



Calm Your Nerves Before a Talk

Glossophobia (the fear of public speaking) is fairly common—with 25% of Americans listing it as a concern (Ingraham, 2014). Such anxiety manifests itself cognitively, physiologically, and behaviorally, which is why you might experience rapid speaking and breathing, shaking hands, or other symptoms of nerves.

To address these reactions, it helps to know your material and to have practiced your talk, yet the additional steps below can also help you to prepare for your presentation:

Before your presentation

- Limit caffeine or other stimuli. Too much of these can exacerbate the physical reactions related to nervousness.
- Inspire yourself with music or an image that puts you in a positive frame of mind.
- Take a quick walk or move around to release some nervous energy.
- “Box breathe” for a few minutes: Inhale slowly through your nose while counting to 4; hold your breath for 4 seconds; slowly exhale through your mouth while counting to 4.
- Repeat a calming mantra to yourself while breathing slowly and deeply.
- Visualize a successful presentation.

During your presentation

- Maintain eye contact – look around the room and divide the space into three or four sections so you look at groups of people. This lets you look around the audience without too many rapid shifts in focus.
- Stand with poise and confidence – open your shoulders and arms, position your body so it is as symmetrical as possible, and use natural gestures and expressions.
- Speak up and out – this means you’ll be speaking while maintaining eye contact with the audience and will make certain the audience in the back can hear you.
- Use effective notes – write these with a big, clear font so you can easily read your cues and can then return your attention back to the audience.
- Most importantly – breathe! If you feel your speaking pace speeding up or your breathing getting shallower, pause and take a calming breath.

Note: Your audience is unlikely to pick up on many of the behavioral manifestations of your nerves. For example, some people worry their hands will shake, but this is more apparent to the speaker than the audience. So speak with confidence!

