

**Supplemental Chapter for *Confidence in Public Speaking*, Seventh Edition
(Telecourse Version)**

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CONQUERING SPEECH ANXIETY

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Question Outline

- I. What is speech anxiety?
- II. Who experiences speech anxiety?
- III. Why does speech anxiety occur at different times?
- IV. What are the causes of speech anxiety?
- V. What are the signs that an individual might be experiencing speech anxiety?
- VI. How can I overcome the nervous thoughts that interfere with public speaking?
- VII. What techniques can I use to replace the nervous behaviors associated with my fear of speaking?

Introduction

Ricardo Delgado had been asked by his coach to deliver a speech about the importance of balancing academics and college athletics. The speech would be given at the university's annual athletic banquet, which would be attended by athletes from all university sports, their families, and representatives of the local media. Even though he had no experience in public speaking, Ricardo felt confident that he could prepare a good speech—after all, he had maintained a B+ average while playing for the university's baseball team during his four years at Eastern State. All he had to do was describe how he was able to effectively managed his time and prioritize his academic and athletic commitments.

After several weeks of preparation, the night of the award banquet arrived. Ricardo had practiced his speech repeatedly in front of his coach, his parents, and his roommates. While seated at the head table, Ricardo glanced a round the room and saw many familiar faces—his teammates, friends from other sports, and his family were all there for support. As the coach stood to introduce him, Ricardo looked at the front row of the audience and noticed a camera operator and a reporter from the local television station. He felt his palms begin to sweat. During his walk to the lectern, his knees began to shake furiously. His mouth felt like it was filled with cotton, and when he opened his mouth to deliver the speech, his voice sounded like a child's.

Ricardo was well-prepared for his speech. He had practiced the speech in front of his friends and family, was speaking on a topic about which he had a great deal of personal experience, and was familiar with the members of his audience. Yet, Ricardo was experiencing a common communication phenomenon known as speech anxiety.

In this chapter, you will learn about some causes of speech anxiety and the sources from which they evolve. You will learn how to recognize some of the signs that indicate you are experiencing this fear. By informing you of the signs and causes of speech anxiety, the goal of this chapter is to offer you some suggestions for overcoming your fear of public speaking. After all, the rush of adrenalin that you feel when getting ready to speak may not always be harmful to your performance.

Speech anxiety is a fear that is common to all humans. You will be presented with some possible solutions for overcoming the symptoms of the speech anxiety that you may experience as you prepare to deliver a public speech. These suggestions will assist you in minimizing nervous thoughts and maximizing the positive outcomes of using your anxiety to your advantage rather than allowing it to control your performance.

What Is Speech Anxiety?

Speech anxiety is the fear one experiences when giving a speech in front of an audience. Other terms used by communication researchers to describe this fear include stage fright, reticence, nervousness, and communication apprehension. The symptoms Ricardo suffered in the opening scenario are typical indicators that an individual is experiencing speech anxiety.

It may seem unusual that Ricardo developed anxiety about giving his speech. He was prepared, had practiced, and had an audience that was familiar to him. However, there are a number of reasons why a speaker may suddenly feel nervous or apprehensive when faced with the challenge of speaking before an audience.

Many actors, musicians, and professional athletes experience fear when they are in the spotlight. Even celebrities such as Joan Rivers and Barbra Streisand report that they experience feelings of anxiety when asked to perform in front of an audience. However, they have learned to manage their fear rather than allowing the fear to have an adverse effect on their performance. For example, Michael Jordan applied his view of the fear of failure to his transition from professional basketball to major league baseball. He stated, "I am not afraid to fail," and pointed out that true fear is a result of not trying to succeed.¹ The key to breaking down the fear barrier is to identify your fear of public speaking and understand its sources. Rather than giving in to your fear and refusing to give a public speech, you must learn ways to work through your fear and become more confident in your ability as a speaker.

Who Experiences Speech Anxiety?

According to *The Book of Lists*,² Americans report that giving a public speech is the thing they fear most. It is surprising to note that most Americans fear public speaking even more than they fear death. Researchers have found that as many as 75 percent of American college students admit to having a great fear of public speaking.³ For example, as many as 14 percent of the students enrolled in public speaking courses at Washington State University reported experiencing extreme levels of speech anxiety.⁴ Contrary to popular belief, speech anxiety does not happen only to individuals the first few times they are presenting a speech. It is also experienced by "speech veterans" who have been making public presentations for years.

Most people who experience speech anxiety assume that they are the only ones who suffer from shaking knees, sweaty palms, and butterflies in the stomach. This feeling of being "abnormal" can intensify these negative feelings. In order to control your fear, you need to realize that you are experiencing the same fears that the majority of your classmates in your public speaking course--and the majority of Americans--are experiencing. Chances are that the more practice you have at public speaking, the more confident you will become.

The majority of speakers who report an extreme fear of speaking before an audience usually experience the greatest level of fear prior to and during the introduction of the speech.⁵ Once you have overcome the initial nervousness associated with anticipation of the unexpected, you can learn to channel your anxiety into energy that will enhance your performance. Many athletes report feeling nauseated just prior to taking the field or going out on the court. Rather than letting these nervous feelings affect their performance, they use them to their advantage. The key to successful speaking is learning how to manage the adrenalin rush and the accompanying symptoms of speech anxiety so you can use them to your advantage. Stevie Nicks, former lead singer of Fleetwood Mac, felt that her fear of performing on stage was beneficial to her performance, stating that if she didn't experience the feelings of excitement and nervousness before a concert, she would feel worried about her show.⁶

Many people who suffer from speech anxiety choose to deal with their problem by avoiding public speaking situations. This may be the ideal strategy for some people, but chances are that at some point in time you will be expected to discuss a group project in front of a class or deliver a speech to co-workers. Once you realize that you cannot hide from public speaking situations for the rest of your life, you can focus on conquering speech anxiety. Understanding the causes and effects of this fear is the first step in developing a strategy that will work for you.

Why Does Speech Anxiety Occur at Different Times?

While some people seem to experience speech anxiety every time they are faced with even the remote possibility of having to speak in public, others may have delivered several speeches before speech anxiety occurs. Speech anxiety expert Jim McCroskey suggests that the changing anxiety levels felt in different situations are a result of your level of communication apprehension (CA).⁷ In the opening scenario, Ricardo became more apprehensive about giving his speech after he stood up in front of the audience. This sudden feeling of apprehension is quite common. Many think that speech anxiety strikes when one actually stands at the lectern to deliver a speech. However, the nervousness associated with giving a speech may begin affecting some individuals at the very moment they are asked to speak--even if the actual speaking engagement is months away!

Communication apprehension is the fear or anxiety associated with actual or anticipated communication situations.⁸ The nervousness that accompanies public speaking is a function of either trait or state communication apprehension. Trait apprehension is used to describe nervousness or anxiety that is experienced in virtually any communication situation. Individuals with trait apprehension are likely to be nervous when communicating in a one-on-one situation (i.e., asking a store clerk for help or calling a classmate on the phone), in small groups (i.e., working on a group project for a class), in

large groups (i.e., fraternity, sorority, or club meetings), and in public speaking situations. The nervousness felt with trait apprehension is ongoing—it occurs in all situations where communication may be expected.

State apprehension refers to the fear and anxiety experienced when communication is expected in a specific context or with a particular audience. State apprehension can be experienced in one of four settings: interpersonal communication, small group communication, large group communication, or public speaking. While some individuals may feel comfortable speaking in one-on-one situations or in front of small groups, they may experience a great wave of fear when asked to speak in front of a large group of people. Others may have no problem giving a public speech, but may panic at the thought of having to speak before a smaller audience. As was pointed out earlier, public speaking apprehension is a problem for most people. If you generally feel comfortable when speaking with your friends or during a meeting, you may be surprised to discover that you may experience anxiety when you are required to give a speech in front of a large group of people.

The questionnaire included in the Application Exercises at the end of this chapter will help you compute your personal report of communication apprehension (PRCA). If you experience trait apprehension, you probably report a high degree of anxiety in two or more of the four communication contexts. A person with state apprehension may report a high degree of anxiety associated with only one particular communication context. For example, if you feel anxiety when it comes to public speaking, but are completely relaxed in the other communication contexts, you will report high levels of apprehension only in the public speaking context. You have no fear of communicating at your marketing club meeting or with your group members when discussing your class project, but you do experience stress in public speaking situations.

People who experience state apprehension may feel a higher level of anxiety when asked to speak with a specific individual or group. In the scenario that was described earlier, Ricardo was not nervous presenting a speech in front of his parents, friends, and fellow athletes. However, he began to experience extreme levels of apprehension when he realized that the media and the television viewing audience would be watching his performance. This is an example of audience-based communication apprehension.

An individual presenting a speech to a culturally diverse audience may also experience audience-based anxiety. Would delivering a speech to an audience of individuals who are primarily from another culture cause you to feel more or less apprehensive? At some point in time you will probably be expected to speak in front of a diverse audience. If you choose a career in education, you will encounter students from a wide variety of backgrounds; if you choose a career in business, you may be expected to give business presentations to clients or representatives from other parts of the country or even from around the world. The level of anxiety you experience in public speaking may be affected by how different or diverse you perceive your audience to be.

Gender differences can also cause a speaker to experience more or less anxiety. How would you feel if you knew that your audience consisted primarily of people of the opposite sex? Some speakers clam up when faced with the thought of standing up in front of and addressing a group of the opposite sex, while others thrive on it. The nature of the audience can increase or decrease anxiety, depending upon the degree of comfort and acceptance you feel with that particular group.

Regardless of who you are or how much time you've spent preparing to speak, you may possess a level of apprehension that is either trait or state in nature. After completing the PRCA, you will be better able to identify the potential situations in which you might experience increased anxiety. By becoming aware of the situations that are possible sources of apprehension, you can prepare for your speech by employing strategies that help you deal with your fear.

What Are Some of the Causes of Speech Anxiety?

Researchers have identified five common concerns that contribute to the fear and anxiety associated with public speaking. These include the speaker's previous public speaking experiences, fear of being in the spotlight, fear of being judged, amount of preparation for the speech, and amount of experience (or lack, thereof) in delivering a speech to a particular audience or on a specific topic. "

I Failed Before, I'll Fail Again

Fear of repeated failure may cause individuals to experience speech anxiety as they prepare to deliver future speeches. In his account of being chosen to recite a Hebrew blessing on Rosh Hashanah, Weston Kosova experienced nervousness caused by his recollection of prior failures in speaking before the congregation.⁹ Flashbacks of a prior speech may interfere with the preparation and delivery of future speeches. However, just as you are able to overcome the nightmares you may have while sleeping, you can also learn how to cope with the frightening visions that return every time you have to speak in public.

When asked to give a speech, do not focus on your past failures. After all, the imagination often causes us to dream up very graphic thoughts of our previous speaking "disasters," and these thoughts are often grandiose exaggerations of the actual, tiny mistakes made during a speech. Singer Barbra Streisand allowed her inability to remember the lyrics of three songs during a 1967 performance to keep her from singing in public for more than twenty-seven years.¹⁰ Like Ms. Streisand, Ricardo from our opening story may experience speech anxiety in the future if he focuses on the shaking voice and dry mouth he developed during his speech.

We must all accept that, at one time or another, speech anxiety will interfere with the smooth delivery of a speech. Rather than allowing your fear of another slip-up control your speaking, you must learn how to manage your fear. One way of overcoming this fear of repeated failure is to engage in positive visualization of the speaking situation. This strategy will be discussed later in this chapter.

All Eyes Are on Me

Being asked to deliver a speech on a stage where you are the conspicuous center of everyone's attention may cause you to experience greater levels of anxiety. For example, if you make a mistake in your own home (i.e., trip over your own feet), it's no big deal. However, if you make the same mistake in front of dozens of people (i.e., tripping while walking through a shopping mall), you are suddenly overcome with embarrassment.

Public speaking is exactly what its name says--giving a speech in front of a large number of people. Although some people thrive on being the center of attention, most do not look forward to standing in the spotlight. For most of us, a feeling of conspicuousness creeps up when we stand before a group. The more conspicuous you feel, the more likely you are to experience higher levels of speech anxiety. Rather than focusing on the fact that all eyes are on you, think of your speaking experience as a chance to share what you know about a topic with your classmates and instructor.

I'm Being Judged on This Speech

When your speech is the basis of your class grade or is under the evaluation of your peers or teachers, your level of anxiety is likely to increase. It is awkward knowing that you are being judged on your performance. It may seem that your audience is making mental notes to remind you of all the mistakes you made during your speech. However, even though *you* are aware of the mistakes you made, chances are your audience didn't even notice your quivering voice and shaking knees.

Your audience is not as likely to recognize your fear of speaking as you might think. Studies have shown that speech instructors and audience members often underrate the amount of stage fright they believe a speaker is experiencing while delivering a speech.¹¹ If you place more importance on your speaking performance than is necessary, however, the added stress will increase the level of speech anxiety you experience. During the 1991 Oscar Awards, Madonna showed visible signs of performance anxiety, especially trembling hands. She later said that her nervousness was due to the fact that "I had four minutes to be perfect and there were three billion people watching me on TV."¹²

Communication professor Michael Motley states that, "A much more useful orientation, and a more accurate one, is to view speeches as communication rather than performance." The speaker should think of their speaking experience as a chance to share ideas with an audience. The audience should be considered as having an interest in what is being said, rather than in analyzing or criticizing the content of the speech or the ability of the speaker.¹³

I'm Not As Prepared As I Should Be

The best advice for giving a successful speech is to know your topic and practice, practice, practice. If you attempt to throw a speech together in a couple of hours with only one practice run, you are literally setting yourself up for failure.

Take time to fully prepare and practice your speech once a day for a week or two prior to the speaking engagement. By doing so, you will become comfortable with your speech and learn to incorporate the gestures, pacing, and other habits that will enhance your performance. Even though some speakers feel they are never quite ready to stand before an audience, practicing your speech will reduce anxiety considerably.

Preparation also means that you know a great deal about the content of the speech. If the content of your speech is directly related to your own experiences or covers a topic that interests you, your audience will probably consider you an expert on that topic. If you are asked to deliver a presentation on a research project that you have conducted for a class,

chances are that you probably know more about that topic than anyone else in your audience--maybe even your teacher.

I've Never Done This Before

If you have never given a public speech, you may experience a great deal of fear and anxiety the first time you step up to the lectern. Humans are prone to experiencing greater levels of fear when faced with the unknown. However, if you think back on your life's experiences, you can probably recall numerous times that you've felt anxious in a new situation. You probably felt nervous the first time you went out on a date, or on your first day at a new school. It's normal to feel anxious in a new situation, and chances are that you have a lot of experience at overcoming this fear of "first encounters."

You can reduce the ambiguity and novelty of a new speaking situation. One possible solution for reducing your anxiety is to conduct an audience analysis so that you are familiar with the size of your group, their expectations, and their background on the topic about which you are speaking. Each time you give a speech you gain experience; your fear will diminish a little each of the subsequent times you are asked to speak. Think of all the public speaking experience you have already. Examples of past speeches you may have presented might include "show and tell" presentations, book reports, current events reports, or science project demonstrations. You are probably more experienced at public speaking than you thought!

The key to breaking the speech anxiety barrier is to recognize that each of these causes provides you with rational reasons for being apprehensive about speaking in public. The ideal method of conquering speech anxiety would require you to eliminate all of these causes, however, this is probably not a realistic possibility. Instead, you must accept that you--and practically every other speaker--experience these worries. Once you have recognized the causes of your fear, you can concentrate on developing strategies that will help you overcome it.

What Are the Signs of Speech Anxiety?

Both cognitive nervousness and behavioral nervousness may accompany public speaking and speech anxiety. **Cognitive nervousness** consists of the internal negative thoughts that often precede and interfere with the presentation. Examples include thoughts such as "I can't do this," "I know I'll mess up," and "I know everyone is laughing at me." This cognitive interference exists only in the speaker's mind, and cannot be seen by the audience.

How to Manage the Effects of Speech Anxiety

1. Engage in physical activity.
2. Establish proper breathing.
3. Avoid dry mouth.
4. Practice progressive relaxation.

Behavioral nervousness is observable through the speaker's physiological responses to speech anxiety, and is more easily identified by the audience. Indicators of behavioral nervousness include an increased heart rate, sweaty palms, dry mouth, butterflies in the stomach, and the use of fillers such as "um," "uh," and "like." Extreme behavioral nervousness may result in a total avoidance of all speaking situations. While it may seem impossible to overcome these nervous responses, there are a few things that you can do to manage the symptoms of speech anxiety and reduce their impact on the delivery of your speech.

Several researchers and professional speakers offer their own personal solutions for managing and minimizing the effects of speech anxiety on performance. These include:

1. *Engage in physical activity.* To minimize the effects of the increase in adrenalin, take a brisk walk or engage in light exercises such as neck rolls or arm swings to relieve tension and bring your body back to normal.¹⁴
2. *Establish proper breathing.* Often we are so focused on our nervousness or on the prospect of the upcoming performance, that we actually forget to breathe! Remember to breathe evenly through your nose so that you avoid getting the dry "cotton" mouth.¹⁵
3. *Avoid dry mouth.* The dry mouth that accompanies the prospect of giving a speech is often caused by nervousness--not thirst. Dry mouth usually occurs as you are waiting your turn to speak, so resist the temptation to consume endless quantities of water. Rather, press the top of your tongue to the roof of your mouth, or lightly bite the inside of your cheek until you salivate.¹⁶
4. *Practice progressive relaxation.* Tense different parts of your body for a few seconds, and then relax them. Doing so will help reduce the amount of tension you feel prior to stepping on stage. For example, lightly clench and unclench your fists as you are waiting for your turn to speak in order to relieve some of the tension and clamminess in your hands.¹⁷

How Can I Overcome the Nervous Thoughts That Interfere with My Speaking?

Some situations in life will require you to become more actively involved in planning and executing certain behaviors. Public speaking is one situation that requires intense cognitive awareness. From the time you step up to the lectern, you will have to cope with a wide variety of thoughts occupying your mind. Not only do you have to remember the actual content of your speech, but you must also attempt to determine how interested the audience is in what you are saying. All of these thoughts may cause you to feel overwhelmed, uncertain, threatened, or helpless in the speaking situation.¹⁸

For many people, public speaking causes cognitive thinking to move to a more conscious level. The speaker actively engages in planning and practicing future speeches and in evaluating past speaking experiences. If the speaker has had extensive practice at delivering a speech or has had positive experiences, the cognition process may not interfere with future speeches. However, if the speaker has had prior failures, if this is the first speech the individual has given, or if the audience or topic of the speech is unfamiliar to the speaker, many distracting thoughts may interfere with the thought processes

needed to deliver a successful speech. "I can't do this," or "Everyone will laugh at me if I forget my speech," are common negative thoughts that can divert your attention away from your speech and cause you to focus instead on your fear of the situation. The trick is to learn how to cope with this interference by turning your negative thoughts into ones that can enhance your presentation.

Speech anxiety experts Joe Ayres and Tim Hopf suggest three methods speakers can use to work through the cognitive fears associated with public speaking.¹⁹ These include: rational-emotive therapy, cognitive restructuring, and visualization. A description and example of each of these methods follows.

Rational-Emotive Therapy

Even if a speaker has delivered what the audience considers to be a great speech, that speaker may choose to focus on the one or two small mistakes that were hardly noticed by the audience. Another speaker may consider the speech to be a failure if even one member of the audience remained unconvinced of the point that he or she was trying to advocate. Many would consider it irrational thinking to believe that one person should be able to convince every single member of the audience to adopt the position stated in the speech, or that the entire audience noticed every small mistake the speaker made. However, this type of irrational thinking often interferes with future success in public speaking. Communication researchers have established that the way to change and overcome irrational thoughts is to challenge the reasoning behind those thoughts.²⁰

Rational-emotive therapy is a technique designed to alleviate cognitive fear of public speaking by helping the speaker replace irrational thoughts about public speaking with more rational, realistic thoughts. By practicing the ABC's of rational-emotive therapy, the speaker can learn to overcome the irrational thoughts that contribute to speech anxiety. Step one involves analyzing (A) the situation or event at which the speech is to be delivered. If you are preparing to deliver a speech to your public speaking class, try to determine what exactly about the speaking situation is causing you to feel so nervous. Is it the prospect of standing in front of a group of unfamiliar faces, or is it the thought of getting graded on the speech by your instructor and classmates?

The next task is identifying the source of your irrational beliefs (B). For example, if you think that a successful speech requires that your entire audience be in agreement with all of your main points, this is irrational and improbable. Once you have analyzed the speaking situation and identified the source of your irrational beliefs, you can move on to the consequences.

Identifying the consequences (C) of your irrational beliefs is the last step. In the public speaking context, the most likely consequence is that the speaker will develop a fear of failure based on the belief that he or she cannot successfully deliver a public speech. After you pinpoint the irrational thoughts that may be causing the fear and anxiety you feel when faced with the possibility of giving a speech, you may seek assistance in overcoming or altering this irrational thinking.

Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring involves replacing the negative thoughts that interfere with public speaking with positive thoughts that enhance positive reactions to the public speaking situation. Once the speaker has identified the source of anxiety--public speaking--statements that can be recalled during the speaking situation are developed to enhance positive thinking. For example, negative thoughts such as "I can't do this," "Everyone is looking at me," or "I'm afraid I'll forget my speech," should be replaced with positive thoughts like "Lots of people feel as nervous as I do when giving a speech--it's normal!"

The ABC's of Rational-Emotive Therapy

- A. Analyze the situation or event at which the speech is to be delivered.
- B. Identify the source of your irrational beliefs.
- C. Identify the consequences of your irrational beliefs.

"I'm doing a good job," or "I'm almost finished with the speech and I'm doing okay." If you can replace the negative thoughts that typically accompany public speaking situations with more positive statements, mental distractions will be minimized and your speech will probably go more smoothly.

Visualization

Another successful therapy for overcoming speech anxiety that has been included as a part of many public speaking courses is **visualization**.²¹ This method of overcoming the fear of public speaking involves creating a successful image of the public speaking experience and recalling that image while delivering the speech. If you enter a speaking situation imagining that your audience will be hostile or uninterested in your topic, chances are that your behaviors may reinforce that expectation. Rather than speaking with enthusiasm about your topic, your voice and facial expressions will likely communicate a lack of enthusiasm and dislike for the topic or the audience.

Instead, try to imagine yourself delivering a speech, and that the response you receive from the audience is supportive and friendly--they are actually eager to hear what you have to say. If you envision yourself as being successful, your audience will also perceive you positively, and you will appear to be knowledgeable and excited about your topic. When you can imagine a positive experience, you are on your way to achieving that goal. The key to effective visualization is picturing yourself as a confident, successful speaker.

As you may have noticed, the power of positive thinking is the central focus of rational-emotive therapy, cognitive restructuring, and visualization. The first step in delivering a successful speech is to form positive thoughts about your speaking abilities, the speaking situation, and the outcomes of a successful speech. Next, continue to recall these thoughts while delivering your speech. As many athletes and speakers can attest: positive thinking equals positive results.

How Can I Develop Behaviors to Replace Speech Anxiety?

Recall the symptoms of speech anxiety Ricardo experienced at the beginning of the chapter (shaking knees, dry mouth, quivering voice). Two strategies--systematic desensitization and skills training--could have helped Ricardo minimize the observable behaviors he displayed as a result of his fear of public speaking.

Systematic Desensitization

Systematic desensitization uses several therapy sessions to teach speakers how to replace the anxious feelings associated with public speaking situations with positive, relaxing feelings. For example, when presented with the prospect of delivering a speech before a large audience, thoughts of tripping on your way to the podium, dropping your note-cards, or forgetting your main points might run through your mind. Instead of focusing on these thoughts during the speech, systematic desensitization teaches you to replace negative feelings with relaxing thoughts associated with an enjoyable experience. This therapy has been used to assist individuals in overcoming a variety of fears, including speech anxiety, test anxiety, and the fear of flying.

Systematic desensitization requires approximately six hours of therapy over a two to six week period.²² During the sessions, individuals engage in two forms of treatment for their fear. The first step involves deep muscle relaxation. This technique teaches the individual how to recognize when the feelings of tension begin to affect the muscles in the body. The second part of the therapy teaches the individual to replace the feelings of fear with pleasant thoughts when they begin to feel the muscle tension occur.

Skills Training

Many times individuals are afraid of giving a public speech simply because they lack the skills necessary for successful presentations. Often this lack of skills is closely related to a lack of experience. **Skills training** is a strategy that teaches individuals to become more competent in organizing a speech, developing ideas clearly, maintaining good posture while speaking, maintaining eye contact with the audience, and incorporating vocal variety and gestures while speaking.²³ Your public speaking course will provide you with the skills training you need to polish your communication skills and enhance your presentations.

Summary

Speech anxiety is a problem, but it is a normal problem. Even though you may watch other people give presentations that you think are flawless, they would probably report experiencing butterflies in the stomach and shaking knees during their speech. The important thing to remember is that you are not alone. The majority of Americans experience the same fear, and there are things you can do to manage your fear and improve your performance.

One of the first steps in overcoming speech anxiety is identifying the reasons you feel apprehensive in public speaking situations. Once you have identified the causes of your fear (first time speaking on a topic or to a particular audience, fear of evaluation), you

will be able to develop strategies to help overcome the fear. It is important to realize that the fear you are experiencing on the inside is not always evident to your audience. The key is to view your audience as your ally and to visualize yourself as a successful speaker. These tips, combined with preparation and practice, will help you put fear in its place. By reducing speech anxiety, your delivery will improve and you will become more confident in your ability as a speaker.

Vocabulary

behavioral nervousness The external, observable behaviors and reactions that result from a fear of public speaking; these may include: stuttering, using fillers ("um"), sweating, shaking knees, increased heart rate, and an upset stomach

cognitive nervousness The internal, unobservable negative or nervous thoughts that often precede and interfere with the delivery of a speech

cognitive restructuring A therapy designed to help alleviate cognitive fear of public speaking by training speakers to replace the negative thoughts that accompany and interfere with public speaking with positive thoughts

communication apprehension The fear or anxiety associated with actual or anticipated communication situations

rational-emotive therapy A therapy designed to help alleviate cognitive fear of public speaking by teaching individuals to replace irrational thoughts toward public speaking with rational, realistic thoughts

skills training A therapy designed to help reduce or alleviate the behavioral indicators of speech anxiety by teaching individuals the skills needed for effective communication—speech organization, maintaining good posture, making eye contact, incorporating vocal variety, and the use of gestures

speech anxiety The fear one experiences when giving a speech in front of an audience

state apprehension A form of communication apprehension in which fear is experienced when communicating in a particular context (public speaking, interpersonal, small group, or large group) or with a particular audience

systematic desensitization A therapy designed to help reduce or alleviate the behavioral indicators of speech anxiety that uses several sessions to teach individuals how to recognize when feelings of tension begin to affect the body and how to replace anxious feelings with positive, relaxing feelings

trait apprehension A form of communication apprehension in which an individual is predisposed to experience a fear of communicating across all communication contexts

visualization A therapy designed to help alleviate cognitive fear of public speaking by teaching individuals to create a successful image of the public speaking experience and recall that image while delivering the speech

Application Exercise

In order to help you identify situations or contexts where you may be more likely to experience anxiety about communicating, complete the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension.^{24*} Please indicate the degree to which each of the following statements apply to you by writing the number showing whether you:

1-strongly agree 2-agree 3-undecided 4-disagree -strongly disagree

- 1. I dislike participating in group discussions.
- 2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
- 3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
- 4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
- 5. Engaging in group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
- 6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
- 7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
- 8. Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in meetings.
- 9. I am calm and relaxed when called upon to express opinions in meetings.
- 10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
- 11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
- 12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
- 13. While in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
- 14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
- 15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.
- 16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
- 17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
- 18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.
- 19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
- 20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
- 21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
- 22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
- 23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
- 24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

*From J. C. McCroskey, "Oral Communication Apprehension: A Summary of Recent Theory & Research," *Human Communications Research* 4:78-96. Copyright © 1977 Sage Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks, CA. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.

To calculate your score for each of the four communication contexts measured by this instrument, add or subtract your scores for each item as described below. Begin your adding or subtracting with 18 points in each case.

Group Discussion	18 points + scores for items 2, 4, and 6; -- scores for items 1, 3, and 5.
Meetings	18 points + scores for items 8, 9, and 12; --scores for items 7, 10, and 11.
Interpersonal Communication	18 points + scores for items 14, 16, and 17; -- scores for items 13, 15, and 18.
Public Speaking	18 points + scores for items 19, 21, and 23; -- scores for items 20, 22, and 24.

To determine your overall score on the PRCA, add the points you earned on all four of the contexts together.

Norms for the PRCA-24

Range of Scores: 24-120

Average Score: 65 (plus or minus 15)

High Level of CA: above 80

Low Level of CA: below 50

Application Assignments

1. Make a list of the specific speaking situations that cause you to become nervous. Make a timeline of your speaking experiences. Describe and rate your level of nervousness (on a scale of 1 to 10) during each of the experiences, and evaluate each of your performances (your perception of success/failure). Analyze your timeline to determine your patterns of speech anxiety. Identify specific things in each situation that may have increased or decreased your level of speech anxiety. (If you have never given a public speech, make a list of things that might make you nervous in this situation. Identify strategies or steps you could adopt to overcome this fear.)
2. Observe another individual giving a public speech. Make a list of the behavioral indicators of speech anxiety that you observe that individual exhibiting while speaking. Ask that individual to rate his/her level of anxiety, and to describe the mistakes or nervous behaviors that she/he feels occurred during the speech. Compare that list with those you recognized during the speech. Have a friend observe your speaking performance, and compare how many of your "mistakes" were recognized by your friend.
3. Imagine that your instructor has just announced that you will have to give a speech entitled "The Most Important Decision I Have Ever Made and How It Influenced My Life." Make a list of the thoughts you might have about your upcoming performance. Do not focus on the specific things you will talk about during your speech, rather list the thoughts you have regarding the actual performance. Indicate which thoughts are positive (+) and which ones are negative (-). Write a positive thought to replace each of the negative thoughts you recorded.

Notes

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- ²⁴ McCroskey, 1977; McCroskey, 1978.