

Annotated reading Practice

The idea of getting up and speaking in front of a bunch of people can put even the most confident person into a cold sweat. The truth is: Stage anxiety is very real. Even successful actors, politicians, athletes and musicians suffer shaky hands and sweaty palms.

Being prepared is your first line of attack. You should be anxious if you haven't done your homework. In his book, *Free Yourself From Fears*, Joseph O'Connor recommends five minutes of preparation for every minute of presentation. Rehearse your speech out loud and become accustomed to your speaking voice. If you need assistance in organizing your material, talk to someone who can instruct you. Or, you can join an organization such as Toastmasters, which has local chapters throughout the country.

Then again, you may be very prepared for your public appearance. Yet you are still overwrought with fears. This is not uncommon. In fact, many people choke, or fail to execute previously mastered tasks. It doesn't matter if you have delivered faultless lines or perfect speeches in the past; choking, which has nothing to do with distraction, is caused by an inability to handle [stress](#). Stressful situations can doom even the most celebrated performer.

Often, a high point of anxiety and cardiovascular activity comes the moment you are expected to speak or perform. And there are plenty of common fears people think about when taking center stage:

- [Fear](#) of one's mind going blank
- Trembling, shaking or showing other signs of [anxiety](#)
- Doing something embarrassing
- Inability to continue talking
- Saying foolish things or not making sense

There are ways to counter your feelings of anxiety. First, remember that acknowledging your fears can help you. Sometimes, when you admit you are nervous, your anxiety will subside. One way to do this is to take a look at your mental pictures. Do you imagine people jeering and throwing food at you? Now, disconnect yourself from that negative picture and formulate a positive one—one that shows you successfully delivering your speech.

Another tip is exaggerating your symptoms. If you suffer from shaky hands and sweaty palms, try to make them shake and sweat more. You will notice that they will stop shaking and sweating. If you are able to increase the symptoms, you can control them.

Sometimes, arriving early can help. An early arrival allows you to meet your audience and helps you see their friendly faces up close. And when you are speaking, focus on one person, hold eye contact, and move to the next person when you pause naturally. Connecting with your audience in this way may help ease you.

You might also have the tendency to rock, sway, wave your arms, or move pointlessly around. This annoys the audience, shows your anxiety and may in turn increase your anxiety. Instead, breathe in slowly. Steadied breathing will calm you down.

Remember that while you are rooting for you, the audience will be rooting for you, too. Why wouldn't they? Everyone cringes when the actor flubs his lines or when the skater trips over her toes. The audience does want you to succeed.