

COPING *with* PUBLIC-SPEAKING NERVES

When you speak in front of others, do you regularly:

- Worry for days, weeks or even months in advance, imagining all the worst-case scenarios?
- Experience shaking, blushing, sweating, nausea, dry mouth, rapid heart rate and a quivering or squeaky voice?

If you do, you could be experiencing some performance anxiety. Public speaking is one of the most common fears of people of all ages. If you experience nerves in front of an audience, you are certainly not alone! Presenters who seem relaxed and confident have simply learned to manage and use their nerves to enhance their performance.

Try these public-speaking tips:

- **Tell someone** - Let your teacher, school counsellor, parent or a friend know that you're nervous about speaking in front of others. Sometimes talking about your nerves can make it easier to overcome your fear. You'll probably hear that other people have felt the same and you might just receive some helpful advice!
- **Be prepared** - Practise delivering your speech several times before your actual presentation. Use gradual, concrete steps, like doing your speech in front of a mirror, videotaping it, and then doing it in front of a small group to help you gain confidence. Recruit family, friends or even your pet for an audience! See this [Presentation Rehearsal Checklist](#) (Algonquin College) for more prep ideas.
- **Visualize confidence** - Visualize yourself calmly delivering your presentation with confidence. Elite athletes use this strategy to improve their performance in competitions. Acting as if you are confident can often help you *feel* more confident. Listen to this guided [Public Speaking](#) visualization (Anxiety Canada, 3:59/3:10) to help you with this.
- **Find a friendly face** - When you're giving your presentation, look for a friend, a classmate or an adult in the audience who seems friendly. Imagine that you are speaking only to that person.
- **Set realistic expectations** - Public speaking is difficult to master. Even experienced speakers like politicians and actors make mistakes. Instead of trying to give a perfect speech, remind yourself that mistakes will happen and talk yourself through it with phrases like, *If I lose my place, I will calmly scan my notes and then continue*, or *Small mistakes are going to happen and won't ruin my presentation*.
- **Use relaxation techniques beforehand** - It's helpful to regularly take time to calm down and relax in the days leading up to your presentation. Two of the most helpful relaxation techniques are [Calm Breathing](#) (Anxiety Canada, audio, 2:00/4:42) and [Tense and Release](#) (Anxiety Canada, audio, 6:30). For more options, search YouTube for "calm breathing exercises" or download phone apps with guided relaxation tracks. During your presentation, take a few of these calm breaths and remind yourself that you are safely connected to the ground, which is firm and steady beneath your feet.



- **Learn public speaking skills** – Sometimes knowing what makes a good speech and how to engage an audience can help you feel more confident. Look for information and resources on how to become a strong public speaker, such as this short YouTube video, [How to Deliver an Effective Presentation](#) (Algonquin College, 2:03). You can also join a related club at school to get more practice and gain experience.

Remind yourself that:



You are nervous because you want to do well, not because it's going to go badly – Even the best speakers get nervous, but they use their nerves to invigorate their gestures and share their enthusiasm about the topic. Try to think about your nerves in a more positive light – as excitement about sharing what you know (or just excitement about the relief of having it done!).



Your classmates are on your side – Think about a time when you saw a nervous classmate present. Did you think less of them, or did you mostly feel empathy for them? Remember that your classmates are probably feeling anxious, too, and are probably not paying that much attention to your every word because they are thinking about their own presentation.



Most of your anxiety is not visible – You may feel like your anxiety is so obvious. Your classmates probably can't tell how anxious you are, so fake it till you make it! You are the only one who knows how nervous you are on the inside.



Your nerves will settle as your presentation progresses – Anxiety is often worst right before you start. Most people find that once they get through the introduction, their anxiety begins to decrease and they feel steadier and more confident as they continue.

More public-speaking resources

Public Speaking Anxiety Tips
(YouTube video, 6:08)

5 Public Speaking Tips for Kids Who Are Shy or Anxious (YouTube video, 5:39)

Mindshift CBT (Anxiety Canada)
Free app provides pre-presentation “chill-out tools” and other helpful ideas for coping with anxiety about public speaking



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