

Reducing Public Speaking Anxiety- Stage Fright

What is stage fright? You may have a dry mouth, tight throat, sweaty, shaky or cold hands, a fast pulse, nausea, and you may start trembling slightly. You probably feel nervous and uncomfortable. Stage fright affects everyone in different ways. Some people may have little to no anxiety while speaking in public, while others may find it quite the ordeal. Here are some strategies for dealing with this very common- and very manageable- problem!

Advance Preparation

- Practice, practice, practice! Perform your presentation for friends, roommates, a tutor, or anyone else who will listen.
- Become familiar with the space where you will be presenting.
- Make sure you are wearing comfortable clothing, especially shoes. Minor physical annoyances will distract you during the presentation.
- Pick a simple phrase that will relax you that you can silently repeat to yourself immediately before presenting. "You're fine" works nicely, as does "all right."

Before the Presentation

- Do something relaxing. Read a favorite poem or listen to a favorite song.
- Exercise! A quick walk will get oxygen to your brain and calm you.
- Avoid caffeinated foods and beverages like chocolate, soda and coffee. They will not give you true energy, but they will speed up your heart rate and make your anxiety more intense.
- Take small sips of room-temperature water.
- Don't force yourself to eat if you're not hungry.
- Warm up your voice! Talk to friends, call a family member, or find a private space to sing your favorite song or give yourself a pep talk.
- Tense up your muscles for ten seconds, then release and focus on the feeling of relaxation. Start with your feet and work your way up to your shoulders.
- Visualize! Imagine how well the presentation is going to go, and picture yourself being extremely successful during the presentation- happy, prepared and confident!

During the Presentation

- If standing, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, one foot slightly in front of the other. This will help your balance and discourage a nervous rocking.
- If your legs are trembling, lean onto the lectern or move around a bit.
- Make eye contact. This might sound hard, but it will make you feel less isolated.
- Focus on the friendly faces in the audience and think of how well you're doing.
- Keep breathing deeply! Don't be afraid to pause and collect your thoughts.

All of these tips will not work for everyone. The single most important thing you can do to eliminate stage fright is to be entirely prepared for the presentation, so practicing is a must. People react to potentially stressful situations in different ways, so experiment with some of these strategies to see what works best to reduce your own public speaking anxieties.