

Public Speaking Tips **(or how to enjoy giving presentations)**

It's 9am on a Monday morning. Public speaking couldn't be further from your mind and your manager tells you have to do a presentation to fifty colleagues next week. What's your response?

- Do you feel that public speaking is just part of the routine?
- Do you respond to the challenge and wonder how you can make your presentation compelling, informative and inspiring?

Or, like most people do you feel you would rather die than stand up and be judged by the hard unforgiving scrutiny of your fellow man and woman?

- Is it possible to be an average presenter and learn the skills to become an inspiring and entrancing speaker?
- Is it possible to be totally terrified of the mere thought of public speaking yet learn to relax and even enjoy it?

Without a doubt, the answer is YES!

Public speaking on the increase

It's a cliché to say that we live in an information culture. But it's true! Never before has so much information been so readily available. The rate of change and development is so fast that we have to work constantly to 'stay ahead of the game'.

More than ever, people are having to present information to others as part of this constant up-dating. People are being increasingly called upon to present publicly their information to co-workers and other departments.

To get ahead, you have to present!

But how often are we taught how to present? There are 2 main areas of skill:

- 1) Skills of effective presenting; use of teaching aids, use of the voice, structure and so on.
- 2) Self-management; the ability to remain calm and composed in front of an audience.

Learning these skills make a huge difference not only to the quality of your public presentation but also to your enjoyment. Truly fantastic presenters are quite a rare commodity, but that's only because most people never took the time to learn.

Being an excellent presenter will enhance your career, social life and your enjoyment of work in general.

Great presenters can transform almost any subject into one of interest or even inspiration. A friend once told me that the most entertaining and thought provoking presentation they ever saw was about print processing!

One of the most effective ways to decrease public speaking fear and anxiety is through relaxation and mental rehearsal, coupled with techniques for removing 'learned fear'.

We have recorded a [self hypnosis](#) session that does this, and you can read about it on our specialist site: [Public Speaking Fear Download](#) (page will open in new window).

The 10 Most Common [Public Speaking Fears](#)

So what exactly are people afraid of when it comes to public speaking?

Here's a list of the things we hear most often:

- 1) 'Drying up' or not being able to speak.
- 2) Forgetting what you are talking about – your mind going blank.
- 3) Having the heckler from Hell.
- 4) Having someone in the audience who knows more than you do.
- 5) People noticing that you are nervous.

- 6) Having to run screaming from the room.
- 7) The presentation being so awful and embarrassing that your social/career relationships are forever ruined.
- 8) The impossible to answer 'question from Hell'.
- 9) The audience talking over you or walking out
- 10) Dying on stage (OK, so we made this one up to make it up to 10 :-)

We'll address these fears in the sections below

What to do about a fear of public speaking

Firstly, let's accept that we need fear. Without the ability to become very fearful no human beings would be here today - our ancestors relied on fear to survive bigger, stronger and faster predators.

When we become highly fearful, the unconscious mind takes over and we become primarily set up for physical action. In order to survive a physical threat we respond automatically for the sake a quick reaction. In certain situations, this can be a life-saver.

During this 'fight or flight' response, breathing speeds up in preparation for physical exertion, we may sweat to cool the body, or feel as if we 'can't think'. Survival in very primitive conditions is primarily about action rather than thinking.

How much anxiety is good for public speaking?

When presenting we need a little anxiety as this will improve recall, raise energy levels and make for a more focused, dynamic speech. An overly laid-back speaker can easily bore!

So we don't want too much anxiety and we don't want too much relaxation. We need enough tension to give us energy, and enough calmness for clear thinking and recall. We need the right balance.

Most of the petrified presenters that we train are doing the same thing!

Here's the usual 'pattern of fear'.

- 1) You have a presentation coming up.
- 2) You think about it, imagining things going wrong and so feel anxious.
- 3) Unknowingly, you build up an association between the thought of the speech and the feeling of fear.
- 4) You go into the actual situation and get a fear response!

Repeated often enough, this will cause the two to become very closely associated. This is 'negative mental rehearsal' for the event. Not surprisingly, when you go into the actual situation you feel terrified!

Dogged by an ancient brain

As Ivan Pavlov showed, dogs who are repeatedly fed whilst hearing a bell can eventually salivate when just hearing the bell without food.

People who repeatedly feel fear coupled with imagining something find they feel fear when the situation arrives.

However, people can learn to associate tightrope walking, fighting in battles or defusing a bomb with a state of psychological calm.

You can learn to change an association.

Public Speaking Exercise: responding to public speaking with calmness, not fear

Find a quiet place where you can ensure that you won't be disturbed for ten to fifteen minutes. Close your eyes and direct your focus of attention to your hands, imagining what they feel like when they relax.

As the relaxation spreads, allow your mind to drift to a time where you felt really comfortable. Maybe a time such as, lying in the bath, or listening to music, or an evening with friends when you had a good time and were laughing and having fun.

Begin to get a feel for the reality of this time. Notice the colours, shapes and sounds even smells and tastes associated with this time. Notice what it's like to bring back something of the feeling of that time and let those feelings begin to build up almost as if you are back there.

Once you have that feeling, imagine watching television and seeing your self on the screen, taking your time, looking cool and relaxed

giving that presentation. Notice what it is about 'the you on the screen' that lets you know you are relaxed and comfortable.

Then drift into that screen and experience what it actually feels like to be speaking in that way with similar feelings to those you had in the first memory. Spend some comfortable time doing this almost as if in a dream. When you have enjoyed this for a few minutes open your eyes feeling refreshed and alert.

Read this over a few times to make sure you have it clear in your mind. Repeat this exercise regularly and notice the differences.

Some people find this type of exercise easier than others. If this is difficult for you, consider getting the [Self Confidence Trainer](#), which contains hypnotic inductions for rehearsing events such as public speaking.

Avoiding a major [public speaking mistake](#)

'Mind reading from facial expressions'

When I first began speaking to audiences I was extremely sensitive to the way audience members looked. During the presentation I would try to read their mood.

- Were they frowning?
- Did they have blank expressions?
- Did this mean they were hostile?

If no-one was smiling this would really bother me. If one person appeared more friendly than the rest I would focus on them during my talk, to the exclusion of the others.

On one occasion I was conducting a two day workshop to about forty people. There was a particular woman in the front row who continuously frowned at me and even occasionally shook her head!

I began to try and blank her out of my vision and was relieved that she didn't ask any questions. At the end of the two days as I was saying my goodbyes and packing to leave she approached me. 'Here we go' I thought. I was amazed when she told me how much she enjoyed my presentations and that she had loved the training and couldn't believe how much she had got out of it!

Ever since, I haven't tried to guess what my audience is thinking. If I suspect someone is not enjoying it, I approach them and give them a chance to say so. I consider that their responsibility.

As I learned how to relax and enjoy public speaking, my perceptions began to change. What I had seen as hostile, I started to see as nervousness in the audience members. Rather than looking at them to put me at my ease I began to try to put them at their ease.

Dealing with difficult people and tough questions when speaking in public

During your presentation, if someone is being very disruptive then you will not be alone in being vexed with them. People generally behave with decency during presentations. If someone begins to make sarcastic comments or interrupt, you have several options. You can:

- 1) At the start of your speech you can request that people raise their hand before any comments or questions or designate a specific time for questioning such as at the end.
- 2) If someone begins to interrupt or make asides you can politely remind them of your opening remarks. Most people will respond instantly to this.
- 3) If some one tells you they totally disagree with your point/points you can try to refute them or open the debate up to the wider audience where, more likely than not, others will defend your position for you. Remember, your job is merely to present ideas and information in a compelling way, not to get into arguments with one audience member at the expense of the others.
- 4) Admit you don't know something and promise to find out for them.
- 5) Tell them that you would like to come back to that point.
- 6) Ask them to come and see you afterwards for further discussion as you have limited time and much material to cover.
- 7) Stick to the main points of your speech. You don't have to answer questions immediately or on the questioner's terms. If people wish to side-line they can do it afterwards or during a break.

8) Remember: It's not just about you justifying yourself to the audience. They carry half the responsibility in the situation. They are required to be polite, to listen to and absorb what you are saying, to ask relevant questions and to know when to keep quiet. Your responsibility extends only so far.

It's all in the [preparation](#)

1) To feel confident you need to be really familiar with your material. Hesitancy and constant note-reading do not a good speech make!

2) Become familiar with the 'signposts' of your speech and fully acquaint yourself with your content so that you can trust yourself to remember.

3) Many good presenters I know use mind-mapping to prepare and memorise speech notes. It's quick and really aids memory and recall when you're 'up there doing it'. Check out Tony Buzan's classic 'The Mind Map Book'.

4) Rehearse out loud until you feel 'conversationally comfortable' about your material, as well as secure in the knowledge that it is 'all there'. It's a very comfortable feeling when you know you can trust your unconscious mind to deliver. (This doesn't mean you can't have your notes handy just in case!) Remember that rehearsing out loud can feel artificial - it's actually much more natural to present to an audience.

5) Take care of the 'self management' side of things. If you feel overly nervous, or have had unpleasant experiences presenting before, consider getting an audio programme which helps you relax properly and prepare mentally for your presentation. Once the 'back part' of your mind has a good template for how you want things to go, it's much easier to present well. As I mentioned before, our [Self Confidence Trainer](#) has exercises and techniques specially for this. If you just want to relax, check out this relaxation tape.

10 More [Tips and Ideas for Great Public Speaking](#)

1) Use eye contact with each member of the audience in turn.

2) Remember that some people get nervous in audiences too. Put them at their ease.

3) Use visual aids where useful. People like to look at things. Flip charts, overhead projectors and video can all be used to make the presentation more memorable. Too much detail or overly technical information might not be best presented in a visual way however. Keep visuals simple. If you don't have the use of visuals remember that 'words paint pictures in the mind.'

4) Consider giving handouts to your audience members. It gives them something to take away and it might be a memory prompt for them when recalling your speech. They can also feel as if you have given them something 'for free'. Too much written material may be off-putting however and you don't want everyone reading during your presentation, so choose carefully when you give them out.

5) Again, remember that the audience has a responsibility too!

6) Don't think "How can I survive this?", think "How can I do this brilliantly?" !

7) Remember that, as with all things, you need to know where you're going if you're going to get there. Rather than "I hope I don't panic", work out how you would like things to be.

8) Vary your voice tonality and speed during your presentation. Convey energy when you need to, and slow down to 'draw them in close' when it's appropriate.

9) Repeat the exercise earlier in this section until the thought of public speaking starts to actually let you relax. If you need more help with this see our [Self Confidence Trainer](#). Remember the World needs good communication and if a natural born coward like me can do it you certainly can! :-)

10) Read a good book on excellent presenting. One I use personally is '[Inspire any Audience](#)' by Tony Jeary. As I mentioned above, it makes for fun and compelling reading, is really well laid out and it motivates you to present excellently.

Using humour (oh, in the U.S., be sure and use humor ;-)

The use of humour in presentations can help fix an idea in peoples' minds as well as illuminating unexpected perspectives. But it has to be done in an (apparently) spontaneous way.

If people remain silent in response to one of my little gems (very rare of course ;-) I may comment on the silence itself, which often gets a chuckle.

If you appear terrified when making a joke the audience may not respond as they would when you are relaxed because you are sending mixed signals: Your words say "I am being creative and funny" but Your voice tone, body posture and other unconscious signals say "I am terrified!" and people rely much more on these unconscious elements of your communication.

Overall, I think humour is worth the risk because it makes a presentation more interesting and it's a wonderful feeling when you make an audience roar with laughter!

Final tip: public speaking CAN be fun!

It's possible for public speaking to be fun and hugely satisfying. Once you've enjoyed a presentation, or even part of it, your [self confidence](#) will get a huge boost and you'll be off and running! Give yourself the best chance by using the exercises and tips on this page. Good luck!

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