

SKILL SHEET:

Overcoming Stage Nerves



The largest barrier to learning to speak effectively in front of a group is the fear that something terrible will happen. Some people who dread public speaking are afraid because they've had poor first experiences and were unprepared to handle the situation. But for most people it's the lack of practice or opportunities to speak that keeps them from feeling like capable public speakers.

It is important to recognize the difference between a real phobia and just a bad case of stage nerves (also called "stage fright"). The symptoms of stage nerves could be quite severe, but should lessen as you become a more experienced presenter. You don't have to lose your fear before you can do a good job. You can learn the mechanics of overcoming fear, and through repetition you'll gain confidence.

If you get nervous before crowds, remember that a little nervous energy is absolutely necessary to give you that excited spark that the audience can share. Even very experienced speakers and actors feel "butterflies" before going on stage because they all want to give their best performances. Only speakers who don't care don't feel anything.

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Tips for Reducing Stage Nerves

To reduce your stage nerves and work toward becoming a confident speaker, follow these tips:

- Be prepared. A well-planned and well-rehearsed talk will sound clear and organized and seem natural to deliver.
- Only speak about things you know well or that interest you, so you feel confident you have something to offer the audience.
- Complete the "Let's Talk About Nerves" activity found on page 48 to help you identify your anxiety symptoms. Then learn to prepare for and eventually overcome them.
- If you get nervous speaking in front of strangers, try to chat with a few members of the audience before you have to give your speech. This helps establish contact and make you feel as though you're on friendly ground.
- Eat light before a presentation.
- Avoid carbonated beverages, which may cause stomach upset or uncomfortable gas. Dairy products may coat the mouth and throat, and also may cause stomach upset for some people.
- Practice giving your presentation several ways so you're comfortable making last-minute adjustments.
- Learn a quick stress-reducing routine for relaxing your neck, shoulder and facial muscles just before giving your talk.
- Visualize yourself succeeding and enjoy the applause!

