



Student Success

Study Tips

You are sitting in class and hear those dreaded words: “oral presentation.” Now what? Rest assured that probably everyone else in the class is feeling the same anxiety that you are about giving a speech. Seriously. And, while knowing that others are as stressed as you are about public speaking may not help you feel better, it does help to know that you are not alone. Of course, it’s common knowledge that preparation and practice are the basic building blocks of public speaking success. However, there are also other factors to consider when faced with the reality of giving an oral presentation. So here are a few tips to help you deliver a great speech.

Dress Appropriately. While you may not need to wear a suit, be sure to dress appropriately. Business casual or dressier, depending on the type of presentation and the audience should be perfect. It’s hard to take a speaker seriously if the speaker is dressed inappropriately.

Watch the time. If your presentation has time limitations, be sure to time your presentation several times as you rehearse to give yourself an accurate idea of how long your speech will be.

Know your material. Do not write down every word. Make sure you write down only the topics and related notes you want to cover. This will help ensure your presentation sounds natural.

Keep PowerPoint presentations simple. Keep your PowerPoint slides simple and to the point. Make sure they contain only key pieces of information so that the slides are easy to read and follow. You can elaborate later on any of the finer points as needed when you speak.

Face your audience. When using slides or other visuals you can often become caught up in focusing only on the screen or your visual aids. Always remember to face the audience, not the screen.

Be ready. Before your presentation starts make sure you have everything set-up and functioning properly. This in-

cludes, slides, overhead projectors, screens, laptops, etc.

Eye contact – Eye contact is the key to success. Look at your audience as much as possible. Scan your audience and look at everyone, making eye contact with different individuals as you scan.

Relax and greet your audience. Remember everyone is nervous doing presentations. Breathe, smile and greet your audience. The simple act of smiling can help you to relax, and when you say hello, you will likely get a warm hello in response.

Speak clearly and slowly. Often speakers tend to rush their presentations or speak too quickly. Remember the audience is hearing your presentation for the first time and they are trying to listen to what you have to say.

Below is a quote on public speaking by Dale Carnegie, well-known motivational speaker and author.

“Students of public speaking continually ask, ‘How can I overcome self-consciousness and the fear that paralyzes me before an audience?’ Did you ever notice in looking from a train window that some horses feed near the track and never even pause to look up at the thundering cars, while just ahead at the next railroad crossing a farmer’s wife will be nervously trying to quiet her scared horse as the train goes by? How would you cure a horse that is afraid of cars—graze him in a back-woods lot where he would never see steam-engines or automobiles, or drive or pasture him where he would frequently see the machines? Apply horse-sense to ridding yourself of self-consciousness and fear: face an audience as frequently as you can, and you will soon stop shying. You can never attain freedom from stage-fright by reading a treatise. A book may give you excellent suggestions on how best to conduct yourself in the water, but sooner or later you must get wet, perhaps even strangle and be ‘half scared to death.’ There are a great many ‘wetless’ bathing suits worn at the seashore, but no one ever learns to swim in them. To plunge is the only way.”

— [Dale Breckenridge Carnegie](#), *The Art of Public Speaking*



How to Calm Your Nerves Before a Speech

Let's face it. Who isn't nervous before giving a speech or doing a presentation? Look at this quote from Mark Twain:

"There are only two types of speakers in the world. 1. The nervous and 2. Liars."



So, now that we acknowledge that everyone gets nervous, let's take a look at some techniques that can be used to calm our nerves.

- **Be Prepared.** No, I am not talking about the Boy Scout oath here. I am talking about common sense. The more you know your subject, the better prepared you will be to speak freely and easily about your topic.



- **Breathe.** Try a breathing relaxation technique. Or just slowly take in deep breaths and hold for a second or two and slowly exhale. If you are really nervous you might want to try deep breathing for several minutes before you begin speaking. Try only to think about the breathing and nothing else. This will help you to slow down your heart rate and calm your nerves.

- **Listen to music.** Each of us has our own type of music that we find relaxing and soothing. I am sure you've noticed many athletes wearing headphones or ear buds prior to a game. For many athletes listening to music helps them to focus and relax and get ready for the game. It's no different for public speakers.



- **See Success.** Visualize your speech in your head from start to finish. When you picture yourself succeeding you are more apt to succeed. Do this over and over.

- **Exercise.** Although you can't do a full workout just before a speech (you'd be all sweaty) you can indeed walk around a little, or stretch. A little bit of movement and exercise can go along way to help calm frazzled nerves.



- **Stay away from caffeine.** Yes, caffeine will give you a boost of energy, but it will also increase your heart rate and be counterproductive to the anxiety relieving techniques you are doing.

Once you are ready to begin your speech here are a few more things to try.

- **Make eye contact and smile.** You may not think you can muster a smile when you are so nervous. But, when you are ready to begin, look up at your audience and smile. Trust me. The smile alone will help you relax, and it sets the tone for a great speech.



- **Move a little.** No, I don't mean pace frantically back and forth across the entire front of the room or stage. What I mean is that it's ok to move around a little. Subtle hand gestures are fine too and often can give your nervous hands a thing to do. The key is moderation.

- **Drink water.** A lot of speakers get a dry mouth which can make it difficult to speak clearly and result in more nerves. It's perfectly acceptable to have a bottle of water handy for a quick sip every now and then. Actually, this is a great technique to use when you wish to emphasize a point in your speech. Pause. Take a drink of water and let the audience think about the point you just made. A quick sip is more than enough to wet your whistle and get you ready to move on.

