

Preparing for Public Speaking

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All you've read and done so far was in preparation for your future public performances. The purpose of what you've learned so far was to employ your psychological resources, to help you face your anxiety. However, a good speech always needs solid preparation as well.

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4.6 Preparing for Public Speaking

The process of preparation begins the moment you learn about the next event, where you would have to speak in front of an audience. At that moment, the first thoughts you have, even if they are automatic thoughts, which you don't fully realize, are already shaping your attitude towards the event. Besides, it is important to start it on time, so that you don't have to be pressured by short deadlines. Whenever your next public performance may be, now is the right time to start preparing.



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Create Useful Visual Aid

Even if your speech doesn't require presenting the content to the audience visually, you can still create a presentation and rehearse your speech, by using the presentation to help yourself.

Organizing Your Topic

The technique will structure your speech so that you don't have to think about what comes next. If you arrange the aspects of your topic in logical order, you'll be able to follow the course of the speech with ease, and that will reduce your fear of sudden memory loss. When creating a presentation, make sure it is concise yet informative.

Have a Minimalistic Presentation

Don't include too much information in it, because you'll confuse your audience and probably yourself. Give them just a glimpse of each segment you'll talk about and then elaborate orally. We will soon address the topic of creating an excellent presentation.

Rehearse Your Presentation

Creating a solid presentation is only the first step to getting prepared. When you finish it, you'll have a clear picture of the things you should talk about. However, your preparation isn't over yet. Rehearsing is a crucial part of a successful presentation.

Flashcards

You can use some form of flashcards, to help remind you what you need to say, read them several times – including aloud, and then try to rehearse your speech without looking at the notes. Make sure your voice doesn't sound like you are reading, as that is unnatural. Instead, try to speak as if you are passionately explaining an idea, to a group of your friends. Plan your pauses, emphasize certain points, ask your audience a question, and insert some jokes or other icebreakers.

Becoming Comfortable

Memorizing your speech isn't the only goal of rehearsal. What is equally important, is to practice until your speech sounds fluent and you become familiar and comfortable with it. You can ask your friend, family member, or a colleague to listen to you and provide you feedback. Make sure you have enough time for this step. Remember that rehearsal is important for everyone – even people who sound like they are naturally great at a public performance and seem as though they come up with their speech on the spot, such as Steve Jobs, actually admit to having rehearsed their speech dozens of times.

Get Some Rest

The amount of stress caused by your public speaking increases as the event approaches. The night before your speech may be sleepless, and you might wake up tired and nervous, which naturally contributes to your anxiety.

Treat Yourself to Some Relaxation

Instead of worrying how everything will turn out and playing out various scenarios in your mind, the night before your speech take a relaxing bath or have a massage, drink a cup of soothing tea and bask in other pleasant, calming activities. Do whatever you enjoy - go for a walk, watch a good movie, spend time with other people, or read a book. During these activities, you'll certainly have thoughts and feelings about the next day. Don't try to repress or ignore them - you know that doesn't work. Instead, embrace them mindfully and accept them as a natural part of your experience.

Also, don't forget to eat a nourishing meal, avoid alcohol, nicotine, sugar and other stimulants of the nervous system, especially the night before. Go to sleep early to fully rest your body and mind.

Be Kind to Yourself

Before, during and after your speech, don't forget to be kind to yourself. You already know that you don't have to follow your thoughts - some of these are cognitive distortions, and you are familiar with the ways of overcoming them. What is more, try not to panic if your fear is getting stronger just before it is your turn to speak. The presence of the fear doesn't mean that you don't know how to cope or do well. Instead, accept your fear, allow it to be present and then do what needs to be done.

When Your Speech Is Over

After your speech, when you realize that not only did you survive, but you did a decent job, despite your fear, reward yourself with something you enjoy. Celebrate your small victory and look forward to others. That may be the first one, and each next will be a reason to celebrate because you are one step closer to becoming a better public speaker, a better version of your present self.

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