

Center for Speaking and Presentation

Public Speaking Tips

Public Speaking Anxiety: Strategies for Speakers

Public speaking anxiety is the fear of public speaking, audience appraisal and the feelings of nervousness that accompany that fear. It can manifest itself and affect a speaker in multiple ways, including fidgeting, playing with your hair/jewelry, studdering, talking faster, a red face, and physical illness. It affects everyone in different ways, so it's important to understand how it affects you and how to combat it.

- **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.** Finish your speech/presentation ahead of time and practice it in front of other people. The more you practice, the more you'll be comfortable presenting the content in class. Secondly, practicing as close to the context in which you'll be graded will be the best choice. Having an audience while practicing can help gauge your tone, eye contact, and more.
- **Identify what specifically makes you nervous.** If you're nervous that you'll forget content, it may require more practice. If you're nervous that you may talk too fast, it may require relaxation techniques before presentation. If you pinpoint your specific concern, you'll be able to combat it much easier than saying "I hate public speaking."
- **Relaxation techniques.** Try yoga, meditation, diaphragmatic breathing, or whatever helps you relax. Relaxation techniques lower your blood pressure and heart rate, reducing the risk of nerve-related mishaps during your presentation.

Pay Attention to Nonverbals

Nonverbal communication is the sending and receiving of unspoken cues and can influence the message receiver's reaction in multiple ways. Willis and Todorov (2006) find that we form long-lasting impressions on an individual within one-tenth of one second based on nonverbals—before anyone even speaks. Keep these issues in mind when presenting.

- **Keep both feet fully planted on the ground.** Leaning on one leg can lead to swaying and a perception of an unprepared and nervous speaker.
- **Avoid filler speech, a.k.a "likes" and "umms."** We use these in speaking because we're accustomed to conversational turntaking and are uncomfortable when we finish speaking and nobody responds. SILENCE IS OKAY. It allows us to gather our thoughts and catch our breath.
- **Make eye contact.** Ignoring your whole audience while speaking can lead to a loss of interest. Speakers should keep audiences engaged at all times, so we should, at least, look at them. Some recommend a 60/40 rule in terms of eye contact versus no eye contact.
- **Slow it down.** The recommended speech rate in order to enhance coherence and understanding is 100-110 words per minute. When we're nervous, we tend to speak faster in order to leave the stressful situation as soon as possible. Slow your speech down while presenting; your audience will appreciate it.

Visual Aids: Avoiding Death by PowerPoint

When preparing a presentation, speakers tend to forget that a presentation is a joint effort between speaker and visual aid. Increasingly, presenters are using programs like PowerPoint and Prezi to enhance their presentations. Follow these tips to keep your audience interested and give you, the speaker, a reason to be there.

- **Your slides are not your script.** A presentation is a combination of speaker and visual aid. You, as the speaker, should be keeping your audience's attention at all times and not allowing the screen to dictate your speech. Your audience knows how to read. If you're reading slides word for word, your audience does not need you.
- **You are not limited in slides.** If a slide looks cluttered, split it into two or more, if necessary. There are no rules saying you have to cover one concept in one slide.
- **Less is more.** Are the images you're choosing adding to the presentation's content in any way? Are they absolutely necessary? If not, scrap them. Blank space on a slide is okay. Also, reduce your text to as little as possible, but enough to help as jumping off points for your content. Lastly, avoid flashy text or word art. Using gifs, flashy text, or other eye-catching images takes the attention off of you. Don't fall for that trap.
- **Increase readability.** Find the biggest contrast in your slide/visual aid design so everyone in the room can read them. Sticking with black text on a white background or white text on a black background is safest.
- **Make everything big.** Design for the back row. Make text bigger. Make images as big as possible. You design a presentation for your audience to see. Make sure they can.

Any other questions? Want to practice?

Visit the Center for Speaking and Presentation. We help with everything speech or presentation-related, ranging from topic selection and organization, speech anxiety, nonverbal cues, introductions and conclusions, and much more.

- Location- Old Falvey 301
- Office Hours- Sun., Mon., Thurs. 3:00-9:00 p.m.
Tues. 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m.
- Make an Appointment: Visit villanova.mywconline.com.