

Public Speaking Anxiety

Long Term

If even the idea of public speaking makes you nervous, you are not alone! One survey found just under two-thirds of undergraduates had some level of public speaking anxiety.¹ The ability to communicate is necessary across fields and disciplines and is attractive to employers. Using the following tips and tricks can help ease your nerves and improve your performance.

It is helpful to identify *where* your public speaking anxiety comes from so you can identify what steps will be the most useful to you. Common sources of public speaking anxiety are fear of the unknown, fear of failure, & fear of judgment. For example, if the unknown element is the worst for you, visualization may help the most. Not all these tactics will work for you; try a few out to find the ones that help the most!

If you want to speak to a professional, TSC offers access through the Counseling Center. Visit them at the Technology & Professional Programs Building, Room 141, call (850) 201-8430, or visit their website at tsc.fl.edu/student-life/counseling-center.



Medium Term

Change your mindset:

- Focus on knowing your main ideas & then conveying those ideas to your audience. How can you make them understand your point?
- Assume your audience has good intent & wants you to succeed.
- Use visualization techniques such as imagining yourself giving your speech successfully. Go through every step from walking up to sitting back down.
- The nervous energy may never totally go away; even professionals get nervous! Channel that energy into your presentation. Think about it fueling your gestures or posture for example.

Set yourself up for success:

- Focus on knowing the material rather than memorizing the exact words, then, if you get tripped up, it is easier to get back on track than having to mentally skim through your whole speech.
- Practice multiple times. Studies show that practicing has a positive effect on both performance & anxiety.
- Practice out loud in the mirror (or record yourself) to watch your posture, gestures, & facial expressions.
- If you make a mistake during your practice, don't start over, keep going. Since you cannot restart during your presentation, having experience getting back on track is helpful.
- Practice the components (introduction, body, conclusion) separately & out of order to improve your knowledge of the contents & flow of your presentation.



¹ Marinho, Anna Carolina Ferreira et al. "Fear of Public Speaking: Perception of College Students and Correlates," Journal of Voice, vol. 31, no. 1, 2017, 127.E7-E11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvoice.2015.12.012>.

Short Term

Before your speech:

- Limit caffeine & get enough sleep the night before. Make sure to hydrate & stay away from carbonated beverages.
- If your hands shake & you have notes, use thicker notecards to make the shaking less noticeable.
- Keep focused on the present, rather than worrying about the future. This can also help to displace the nerves. Try tongue twisters, progressive muscle relaxation, shaking out your hands, & diaphragmatic box breathing.

During Your Speech

Overall

- Fake it 'til you make it. Usually, you feel more anxious than you look, so even pretending to be confident means that people will perceive you as such.
- You may have heard “imagine the audience in their underwear,” but imagining them as inanimate objects, like stuffed animals or action figures, can better relieve the feeling of being judged.
- If making eye contact makes you nervous, try looking at the space between an audience member's eyebrows.
- Start by looking at a few audience members that you know until you feel confident enough to look at strangers. Look for someone who is engaged & nodding along, there's usually at least one!
- Take deep breaths using your diaphragm.
- Keep your knees slightly bent. Locking your knees can restrict blood flow causing you to faint.

If you...

- **...lose your train of thought & go blank**, repeat what you just said to jog your memory, or take a sip of water to stall while you think.
- **...use filler words (like “um” or “uh”)**, try pausing instead. You can also purposefully relax your muscles & slow down. When you go to use a filler word, take a breath or a sip of water.
- **...get sweaty palms**, try holding something cold or use open palm gestures
- **...shake**, breathe using your diaphragm. Stand with your feet flat on the floor, shoulder-width apart with your knees slightly bent. If you have speaking aids, put them down on the lectern so the shaking is less visible.
- **...start speeding up**, reset by taking a breath or a sip of water. Broaden your gestures to slow down. Focusing on the words you're saying will help you pay attention to your speed.
- **...sway back & forth**, keep your feet flat on the floor, almost parallel, with your toes pointed slightly outward to make it harder for you to sway.
- **...skipped a section**, don't let the audience know, just keep going. Think ahead & try to figure out somewhere to include the information you missed.
- **...freeze up**, try to reorient yourself to the present moment. Grounding techniques, like focusing on your breath or progressive muscle relaxation, can help you calm your anxiety.