

Public Speaking Panic Control Tips

The following suggestions are geared towards speakers who suffer from speech anxiety. Some tips may be useful and others may not. Play with them, and get comfortable with what works best for you.

Before

- In advance

Visit the room

If there's a stage, stand on it, speak, scream (as long as no one is giving a talk) cry, faint. Get it out of your system.

Check the temperature so you can plan your comfort level.

Get oriented

Determine the availability of stools, rostrum, projectors, drinking water.

If you'll be using a rostrum, make it your friend.

Check it's height and compare with your height.

If appropriate, plan to use it to rest props on, lean on, use as a foot-stool (put one foot up while standing to ease your back muscles).

Take notes.

- Choreography

Divide the talk into sections and breaks.

Determine several comfortable positions: standing, standing with your foot up on a ledge or stool, sitting, walking. Designate positions to suit the material.

Build movement into the material and use it to help divide the talk into easily accomplished increments. Create breaks with physical signposts (e.g., walk, shift, sit, stand) to be used in the transitions in the material.

Find a good neutral stance, knees slightly bent, not too stiff and not too relaxed. Find it, experience it, remember it.

Play with your hands and your arms to determine where you're most comfortable having them (e.g., hands in pockets, gesturing, holding props).

Choreograph a comfortable physical presentation.

Make notes.

- Night before

Rituals. Find a comfort prop: a squeeze ball, teddy bear, your favorite mouse.

Don't think about the talk (at least for awhile). Do something else – anything else.

Eat well – but not too well!

Do yoga, exercise, a balancing stress reducing technique (e.g., the Paradox Tapping Technique).

- Day of

Breathe

Exercise; jogging, yoga, stretches with deep breathing. If you can do some physical activity before the talk to increase oxygen intake and release endorphins (anti-pain neurotransmitters), it would be a good warm-up.

Dress comfortably with pockets (for hands and props).

Wear cozy, supportive shoes.

Read notes and take them with you. Don't forget your props.

Arrive early – but not too early!

Focus on *communication* rather than *performance*.

Find a quiet room and do the Paradox Tapping Technique about 15 minutes in advance if you can predict you'll have that time available. If not, try to do it as close to your talk as possible.

During

- Settle in

Breathe. When all else fails – keep breathing!

Find your neutral stance.

Have fun.

Remember, you just have to make it to the next section. There are breaks built in. Use them to pause, get your bearings, adjust your breathing, re-establish your neutral stance, (remembering to bend your knees). Think of breaks as mental stretches.

- Movement

You've arranged stools, chairs, the rostrum where you want them to be. Use them: lean, sit, put your feet up.

Try to follow your choreography plan. Movement is important for clear thinking. It provides the breaks from the thinking – space and time for your thoughts to rejuvenate.

Movement builds confidence from the knowledge that you are presenting a more visually interesting scene than does a static figure. Knowing this can be calming.

- Eye contact

...with the right people! Engage with someone in awe, someone who seems excited about what you're saying. This can bolster your confidence and relax you.

Communicating directly with someone helps you feel more connected, more like you're having a conversation.

- Self control

There are several things you have no control of when giving a talk. Apart from equipment failure, most of the unknowns are about the actions of other people. You don't know how many people will enter or leave the room during your talk, or what kind of questions they're going to ask. You have no power or control over the actions of others but you do have complete control over your own. Instead of dwelling on the unknowns, focus on what you know. Take charge of the factors within your control. You have the power of self control.

Water control. You can drink as much as you need and keep on drinking.

Oxygen control. You can breath whenever you want and keep on breathing.

Comfort control. You get to decide what to wear and what props to bring to assist in boosting your comfort level.

Motion control; to stand, walk, sit or dance at will.

Bladder control. You can be prepared and use the facilities as well as the Paradox tapping technique to increase the parasympathetic response and decrease the urge!

Passion control. No control necessary.

After glow

Congratulations

It's over. Keep breathing.

You probably did much better than you think you did.

If you're still afraid, seek professional help!