



Douglas College

Douglas College Learning Centre

DEALING WITH NERVOUSNESS IN ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Many people get nervous when they need to speak or perform in front of a group. Actors, athletes and politicians all get nervous when public attention is turned on them. The ones who do well are the ones who use their nervousness to help them do a good job. Nervousness is a kind of energy; they can channel that energy into helping them perform well. You can too. Here are some tips:

- Practice with public speaking is probably the best strategy for reducing nervousness. If you are afraid of public speaking, look for as many opportunities as possible to practice. You may want to consider taking a college course on Oral Presentations (CMNS 1125). This university transfer course gives lots of practice as well as useful instruction.

Before your Presentation

Prepare your Presentation

- Go easy on yourself. Make sure that you spend the time to develop a clear and coherent plan for your presentation. Lack of preparation can lead even the most highly skilled presenter to get nervous and do a poor job. If you need help about how to do this, consult Learning Centre handout RS8.10: Preparing an Oral Presentation
 - Put special effort into planning your introduction. If things go well at the beginning of your presentation, your nervousness will decrease.
- Plan to use some visuals in your presentation. Visuals take some of the focus away from you and so can reduce your anxiety.
- Practice your presentation in front of others as many times as possible.

Practice relaxation techniques

Choose one of these techniques and practice it for one or two minutes at a time in the weeks and days leading up to your presentation. At first, practice in relaxed situations like at home in a comfortable chair. As you get used to it, begin to practice in more stressful situations like in class or on the bus:

- Breathe in deeply through your nose; breathe out slowly through your mouth. Focus on the feeling of the air as it enters and exits your body. With the air, breathe out your anxiety.
- Create a peaceful scene in your imagination. Imagine yourself in a favorite place where you feel comfortable and relaxed. It might be a beach, a forest or even a favorite cozy armchair. As you imagine yourself in the picture, let go of your anxiety.
- Tense and release your muscles. Starting with your feet, tighten the muscles for 3 seconds and then consciously relax them. Move up your body tensing muscles and releasing the stress. Notice your muscles relax and feel heavy.

Think Positive Thoughts

- Don't think about your nervousness; that just makes you more nervous. Plan to enjoy giving your presentation. If you get butterflies when you think about presenting, call them excitement, not nervousness.
- Psych yourself up for the presentation. You can do it. You know you can. Think positive thoughts.
- If you catch yourself thinking negative thoughts like "I can't do it" or "I'm just going to die of nervousness!", tell yourself "STOP!" and switch to positive thoughts like "I am learning to be a good speaker" or "I can manage my nervousness and do a good job."
- Visualize yourself giving a good presentation. Imagine yourself walking confidently to the podium, arranging your notes, looking around the room and greeting your audience in a clear, loud voice and a friendly tone. Visualize yourself making eye contact with people around the room, pausing for emphasis and ending with a strong message.

Prepare Physically

- Get a good night's sleep the night before, drink lots of water early in the day and eat lightly before the presentation.
- Some people benefit from a physical release of energy an hour or so before the presentation. A walk, or for those more physically able, a run – or even a quick hike up and down a few flights of stairs – can help.

During your Presentation

- Act confident. Even if you don't feel confident, acting confident may actually convince you out of your nervousness. Even if you are still nervous, when you appear confident, your presentation will benefit.
- When you are speaking to a group, think of each person as someone you are talking to individually; avoid thinking of the group as a whole.

- Focus on your ideas or on your audience instead of on yourself and your own feelings. As part of this, don't mention your nervousness to the audience. It's your issue, not your audience's.
- When you feel butterflies, sweats or other physical symptoms of your nervousness, welcome them. Tell yourself these feelings can convert into positive energy.
- If you are still too nervous, use the relaxation technique you've been practicing. If you practiced it, you should be able to quickly release stress using your technique.

After your Presentation

Yes, there is life after a presentation. Reward yourself. Treat yourself to a special meal, or spend time with a favourite friend, or buy yourself a small gift. You did it!

Other Learning Centre Resources on Oral Presentations:

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| RS8.10 | Preparing an Oral Presentation |
| RS8.20 | Organizing your Oral Presentation |
| RS8.30 | Using Visuals in Oral Presentations |