

Overcoming Performance Anxiety

Performance anxiety is a common problem that many presenters overcome or learn to manage. Many different things can trigger this anxiety, so learn what your triggers are and rehearse your presentation with this knowledge in mind. Recognizing your fears can also help you manage your performance anxiety. Below are some common fears many presenters have as well as some tips to help you stay confident while presenting.

Common Fears

I don't want to **bore** my audience

Choose an aspect of your topic that **excites you**. If you are excited about your topic in some way, then your audience is more likely to be engaged. If you're not excited about your topic, create engaging examples that prove your point. Find some aspect of your topic to invest yourself in.

Speak in a clear, audible voice – an audience will lose interest if they cannot hear you or cannot understand you because you speak too quickly when you are nervous.

I am convinced my audience **is against** me

Remember that your audience likely **wants you to do well**. Even if a few people seem disengaged, uninterested, or hostile, chances are these people are in the minority. After all, people have already budgeted their time to see you present. Had your audience wanted you to fail, they wouldn't have devoted this time to you in the first place.

View a hostile question during the question-and-answer session as an opportunity to show your **grace under pressure**. Respond by restating and/or clarifying the question and then calmly and confidently provide your answer.

Understand that some people might come across as more abrupt, distant, or unfriendly than they intend. It is your job as a presenter to maintain a **calm, confident manner** and to not take it personally if an audience member seems unfriendly or rude.

I am afraid I might **forget** a word, sentence, or present something in the wrong order

Trust that your preparation will pay off in the presentation. Also, practice using **outlines or a set of key words/concepts** instead of attempting to memorize a script. Speakers who memorize a script and then forget a word or phrase might panic and lose their place.

Pause for a moment if you find yourself lost or stuck while presenting. Take a moment and look at your notes or otherwise **collect yourself**. While pausing in this manner might not be ideal, doing so is better than continuing to flounder.

I worry about **time** – going too long or finishing early

Rehearse your presentation with a stopwatch in order to get a better idea of how fast/slow you speak. Consider what aspects of your presentation can be trimmed if you have less time than originally planned. Should you finish early, having a series of questions for the audience or additional examples to share might be useful.

I don't know what to do if my PowerPoint **crashes** or the projector **malfunctions**

Create a back-up plan in case you have a software or hardware problem, whether that be having handouts or overhead slides. Practice with and without your visual aids. Your credibility will increase if you can work around technical problems and still deliver an effective presentation.

The group or presenter who **preceded** me did a far better job than I or my group can hope to do

Treat this **as a learning opportunity** – you failed to distinguish yourself in this instance, so take what you learned by being outshone by another group and deliver a better presentation when the opportunity comes along again. Do not become intimidated by the success of another presenter to the point that your own presentation suffers.