



# Overcoming Stage Fright

*He who overcomes his fears will truly be free.*

—Aristotle

Stage fright, also known as speech anxiety or \_\_\_\_\_, is the fear or nervousness associated with actual or anticipated communication with others.



According to *The Book of Lists*, people reported that speaking in public is what they fear most, even more than death.

List three reasons why a person might suffer from stage fright or speech anxiety.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Nearly everyone has experienced some form of stage fright or speech anxiety at one time or another. The symptoms of speech anxiety take many forms and can show up without warning.

Common symptoms of speech anxiety:

- |                             |                              |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Monotone                 | 7. Shallow breathing         |
| 2. Dry mouth                | 8. Loss of concentration     |
| 3. Rambling speech          | 9. Increased heart rate      |
| 4. Increased pace           | 10. Increased muscle tension |
| 5. Flushed face             | 11. Ineffective gestures     |
| 6. Nervous laughter/smiling | 12. Stammering speech        |



Aristotle defined courage not as the absence of fear, but as just the right balance between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

## Positive vs. Negative Stress

The concept of stress in a biological context was first investigated by endocrinologist Hans Selye in the 1930s. Through his research, Selye created a model that divided stress into two different types:

- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_ (positive stress)
- ▶ \_\_\_\_\_ (negative stress)

As a communicator, you can move from negative stress to positive stress via the following:

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## Tips to Help Combat Speech Anxiety:

1. **Practice, practice, practice.** The best method to combat stage fright or speech anxiety is to become extremely familiar with your speech or presentation material. This eliminates the fear that you are going to forget your words. Always complete the three phases of effective preparation utilized by professional actors:

**Phase One:** Read Through

**Phase Two:** Stumble Through

**Phase Three:** Dress Rehearsal

2. **Visualize success.** Cognitive nervousness and negative thoughts can interfere with your speech or presentation. Use creative visualization to center yourself by imagining circumstances or an environment where you feel confident, powerful and relaxed.



3. **Focus on your message and the benefit.** Take the focus off you standing there, alone, in front of a group, and put your focus back on what you are there to accomplish and the information that you are there to present.
4. **Warm up properly.** It is important that you properly warm up both your body and your voice before giving a speech or presentation. Physical activities such as jogging, walking or swimming are also good ways to shake off nervous jitters.
5. **Focus on breath.** Locate your core breathing to help center yourself and release any unwanted tension. Using core breathing during your speech will help to calm you and keep your presentation on track.
6. **Create a ritual.** Develop a day-of strategy that is familiar and constant. This will help you relax and feel in control before any speech or presentation.
7. **Find a friendly face.** As you take the stage and make initial eye contact with your audience, seek out a friendly face. Look for someone giving you positive nonverbal feedback. If nervousness or anxiety start to creep back into your presentation, direct your speech to them.
8. **Commit to the moment.** Once your speech or presentation begins, focus on delivering it to the best of your ability. Don't give up and don't telegraph to your audience (verbally or non verbally) that you think you are doing a poor job. This is your moment to shine—enjoy it.

*If you hear a voice within you say "you cannot paint,"  
then by all means paint, and that voice will be silenced.*

—Vincent Van Gogh



## Core Breathing

Life is breath and breath is life. By using your breath properly, you are able to give yourself the gift of vitality, energy, focus and relaxation. When was the last time you actually had to think about your breathing? Breathing is something that comes so naturally we rarely have to consider it, but it is vital. Every cell in your body is affected by the breaths you take. By breathing properly and slowly, the body is able to relax and prepare for optimal functioning.

When it comes to communicating a message to others, proper breathing is utilized in the following ways:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_



The average person's rate of breath is \_\_\_\_\_ times a minute; however, the optimal rate is \_\_\_\_\_.



### EXERCISE: Finding Your Core Breath

1. Begin by relaxing your body and making sure your posture is straight.
2. Place your hand on your stomach, just below the navel.
3. Inhale gently through your nose for a count of five. Imagine your belly is a balloon, filling with air.
4. Hold the breath for a count of five.
5. Exhale through your mouth for a count of five while gently pressing on the stomach. Imagine your belly is a balloon being emptied of air.
6. Repeat the entire process from the beginning, this time adding in an audible sigh or vocalization with each exhale.