

T.I.P.S.

The Speaking Center Presents: Techniques to Improve Public Speaking

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Convenient and simple techniques or suggestions to help improve in a variety of public speaking areas.

9 Ways to Reduce Presentation Anxiety

Some people rank the fear of public speaking higher than the fear of death! It is very real and can be debilitating. But there are several techniques to help you overcome your fears.

David Greenberg, president and CEO of Simply Speaking and author of the bestseller *Simply Speaking! The No-Sweat Way to Prepare and Deliver Presentations*, offers nine helpful strategies to eliminate presentation or "speech" anxiety which are:

Accept that being nervous is not a bad thing. Being nervous means you care about giving a good presentation. Your nervousness produces adrenaline, which helps you think faster, speak more fluently, and add the needed enthusiasm to convey your message.

Don't try to be perfect. The fear of public speaking often stems from a fear of imperfection. Rather than striving to become a "super-speaker," just be yourself and your audience will appreciate it.

Know your subject matter. One must "earn the right," says Greenberg, to speak on a particular topic. "Become an authority on your topic and know more than most or all of the people in your audience. The more you know, the more confident you will be," he says.

Engage your audience. Audience involvement is key. Ask your audience questions or have them participate in an activity to hold their attention. Greenberg says that turning your presentation from monologue to dialogue helps reduce your nervousness and engages the audience.

Breathe. Breathing from your stomach muscles, not your chest, calms the nervous system. Here's what to do: Take a few deep breaths before and even during your presentation. "As you inhale," says Greenberg, "say to yourself 'I am,' and as you exhale, say 'relaxed.'"

Visualize your success. Close your eyes and picture yourself delivering your talk with confidence and enthusiasm. What does the room look like? What do the people look like? How do you look?

Practice out loud. The best way to reduce your anxiety is to rehearse until you feel comfortable, advises Greenberg. "Practicing by yourself is important," he says, "but I urge you to also practice in front of a friend, colleague, or coach who will give you honest and constructive feedback."

Avoid caffeine and alcohol. Caffeinated drinks can increase your heart rate, make you jittery, and cause your hands to shake, which gives your audience the impression you're a nervous wreck. Drinking alcohol to cope with fears will increase chances of forgetting things and slurring words.

Make eye contact. Greenberg suggests arriving early when the room is full of empty chairs and practicing by "pretending that you are looking into people's eyes." When you begin your talk, pick a few friendly faces in different areas of the room. Says Greenberg, "Not only will the audience appreciate it, but also you will see that they are interested in your message. Add a smile and you are bound to see some in return."