

Some Ways to Reduce Speech Anxiety

Preparation

- If you begin to feel anxious about speech put things in perspective:*
 - Tell yourself how you're overestimating the importance of this speech. How much will it really affect your overall worth and future satisfaction?
 - Think of specific ways you can improve your preparation next time.
 - Counter your negative self-statements, such as "I'm dumb," "I can't do this," by saying, "I'll do the best I can, starting right now."
- Self doubts and unrealistic expectations can be countered by actively seeking information and by "rehearsal:"*
 - Observe others giving speeches and get an idea of how others manage their anxiety.
 - Make sure you know the purpose of the speech and your audience.
 - Think of possible questions and try to answer them, either alone or by discussing the subject with another person.
- Concentration difficulties often create anxiety.*
 - Often, concentration can be improved by designing specific tasks in which you actively play with the speech material. For example, think of practical applications of the material or make a list of questions.
- If you feel overwhelmed by the amount of work involved in preparing a speech, it's helpful to:*
 - Break down the work into smaller pieces, based on a general outline of the speech.
 - List these smaller units in order of priority, given the amount of time that remains. Accept that you may not be able to give the best speech that you are capable of and consider allowing yourself more time in the future.
- Rehearse the speech several times before you actually give it.*
 - Practice in front of an audience or friend you feel comfortable with. If possible, videotape yourself so that you can review your performance and see what worked and what didn't. Have a friend watch the videotape with you.

The day of the speech

- Just before the speech, engage in some activity unrelated to the speech material, e.g., physical activity, "mindless" activity.
- Get to the place where you will deliver the speech early enough to not have to rush, but not so early that you will have a lot of time to worry yourself.
- Think about the following as you wait to begin: Numerous studies have shown that there is optimal level of arousal, or anxiety, for best performance. Anxiety in itself is not bad – too much of it hurts you, but you need some arousal to keep you going.

The speech itself

Develop a plan of attack – going into the speech with a set of general guidelines with help allay anxiety.

- Schedule your time – plan time limits for each question.
 - Omit difficult questions – come back to them at the end.
- If you become anxious during the speech, try one or more of the following:*
- Do something unusual, such as taking a drink or moving.
 - Tense and relax muscles in several parts of your body, then take several deep breaths.
 - Practice calming yourself by saying a couple of sentences to yourself, such as, "This speech will not permanently affect my future. I'm going to feel calm, relaxed, and get back to the task."
 - Practice visualizing a calm, soothing scene (such as a beach scene) and use this when you feel anxious.