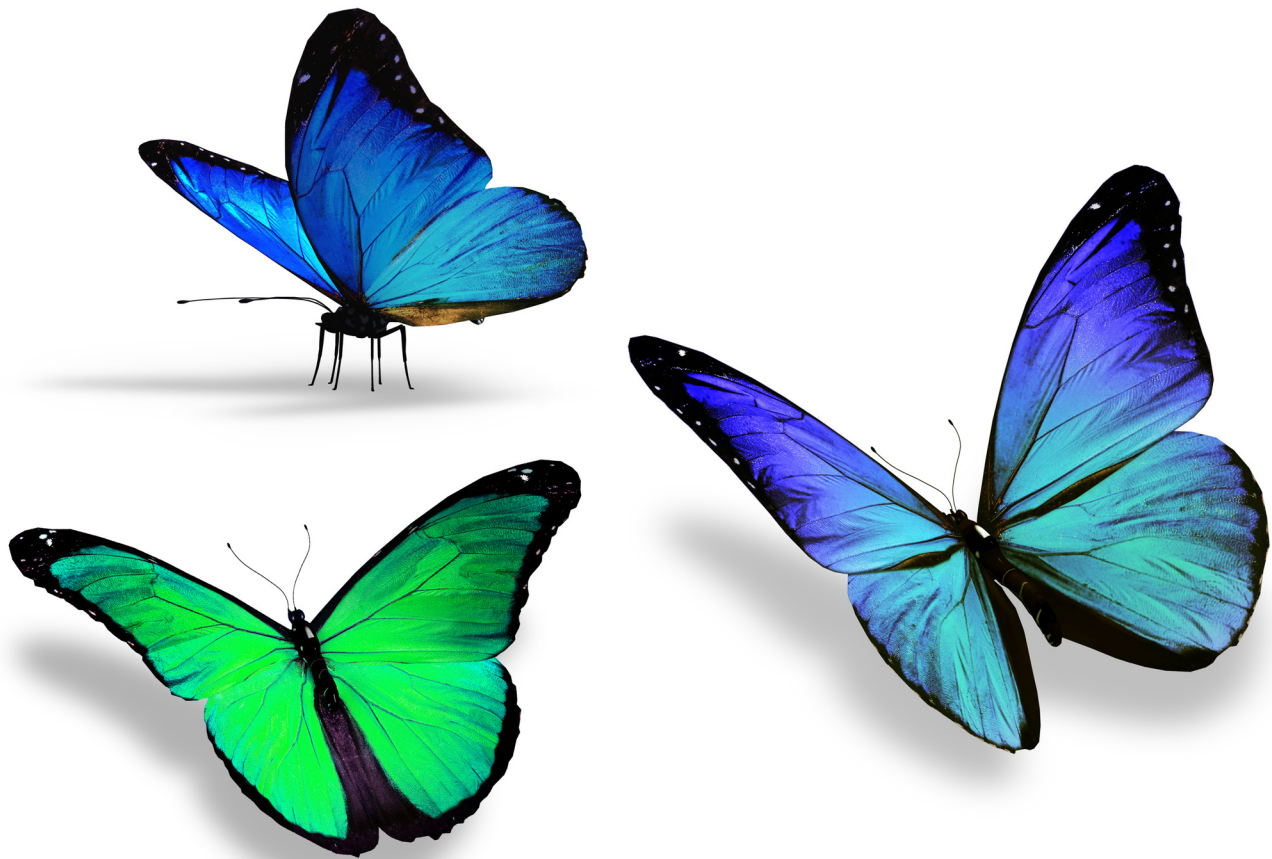


## Fear Not

Harnessing Stage Fright to Enrich Presentations



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## Fear Not – Mitigating Stage Fright

A group of executives sits around a conference table, viewing presentations one by one, while you wait to present. As your turn approaches, the swarm of butterflies fluttering inside your gut becomes increasingly restless. Not only is your boss sitting in the back of the room, but the CEO has decided to sit in on your presentation as well. “Is it always this hot in here?” you ponder, as your confidence wanes. Upon introduction your palms get clammy, your heartbeat races, and your mouth goes dry. Your hand shakes as you reach for your notes. As you begin to present, you hear your voice start tremble a bit, your face gets flushed, and beads of sweat begin to form on your forehead. Sound familiar?

This is actually quite common. Almost every presenter has experienced this fear of public speaking, even those who frequently speak in front of large audiences. Fortunately, there are several effective strategies that you can use to help you overcome your stage fright.

### Proactively Manage Anxiety

Explore some easy ways to calm your fears by **thinking before presenting**. The goal is to either **sidestep** or **better control** the aspects of presenting that make you most nervous. For example, if your hands shake when you present, try resting your hands on the lectern, or holding your notes on a clipboard. If your voice trembles, have a sip of water and clear your throat before starting. If given the opportunity, have a planned “thanks” for your introducer, as a way of finding your speaking voice. **Determining** your trouble-spots, and having a **plan** to address them, will lessen your anxiety significantly.

### Don't Believe the Voices in Your Head

You're **better** than you think; at least that's what the research indicates. Self-awareness and critique can produce an **unfounded** perception of inadequacy, making compliments seem like empty praise, when in fact they are very sincere. Presenters are often **inaccurate** in their assessments of how nervous they appear, thinking that other people can see their anxiety. This can result in unnecessary anxiousness and apprehension, which can further

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exacerbate the problem. Relax, and **speak from the heart**. Don't be afraid to make and correct your mistakes. Audiences develop a greater confidence in presenters who appear **human** and **genuine**.

“There are only two types of speakers in the world: **one**, the nervous and **two**, the liars.” - Mark Twain

## Over Prepare

It's a mistake to underestimate the importance that good preparation plays in diminishing your fears. Prepare **more** material than you anticipate needing. If giving a three-minute presentation, develop enough presentation materials to speak for 10 minutes. It's much less anxiety-provoking to have to **trim** your thoughts, than it is to lack things to say.

As you gain clarity on your goals, know **what** you plan to say, and in what **manner**, your anxiety will fade accordingly. Consider the following **three tips** for preparing your presentation.

- 1. Memorize your first two minutes.** The beginning of a presentation is when presenters tend to experience the most speaker anxiety. By memorizing the **start** of your speech, you will be much more relaxed and confident when you present. Additionally, in order to ensure a strong ending, commit to memory the **final** minute of your presentation as well.
- 2. Be informed on your subject.** When audiences feel you are uncertain of your topic, and sense you are “faking it,” they will lose confidence in you and what you have to say. By being prepared and **genuinely** knowledgeable, your anxiety will be noticeably reduced. Perhaps you worry about running out of things to speak about, or being asked unanswerable questions. Overcome this fear by knowing your subject in-depth, and you'll be viewed by your audience as a thought-leader.

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3. **Envision what your audience wants to hear.** Imagine your audience's questions and work out intelligent responses **in advance** of your presentation. You can then either work those answers into your presentation or reserve them in case the questions arise. Contemplating likely questions and possible answers improves confidence and helps presenters feel better prepared.

“There are always three speeches, for every one you actually gave. The one you practiced, the one you gave, and the one you wish you gave.” - Dale Carnegie

### Understand the Audience

It is essential to familiarize yourself with your audience and understand their **needs** and **interests**. Speak with several people attending, and ask who else might be joining and what is significant to them. Attempt to learn which audience members may have knowledge of your topic, try to discover **their** most critical priorities, and address those issues as part of your presentation.

### Be Aware of Your Environment

Take stock of your **setting** in advance of your presentation. Learn exactly where you will be presenting from, and thoroughly scope it out. Sit in one of the audience's seats, and see the room from **their** view. Evaluate the area's acoustics and **practice** with all of the technology. Leave **nothing** untested.

### Adopt An Audience Focus

When you talk in front of a group of people, it's normal to feel self-conscious. With all the attention centered on you, it becomes easier to shift focus to your appearance, as opposed to **sharing your ideas** with the audience. Once your attention changes from being audience-focused to being self-focused, your stage fright escalates, and your presentation becomes less persuasive.

If you do feel self-conscious during a presentation, try speaking **directly** to **individual** audience members. Speak straight to one person until they begin to smile or nod in agreement. You'll find that, as a rule, giving a smile will get you a smile, so be patient and **friendly**. Continue on to another audience member, then another, shifting focus from yourself onto your audience.

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# Fear Not – Mitigating Stage Fright

## Be Flexible

Presenters suffering from a fear of public speaking often have **strict ideas** about what constitutes a **successful** presentation. Consider the fact that most presenters are more comfortable answering audience questions than giving prepared speeches. One speaks “off the cuff” during a Q&A session; one might think that this would produce increased anxiety. However, this isn’t the case for most presenters, because Q&A sessions are inherently more casual and easy-going than prepared speeches. If you can learn to be as flexible during prepared presentations as you would be during Q&A, you can more easily achieve success, without relying on rigid performance benchmarks.

## Success is Within Reach

It requires conscious effort to reduce or eliminate stage fright, but it’s really not insurmountable. There are many steps one can take to sidestep or better control the aspects of presenting that make you nervous, thus mitigating the fear. Make sure your [content is engaging](#), well-prepared, and you know the subject matter and priorities of your audience. Additionally, take some time to familiarize yourself with the presentation setting in advance, including any equipment you’ll be using.

If you are willing to abandon your preconceived ideas about public speaking, you can overcome your fears and discover the strength and self-confidence required to change a scary occasion into a successful and rewarding event. Remember, you’re better than you think!

## Other Resources

- ▶ [Going Up? 7 Key Steps to Creating an Effective Elevator Pitch](#)
- ▶ [Inspiring Words – Top 6 Tips to Motivate Your Audience](#)
- ▶ [Conversational Presentations](#)