

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Most of the people have fear of public speaking. However, for some this fear is so intense that they avoid making presentations or taking courses that require active participation. Moreover, they may experience this fear in crowded social settings.

This is not a disorder but certainly a problem. Because it makes you feel bad and decreases your performance in class.

People who have fear of public speaking tell that they are mostly afraid of the following to happen:

- Freezing, being unable to speak; suddenly forgetting what to say
- Being the center of attention, everybody looking at and listening to him/her
- Doing a mistake, a question that s/he might not answer
- People noticing that s/he is nervous
- Presentation going so bad that it will embarrass him/her or put him down in front of the teacher or classmates
- Audience disliking the presentation, getting bored and start talking or leave the room.

Actually what underlies all these is the fear of others' judgements.

These negative thoughts are usually accompanied by physical complaints such as trembling and sweaty hands, trembling voice, accelerated heart beat, vertigo, etc. that make it even harder.

If it is too difficult for you to speak in front of people, you may do one of the two alternatives:

1. **Avoid speaking:** Yes, you can do this by not taking some of the courses or not attending to these courses. However, as you avoid, it becomes more difficult to deal with and this may spoil your career and social life.
2. **Face and deal with the fear:** This requires courage but you will see that your next try will always be easier than the previous one.

How can I cope with it?

Before the presentation/speech...

We actually need the fear and anxiety. Some level of anxiety aids remembering, increases energy and facilitates concentration. Thus, our aim is not to totally eliminate the anxiety; rather, we need enough anxiety to give us the energy and enough relief to be able to remember and think. To achieve this:

- Change the way you think. Approach the idea of public speaking calmly, not fearfully. Avoid constantly thinking that everything will go wrong. Instead of saying, "How can I overcome?" say, "How can I do something nice?"
- Don't be perfectionist. Get rid of the thought that a small mistake will ruin everything and focus on your subject. Even the most intelligent and most successful people do mistakes when they are speaking. If you don't get stuck with your mistake, neither will your audience.
- The most important thing to do: Prepare well! Postponing preparation will postpone your current anxiety too, but it will increase your anxiety when the presentation time comes! To be able to be confident in yourself, you should know your subject very well. Make a good research. To start with, determine the structure and main points of your presentation/speech. Have an introduction and a conclusion. Then prepare your speech and review it. Leave the confusing and incongruent parts out; don't try to wedge them in the text.
- Rehearse out loud. Rehearse until you feel that your content and poise are both done. Then present a rehearsal to a friend. In this rehearsal, you will see your timing and the points at which you get stuck, thus you will not bump into surprises during the real presentation. Try not to read your notes while rehearsing.
- Enrich your presentation by using visual materials. This will contribute to the effectiveness of your speech/presentation and will give you a relief by attracting the attention away from you as well.
- Read something about public speaking, collect tips from internet.
- See the room and the equipment before the presentation. If you have concerns, talk to your teacher and tell him/her that you are anxious. S/he may have suggestions.
- If you feel very anxious, take a deep breath and relax yourself. Think positive. Imagine yourself in the presence of the class and imagine how good your speech/presentation went.

- Prepare short key words and phrases, written by big fonts. If possible, write them on cards and number the cards (in case you drop them :) Do not keep the whole text of the speech in front of you

PowerPoint tips:

- Write minimum information needed on slides. Avoid long sentences.
- Use 18 or larger size font (Times New Roman).
- Avoid using yellow or orange as slide backgrounds. They do not show up well when projected. For text intensive presentations white on dark blue is ideal.
- If you will use a slide twice, duplicate it and place them in their order.

At the presentation/speech day...

- Avoid caffeine and eat light things.
- Wear clothes that make you feel good and comfortable. Pay attention to how you look. Looking good will make you feel better and increase your self-confidence.

During the speech/presentation...

- Smile.
- Do not focus on yourself, how you look, how well it is going and/or whether your anxiety is noticed or not. Just think about your presentation/speech.
- Do not try to read the minds of the audience. Do not ruminate about the facial expressions, postures, yawning and laughing of the audience and try to guess what they might have been thinking. You may decide that a person did not like your speech/presentations and feel bad, while actually s/he was anxious about his/her presentation.
- Looking at your friends may be comforting. At times make eye-contact with them.
- Act confident, even when you do not feel so.
- Talk with your regular, natural tone and speed. Avoid being monotonous.
- Use your hands but do not exaggerate. Do not swing; instead move a few steps forwards and backwards.
- Have your closing sentence ready and ask if there are any questions.

After the speech/presentation...

- Leave everything behind. Avoid thinking that "it could go this way", "if only I did that", and/or "I did a mistake there". Whatever had happened, the important thing is that you stood up there and made a presentation/delivered a speech. Relax and reward yourself.

For More Information

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