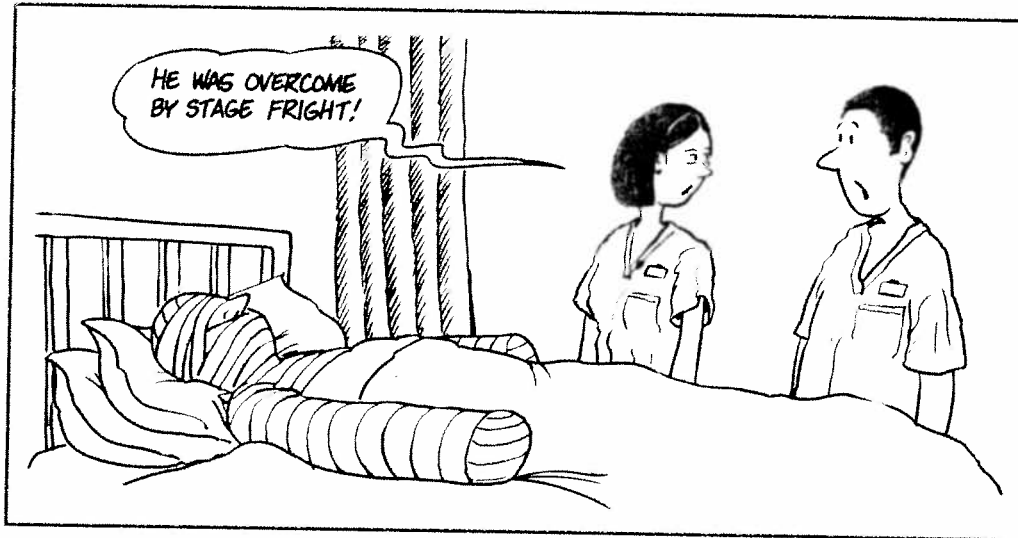


Developing Self-Confidence



It is the beginning of the semester, and this speech class has just begun. It is natural to be nervous about speaking in front of people you've never met before. Relax—your classmates will soon become new friends and will no longer seem like strangers.

This chapter is full of helpful suggestions for presentations. Believe it or not, you are already prepared to deliver many excellent speeches. Talking about yourself, your experiences, your opinions, and your concerns or fears is one of the best ways to do this.

PRESENTATION ANXIETY

Does the thought of making a presentation in front of a group of people make you nervous? Does it make your heart race? Do you feel nauseated or sick to your stomach? Do your muscles tense? Do you begin to sweat? Do you want to run away and hide?

If you answered "yes" to any or all of these questions, you are in the majority. Researchers consistently report that most people fear public speaking even more than death or flying!

Feeling nervous at the thought of public speaking is perfectly normal. You respond the same way you would to any stressful situation. Your body produces extra adrenaline. This is what makes your heart pound faster and your hands shake. This extra adrenaline also makes your knees feel weak and tenses your muscles.

The good news is that you can learn to control your nervousness and make it work in your favor.

HOW TO CONTROL PRESENTATION ANXIETY

Talk Yourself Out of Negative Thoughts

The first step toward controlling your nervousness is to identify its causes. After you've analyzed your fears, you can do something about them.

Step 1: Identify Your Fears

1. Think of five reasons you have presentation anxiety. Use some of the following reasons if they apply, or come up with five of your own personal fears. (Your teacher will decide whether to ask you to do this in class or to assign it as homework.)
 - I'll forget what I want to say.
 - I'm afraid no one will be interested in my topic.
 - The audience is too large.
 - I don't know anyone in the audience.
 - I don't speak well in public.
 - Everyone will see how nervous I am.
 - I might not be prepared enough.
 - Listeners won't understand me.
 - My English isn't very good.
 - The audience won't like me; they will reject me.
2. Rank the reasons from 1 to 5, 1 being the reason that causes you the most anxiety. Write them in the following chart.

Rank	Fear
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____

Step 2: Replace Your Fears with Positive Thoughts

Substitute at least two positive beliefs for each fear you identified. Use the form on the next page to record your positive thoughts.

Example

Fear

The audience is too large.

Everyone will see how nervous I am.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Positive Beliefs

The size of the group doesn't matter. People are listening one at a time.

Nervousness is normal. Everyone feels the same way. Besides, I know I don't look as nervous as I feel.

Step 3: Share Your Strategies

In small groups, discuss your fears.

1. Share the positive thoughts you substituted for each negative one with your group members.
2. Then, meeting as a class, compare strategies. Check your strategies with the suggestions on page 264 in Appendix II.

Take Advantage of Small Occasions to Speak Up

In addition to identifying your fears, you can use several other strategies to reduce presentation anxiety. For instance, you can "speak up" in fun or nonthreatening situations. Try one or more of the following:

- Make yourself give the toast at a birthday party.
- Give the order in a restaurant.
- Ask a question when you are an audience member during another person's speech.

Plan and Prepare

Preparation is one of the best antidotes for presentation anxiety. With proper preparation, you will feel confident that you know your subject matter and have just the right amount of information for the allotted time.

Use Audio and Visual Aids

Audio and visual aids create a lot of interest. They will make you feel less self-conscious as the audience will focus some of their attention on your visuals.

Practice!

Rehearse your speech in front of family or friends. Ask them for feedback. This will help you to feel more comfortable when you face your “real” audience.

Breathe Deeply and Slowly

Breathing exercises are one of society’s oldest techniques for relieving stress. When we exhale, we release carbon dioxide. This increases the oxygen in our brains, which helps us to relax. So, take a deep breath. Hold it. Let it out slowly. Do it over and over until you feel calmer. For additional work on breathing, see *Learn to Breathe Deeply and Slowly* on page 264 in Appendix II.

Remember: Nervousness is normal. Talk yourself out of negative thoughts. Your listeners want you to succeed! When you are the listener, be sure to help the speaker to feel more comfortable.

Suggestions for Listeners

Give the Speaker Positive Reinforcement

Show speakers you are interested in them and in what they are saying. Give them encouragement. Look at the speakers, smile reassuringly, and nod your head from time to time while they are talking. This will help give them confidence and put them at ease.

Ask Questions After the Speech

If a speaker invites questions from the audience after the speech, participate! Asking questions of presenters after a speech compliments them. It shows speakers that you are interested in their topics and would like to know more. It is very discouraging when a presenter asks, “Does anyone have any questions?” and no one responds.

SPEECH 1: SELF-INTRODUCTION

You will overcome your speech fears more quickly if you have an opportunity to speak about a very familiar topic—yourself. For this reason, all the speeches in this chapter focus on you as an individual. Depending on your background and culture, you might be a bit reluctant to express your opinions and to describe personal experiences or your feelings to the class. However, sharing your experiences and feelings is highly appropriate in the United States and will help make your speech interesting and relevant to your listeners. It is also a wonderful way to get to know your classmates.

Your first assignment is to give a speech about yourself. Because the goal is to be very natural and spontaneous as you speak, instead of writing your speech beforehand, you will choose one of the following three methods to prepare and present your speech: