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5 TIPS TO CONQUER YOUR SPEECH ANXIETY

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SUCCESSNET

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Introduction

Who Experiences Speech Anxiety?

According to *The Book of Lists*, Americans report that giving a public speech is the thing they fear most. Most Americans fear public speaking **even more than they fear death**.

Contrary to popular belief, speech anxiety doesn't happen only to individuals the first few times they're presenting a speech. It's also experienced by "speech veterans" who have been making public presentations for years.

Most people who experience speech anxiety assume that they are the only ones who suffer from shaking knees, sweaty palms and butterflies in the stomach. This feeling of being "abnormal" can intensify these negative feelings. In order to control your fear, you need to realize that you're experiencing the same fears the majority of Americans are experiencing.

The key to successful speaking is learning how to manage the adrenalin rush and the accompanying symptoms of speech anxiety so you can use them to your advantage.

Many people who suffer from speech anxiety choose to deal with their problem by avoiding public speaking situations.

Avoiding public speaking may be the ideal strategy for some people, but chances are that at some point, you'll encounter the need to interview or deliver a speech to co-workers.

Once you realize that you cannot hide from public speaking situations for the rest of your life, you can focus on conquering speech anxiety. Understanding the causes and effects of this fear is the first step in developing a strategy that will work for you.

5 Keys to Manage Your Anxiety

1. Remember that your audience wants you to succeed.
2. Think of your presentation as a formal conversation with your audience.
3. Greet some of the audience/participants before your presentation, if possible. It creates a more comfortable environment for you and your audience.
4. Breathe deeply (from your diaphragm).
5. Plan, practice and prepare thoroughly.

5 Tips to Conquer Your Speech Anxiety

1. Let Go of Perfectionism

Most of us put incredible pressure on ourselves to deliver a perfect performance. All speakers expect to feel nervousness. However, they learn to *manage* their fear rather than allowing the fear to have an adverse effect on their performance.

Expectation of perfectionism creates tension in you and in others. It makes people afraid of you, and it makes you afraid to give your gifts to others.

Give up trying to be perfect, now.

2. Get Grounded

A smell, a sound, a picture, a touch, even a color can be an anchor.

- Recall a pleasant experience.
- Notice what you see, hear and feel as you relive that experience.
- Plan how you'll anchor the experience. You may touch your wrist with your finger. You may squeeze your thumb and index finger together. (You must be able to do whatever you choose easily and repeatedly.)
- Recall the same pleasant experience again. As soon as the feelings come up, set the anchor.
- Now test the anchor. Touch your wrist or the place you selected for the anchor. The pleasant feeling should now surface without recalling the entire pleasant experience. (If it doesn't work, it means you set the anchor too soon or too late. Set the anchor the moment you feel the emotions of that pleasant event.)
- Set the anchor right before you get up to speak. You should be able to "touch and go."

3. Breathe

Breathing increases aliveness, relaxes stress and flows energy through the body.

- Sit down.
- Inhale slowly and say to yourself **I am . . .**
- Exhale slowly and say to yourself **relaxed**.

Do this before your speech to calm your nerves. Remember to breathe evenly through your **nose** so that you avoid getting the dry "cotton" mouth.

4. Avoid Dry “Cotton” Mouth

The dry mouth that accompanies the prospect of giving a speech is often caused by nervousness—not thirst. You may be able to improve your saliva flow by sucking on sugar-free hard candy or chewing sugar-free gum. Avoid lemon-flavored hard candy—it makes saliva acidic, increasing the possibility of tooth decay. Sip room-temperature water regularly.

5. Visualize Your Speaking Success

This is the process of running a movie through your mind. Try the following technique:

1. Find a quiet, private place and mentally rehearse your presentation.
2. Clearly see yourself as you rise from your seat and approach the audience.
3. Closely see how poised and relaxed you look.
4. Fully experience the feeling of confidence as you breathe and greet the audience. Hear your opening words as you easily welcome the audience.
5. Breathe again as you hear yourself smoothly move to the body of your message and then to the summary of your talk.
6. See all the receptive, smiling faces nodding with support and approval.
7. Hear the laughter as you tell your personal funny story.
8. Hear the thunderous applause as you wrap up your speech.
9. Feel the positive energy coming toward you from the audience.
10. Breathe again and smile as you feel the positive emotions that come from a job well done.
11. Watch yourself as you walk confidently to your seat.
12. Congratulate yourself.

Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA)

Directions: Below are 34 statements that people sometimes make about themselves. Please indicate whether or not you believe each statement applies to you by marking whether you:

- 1 = **Strongly Disagree**
- 2 = **Disagree**
- 3 = **Neutral**
- 4 = **Agree**
- 5 = **Strongly Agree**

Statement	Score
1. While preparing for giving a speech, I feel tense and nervous.	
2. I feel tense when I see the words "speech" and "public speech" on a course outline when studying.	
3. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.	
4. Right after giving a speech I feel that I have had a pleasant experience.	
5. I get anxious when I think about a speech coming up.	
6. I have no fear of giving a speech.	
7. Although I am nervous just before starting a speech, I soon settle down after starting and feel calm and comfortable.	
8. I look forward to giving a speech.	
9. When the instructor announces a speaking assignment in class, I can feel myself getting tense.	
10. My hands tremble when I am giving a speech.	
11. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.	
12. I enjoy preparing for a speech.	
13. I am in constant fear of forgetting what I prepared to say.	
14. I get anxious if someone asks me something about my topic that I don't know.	
15. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.	
16. I feel that I am in complete possession of myself while giving a speech.	
17. My mind is clear when giving a speech.	
18. I don't dread giving a speech.	
19. I perspire just before starting a speech.	
20. My heart beats very fast just as I start a speech.	

Statement	Score
21. I experience considerable anxiety while sitting in the room just before my speech starts.	
22. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.	
23. Realizing that only a little time remains in a speech makes me very tense and anxious.	
24. While giving a speech, I know I can control my feelings of tension and stress.	
25. I breathe faster just before starting a speech.	
26. I feel comfortable and relaxed in the hour or so just before giving a speech.	
27. I do poorer on speeches because I am anxious.	
28. I feel anxious when the teacher announces the date of a speaking assignment.	
29. When I make a mistake while giving a speech, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow.	
30. During an important speech I experience a feeling of helplessness building up inside me.	
31. I have trouble falling asleep the night before a speech.	
32. My heart beats very fast while I present a speech.	
33. I feel anxious while waiting to give my speech.	
34. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.	

Scoring: To determine your score, complete the following steps:

Step 1. Add the scores for items 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34

Step 2. Add the scores for items 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 24, 26

Step 3. Complete the following formula:

$$PRPSA = 72 - \text{Total from Step 2} + \text{Total from Step 1}$$

Your score should be between 34 and 170. If your score is below 34 or above 170, you've made a mistake in computing the score.

Score	Anxiety about Public Speaking
132 - 170	High
98 - 131	Moderate
34 - 97	Low
114.6	Mean
17.2	Standard Deviation (Roughly, the amount by which the average person's score differs from the average of all scores.)

Source: McCroskey, J. C. (1970)
 Measures of Communication-Bound Anxiety
Speech Monographs, 37, 269-277

Shyness Scale (SS)

This measure is also referred to as the McCroskey Shyness Scale. It was developed to obtain an individual's self-report of their shy behavior.

Directions: Below are 14 statements that people sometimes make about themselves. Please indicate whether or not you believe each statement applies to you by marking whether you:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Statement	Score
1. I am a shy person.	
2. Other people think I talk a lot.	
3. I am a very talkative person.	
4. Other people think I am shy.	
5. I talk a lot.	
6. I tend to be very quiet in class.	
7. I don't talk much.	
8. I talk more than most people.	
9. I am a quiet person.	
10. I talk more in a small group (3-6) than others do.	
11. Most people talk more than I do.	
12. Other people think I am very quiet.	
13. I talk more in class than most people do.	
14. Most people are more shy than I am.	

Scoring: Please score your responses as follows:

Step 1. Add the scores for items 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12.

Step 2. Add the scores for items 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 13, and 14.

Step 3. Complete the following formula:

$$\text{Shyness} = 42 + \text{Total of Step 1} - \text{Total of Step 2}$$

Score	Level of Shyness
> 52	High
32 - 52	Moderate
14 - 31	Low

Source: McCroskey, J. C. & Richmond, V.P. (1982) Communication Apprehension and Shyness: Conceptual and Operational Distinctions Central States Speech Journal, 33, 458-468

Recommended Resource

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- Do you know the three main learning styles?
- Do you know how to calm your nerves and use speech anxiety to your advantage?

Find out more and how to order *How to Deliver Highly Effective Presentations* at [**http://SuccessNet.org/presentations.htm**](http://SuccessNet.org/presentations.htm)

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Michael Angier, speaker, coach and consultant

Michael works with senior executives who want to build world class companies and with people who want to do value-driven work.

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