

# Tips for Speakers • Overcoming Anxiety

This tip sheet has been compiled by the staff of the Speaking, Reading, and Writing Center. Speech anxiety is an ever present fear that exists for both speakers and performers of all levels. The fear of public speaking is also referred to as Glossophobia and is thought to be a mixture of nervousness, doubt and fear of embarrassment. Although nerves and confidence do affect the level of anxiety, there are other elements involved such as genetics and the body's own defense mechanism, the fight or flight response. This response is the result of centuries of evolution and triggers mechanisms within the body that can result in tension, shaking, and most of the classic signs of stage fright. There is virtually no way to stop this process from happening. There are, however, a few things that will allow the mind to overcome the distress call of the body.

## **Practice**

*This is probably the most repeated phrase to any speaker or performer, but it is the most important. Preparing a speech at the last minute (procrastination) will do more to increase anxiety than any other single factor. Being able to sleep in between practices is critical to familiarity.*

- ✓ Practice in a space that is similar to the one in which you will be delivering your speech.
- ✓ Practice in front of others to get comfortable.
- ✓ Use your time wisely. Practice in 30-50 minute increments with 10 minute breaks in between.
- ✓ Use our Speaking Booth at the Speaking, Reading, and Writing Center.

## **Breathing**

*Incorrect breathing during the speech can cause a cracking voice, light headedness, and even fainting.*

- ✓ Breathing through your diaphragm allows you to take long deep breaths. Place your hands at the base of your ribs and breathe in until you feel those ribs expanding. Avoid shallow breathing (upper chest).
- ✓ Remember to exhale. During a presentation, it is easy to forget to breathe in and out.
- ✓ Find pauses in your speech to take breaths.

## **Stretching and Exercise**

*The fight or flight response, caused by adrenaline, can subside more quickly if the body's metabolism is in high gear. Exercise before speech-time helps to do just that.*

- ✓ It is important to stretch before a presentation to look relaxed.
- ✓ Open your mouth as wide as possible. Let your jaw just hang for a bit and then yawn deeply.
- ✓ Tighten each muscle in your body for a few seconds and then completely relax.
- ✓ Stretch your arms as high as you can and stand on your toes.

## **Positivity**

*Self-doubt is your worst enemy. Don't beat yourself up. Instead, build yourself up! Focus on the importance of your topic. Try to imagine what can go well instead of focusing on what could go wrong.*

- ✓ Remember your audience is not there to make fun of you; they are there to take something away from your presentation or speech.
- ✓ Do not get hung up on mistakes. Stay focused on the topic and don't let the little things get in the way.
- ✓ Use your nerves to energize your gestures and body movement. In other words, try to turn negative energy into positive energy!

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