a part of your speech, recover quickly and act as if it didn't happen. Don't stop in the middle. Don't look at people's faces as if

expecting them to laugh at you, and *don't panic*. Most of the time, people won't even notice that you messed up a little! If you exude confidence throughout the speech or presentation, everything will still go smoothly despite a few mistakes here and there. If it's a big mistake, correct yourself immediately and continue your speech.

If you're going to carry note cards, number them so it's easy to put them back in order in case you miss something.

➤ The audience doesn't like me.

When you look at a sea of both familiar and unknown faces, you might easily get the idea that the audience doesn't like you. Hence, you have no confidence since you don't think that you can actually deliver something impressive. You believe the audience might even react badly during your presentation. However, these are often false, dangerous thoughts that swirl around your head and pull you down. The truth is, most of the time, the audience is rooting for you. They want you to succeed. They came because they wanted to listen and they look forward to hear what you have to say. They want you to be informative and interesting, so deliver a speech as though the audience really likes it, and in the end, they will!

➤ The audience will get bored.

Do you find your chosen topic exciting? If you're excited about it yourself, then you'll be able to share interesting things that will engage the audience. Keep your presentation relevant and meaningful so as to tailor it to your particular audience. Work on verbal techniques and body movements such as hand gestures, walking on stage, eye contact, and vocal variety.

Avoid the belief that each and every person should be impressed. One or two people may look like they're not satisfied, but that's okay because you really can't please everybody. Your goal is to deliver a speech or presentation in the best way you can, so don't worry if two or three look unimpressed. Also, remember that some people may frown or appear unfriendly although they don't mean to do so.

➤ People will not understand what I'm saying.

First, make sure that you don't speak too softly nor too fast. Practice

speaking in a clear and audible voice that your audience will hear. Deep breathing is important to support a loud voice and to minimize anxiety. You may want to mark moments of pause and breaths in your note cards, if necessary. Next, allow someone to read your speech or presentation and pinpoint the parts that should be rewritten or removed. A second eye will be useful in spotting errors and confusing sections. Also, ask your friends or anyone whom you trust if your speaking voice is loud and clear. Practice in front of them so they can tell you whether you're talking too quickly or slowly at times.

➤ I'm not skilled enough to deliver something impressive.

Negative thoughts such as these reinforce your belief that you can't be an effective public speaker but remember, you deserve to be heard. We all have something interesting to say in our own unique way. There are many people who fear public speaking who didn't believe in their capability at first but learned to improve their skills through perseverance, practice, and experience.

The art of public speaking is something that can be learned. Even the best and most respected public speakers today started as beginners sometime in their early years. Excellent speakers have shared bad moments wherein they didn't practice enough and thus failed to deliver a good presentation. Thus, if you prepare and practice well, you can certainly deliver an impressive speech. When you get your first few speaking experiences, you'll learn how to improve yourself significantly and find out which areas you need to improve upon.

Once you've identified and recognized your stress triggers, the next step is to face those triggers and to turn your negative thoughts into positive ones.

2. MIND OVER MATTER

We all have preconceived notions about what we can do and what we can't do. These ideas play a key role in shaping our real potential and bringing out the best in us. If you're a pessimistic person and a negative thinker, then it's time to transform yourself into a positive and optimistic individual.

Your inner thoughts have a great impact on your actions and habits; what you think all day long significantly affect your perception of things. When you keep telling yourself that you can't successfully speak in public, then you're conditioning your mind to believe that you really can't accomplish it. Therefore, instead of persistently thinking that you're a terrible speaker, tell yourself that you have what it takes to be a good one.

Avoid self-sabotaging beliefs that linger in your mind as these negative beliefs hamper you from bringing out your potential, and they only lead you into a vicious cycle of fear. The belief that speaking in public is stressful is a self-fulfilling prophecy. You believe and expect that public speaking is a stressful experience; therefore, it becomes at least as stressful as you expected.

You have to understand that negative thoughts in your mind are only messing up your reality. What you believe often becomes real, because those beliefs have been imprinted in your mind, causing you to act according to them.

To change your learned perceptions and to reduce your fear, practice the following methods:

➤ Imagine yourself delivering a great speech or presentation.

Many successful athletes use this visualization technique to enhance their athletic performance. When they imagine reaching their goals, it becomes easier for them to accomplish it. Imagining your success gives you an exhilarating and happy feeling that instantly lifts your mood and even helps boost your confidence. Our brain tends to recognize fantasy and reality as the same things. What you feel when imagining something pleasant may be just as good as the actual occurrence.

Thus, visualize your success often. Be creative and think of what you want to happen when delivering your speech. You can think of having fun while delivering your speech, being confident throughout the speech, having people smile at you, the audience clapping at the end of the presentation, and friends praising you. These vivid imageries will soon replace the dark clouds of doubt that hang above your head.

Also, perform a mental rehearsal of your speech or presentation a couple of times. It will help you remember everything more clearly.

- Say “thank you” to the little voices in your head.

We all have those tiny devilish voices in our minds that incessantly whisper negative things to us such as the following:

“You can’t do it.”

“You’re bad at speaking.”

“Don’t even try it!”

Do you listen to those voices? Do you allow them to ruin your positive thoughts? It’s time that you stand up to them. Don’t let them attack your confidence, and don’t let them affect you. Whenever a negative voice pops up in your mind, simply tell that voice “Thank you for sharing” and don’t listen to it anymore. Don’t respond nor dwell on them. Shove them in a dusty room, lock them up, and throw away the key. Just move on and keep yourself busy with practicing your speech.

- Tell yourself that you can succeed.

To further counter the negative thoughts and voices in your head, always tell yourself that you can succeed. Make it a mantra that will calm and soothe you whenever you feel discouraged. If you make this a daily habit, positivity will soon take the place of the negativity in you.

Here are a few lines that you can practice saying to yourself:

- I’m a good public speaker.
- I can deliver my speech smoothly.
- I’m not afraid of speaking in public.
- I trust myself.
- I believe in myself.
- I believe I can do it.
- I have what it takes to succeed.

Believe in yourself and what you can do. Your thoughts will shape your actions. The right mindset can either make or break your speech delivery. With a positive outlook, optimistic attitude, high self-esteem, and great

confidence, you'll find it much easier to reach your goal of overcoming the fear of public speaking.

3. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, AND PRACTICE!

The keywords here are “practice” and “preparation,” but it doesn't necessarily mean that you need to make everything perfect. What you need to do is to be prepared and to remember the key points in your speech or presentation. This will help you avoid worrying and panicking because of not having prepared well enough. In case you forget something in the middle of your speech, you'll know what to do because you prepared for it beforehand.

Preparation is important in every speech. Remember the old adage by Thomas Edison: “Genius is one percent preparation and ninety-nine percent perspiration.” When you know that talking before a crowd is your weakness, be sure to practice your speech up to 20 times before you finally deliver it.

How to Practice the Right Way

- Create an outline that will help you stay on track – If you suddenly forget what you're about to say, *don't panic*. Breathe in and out a few times to calm yourself, take a glimpse at your notes if you made some, and get back on track. Your notes should be well-written, concise, clear, and properly arranged. Make sure to double check that all of your note cards are with you before stepping onto the stage.

Tip: Your notes don't have to contain every word and detail. They should serve as an outline that will guide you in presenting the most important points and ideas. When delivering a speech, avoid simple memorization of the script. Some people rely too much on memorization that when they get up on stage, they suddenly forget everything that they want to say. Memorizing a speech word for word also typically leads to a stiff and “lifeless” delivery.

A better approach is to memorize the entire script and then write around two or more key lines of text per note card. Next, practice off the top of

your head. You won't simply read the bullet points; you'll elaborate on each point and keep practicing until you master the speech or presentation. Once you master the general flow, you'll find it easy to deliver the speech and even add impromptu details. This way, even if you forget a line in your speech, you can immediately come up with a relevant idea and continue your delivery smoothly.

- Practice in front of an audience – The best way to practice is to face a real audience. No, you don't have to face complete strangers right away; practice in front of your family, friends and those closest to you. Practice in front of those whom you trust and whose presence makes you feel comfortable, then ask them for their feedback. When the time of the actual presentation comes, think of the audience as people whom you know. Imagine your closest friends and family as the people in the audience.

Instead of viewing the audience as one large group, connect with them as individuals. It's better to feel connected than to see people as strangers because it helps your body calm down and relax. With enough preparation, you'll feel more confident and relaxed in delivering your speech.

You may also want to find clubs or networks where you can practice with other public speaking enthusiasts and people who share the same interests. This will help you hone your skills and get over your public speaking fear. Share thoughts with each other on how to improve your public speaking skills.

Keep in mind though: do not over-practice! Advance preparation is great, but it's often not recommended to cram at the last minute. You might actually forget what you've been practicing over the past days if you do this. Half an hour before your turn to present, just sit back, relax, breathe deeply, and think of pleasant things that will calm down your mind and body. Believe in yourself, and believe that the audience will love your presentation.

- Record yourself practicing the speech, and review it afterward.

You may record your practice via webcam on your desktop/laptop or a camcorder. Ask help from a friend to record it for you, if necessary. Later on, review the recorded presentation to see where you need

improvement. You may also send it to a seasoned public speaker and ask for feedback or opinion. Alternatively, you can ask your family and friends to provide feedback for you.

4. CHOOSE A TOPIC THAT INTERESTS YOU

Choose a topic that you're comfortable to talk about and that lies within your area of expertise. If you're already knowledgeable about the topic, you'll find it easier to deliver a presentation about it. It's also much better to pick a topic that greatly interests you and makes you excited. Creative ideas will come to you naturally if you love the topic that you're discussing.

Talking about a tough and unfamiliar topic might increase your stress levels and make you anxious so make sure to choose the right topic. However, if it's unavoidable to deal with a difficult topic (for example, if it was assigned to you), then you should conduct extensive research on it. Make sure to understand every aspect of the topic. Master it and learn it by heart. Be a trusted expert who can answer almost any possible question asked about the topic.

Use an approach that will make you interested about a difficult topic. You should be motivated to research and prepare for your speech. Take note: The amount of enthusiasm you put in and show will reflect on your speech. If you don't feel interested about your topic, then your audience may also not become interested about it. Make people feel your enthusiasm; this will be an effortless process if you already like your topic right from the start.

If you're going to do a presentation and there's a possibility that the audience will ask questions afterwards, then it's best that you list down possible questions and provide corresponding answers. Practice answering these questions to prepare yourself.

As mentioned earlier, preparation is the key. Ensure that you know the material that you'll cover. You may want to research online or at the library to find similar speeches or presentations to give you an idea and inspire you. Be authentic and apply personality to spruce up your presentation.

5. LEARN RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

There are various techniques and methods that you can do to make yourself calmer and more relaxed. Breathing techniques, exercising, and even modifying your diet a little can all help you deal with public speaking anxiety. Be sure to get enough sleep before the day of the event and to eat a healthy and balanced diet.

Here are several relaxation techniques that you can try:

- Do the wall push – This technique was popularized by Yul Brynner, one of the stars on the musical film “The King and I.” The wall push simply involves standing about one meter in front of a wall, placing your palms on it, and pushing yourself against the wall. Do this a few times before the presentation. Some people claim that it’s effective in getting rid of stage fright.
- Deep breathing – Breathing techniques can be learned through proper exercise and also through yoga. Deep breathing is a quick fix that releases tension in the body. Here’s a simple breathing technique that you may practice at home or wherever possible.
 - Sit on a chair or lie down to make yourself comfortable.
 - Slowly deepen your breath by inhaling and exhaling deeply. This allows you to expand your lungs gently.
 - Count to four when inhaling. Then, count to two and hold your breath. Lastly, count to eight when exhaling. It should take you twice as long to exhale as to inhale. This breathing technique helps relax your body, but avoid doing it if it makes you feel dizzy.
- Exercise before the event – Exercise will not only make you physically healthy; it will also help you feel naturally relaxed. Most people typically feel good after a good workout session.
- Avoid caffeine – Caffeinated drinks include beverages such as coffee, tea, and soda. Caffeine increases tension and anxiety levels, so it might help to avoid caffeine intake before your presentation. However, people have different preferences. If you find yourself becoming more active and keen to talk to people after drinking coffee, then it may be good for

you. However, if it only makes you feel jittery and nervous, you should avoid it for a while.

- Get fresh air – Go somewhere clean and relaxing, perhaps the beach or a park. Take your time to relax and recharge in a quiet environment. If you prefer, you can bring your note cards with you and practice in the open air.

There are many other things that you can do to relax yourself. Try different approaches and find out which ones work best for you. With a relaxed mind and body, you'll be able to overcome your public speaking fear more quickly.

6. VISIT THE VENUE AND BE FAMILIAR WITH IT

It's best to scope out the auditorium, classroom, conference room, or wherever you're going to present. Practice at least once in the venue. You can invite a few friends over to watch your live presentation at the venue so you can get used to the feeling of speaking in front of people. It helps to be familiar with the setting and to know the audio-visual components available there.

Are there certain arrangements in the venue that make you feel calmer? If possible, you may want to ask for special accommodations. This involves making specific changes to the environment where you'll be presenting. If you believe a having bottle of cold water which you can drink from anytime will help you manage your anxiety, or perhaps a piece of audiovisual equipment will make things more convenient, then it's good to request for such.

Also, imagine the possible worst case scenario. What if you trip yourself over or you run into a pole? Imagine what may happen and what you can do to manage the situation effectively. This is part of your preparation process so as to avoid surprises.

Check the stage/room and find out if there are any obstacles that may trouble you during the event. The space where you'll be presenting should be a comfortable spot without unnecessary distractions.

Remember to get organized. If you're going to use any audio or visual aids or props, prepare ahead of time. Go to the venue and see where you can place these materials and equipment. You'll be less nervous if your presentation is well organized.

7. BE THE MOST CONFIDENT PERSON ON THE DAY OF YOUR SPEECH

Now that you know how to change your mindset to a positive one, how to prepare yourself for the speech, and how to use relaxation techniques, you're ready to be the most confident person to deliver a great speech. Don't enter the room worrying about everybody else around you. Know that you've prepared as much as you can, and whatever the outcome is, you'll continue to improve your skills and get better.

Follow these key strategies to avoid getting anxious when speaking in public:

- Start strong – Instead of starting with a soft voice, start with a loud and clear voice. This will set up a lively and exciting atmosphere that will carry on until the end of your presentation.
- Smile – Be friendly and smile! It's not advisable to act stiff all the time. Avoid fixing your gaze on the ground or on the ceiling. If it's appropriate to make a few jokes, then that will be great to lighten up the mood and entertain your audience.
- Look at nobody – If you find the crowd overwhelming, don't look at anybody. You might get nervous if you find one or two people who don't have the right expression that you expect. Some people may appear more menacing than they really are. It could be their natural expression, so don't worry too much about facial expressions. Talk as though you're speaking to everyone. However, if you find it more relaxing to connect with people, then it's better to look at a few individual familiar faces. As mentioned earlier, connecting with people can help calm a public speaker. Whether you prefer to look at individual people or see the crowd as a whole depends on what you find more comfortable when

delivering a speech.

- Don't worry about mistakes – If you make a mistake, don't dwell on it and compensate by making the rest of the presentation better. If you view YouTube videos of renowned speakers, you'll notice a few stumbles during the speech. It happens to everybody, even the best speakers, so stop worrying about mistakes.

Public speaking is a skill that anyone can master. Even the most timid and bashful person can be an excellent public speaker with practice and experience. Many people have successfully overcome their fear of public speaking, so you can definitely manage your fear as well.

Don't be disappointed or disheartened if a presentation doesn't go as well as you expected it to be. Instead, let it motivate you. With every public speaking experience, you'll definitely improve more and more. After your speech, list down the positive things that occurred as well as the top things that you've learned. The mind tends to focus on negative things, but in reality, there are more positive things that go unnoticed. Even if you think you made a mistake or presented badly, there are still positive aspects about that experience. For example, you may learn the proper speed of talking, how to remember important lines more effectively, and how to look at the crowd without getting nervous.

Celebrate your success, cherish every experience, and strive to be an excellent public speaker! Use the tips in this article to overcome your fear today. Remember, thousands of people have already recovered from anxiety problems. You too can control your fear. Just be motivated, keep persevering, and never give up. Public speaking is a skill that you can master over time.

CONCLUSION

There you have it! 7 great strategies to overcoming the fear of public speaking. Simply learn to implement these techniques into your own life and I guarantee you will see an improvement in your public speaking skills.

Thank you so much for reading,
Derek Stanzma