

7 Greatest Fears in Public Speaking

How to Prevent Them or Take Remedial Action

Most speakers experience fear when asked to say a few words, and this is natural. We are used to having **two-way** conversations with small groups of people rather than **one-way** with larger groups. For the last 18 months we have been using a technique at our workshops called **`Face the Fear`**. Hundreds of participants have described their worst fears and more importantly come up with **solutions** - here they are:

1.) I will forget what I am going to say (45% of participants rated this as their #1 fear)

To prevent this happening - The single most important thing you can do before you speak is **PREPARE** properly. The more comfortable you are with your material before you step on the platform the more comfortable you will be on the platform. How long should you practise? It depends on you. I usually run through a presentation **10 times** before I feel comfortable. The next most important part is to have a simple structure to your presentation. Beginning, middle and end etc - you should be able to put a 20-minute presentation into 10 bullet points or 2 sides of a note card. And use **stories/examples/case studies** regularly, easier to remember.

Remedial action - The good news is that the audience have no idea what you are going to say, so they won't be able to tell if you have forgotten anything. Don't explain or apologise, keep going. Move onto your next point, your next story etc. You can always return to that missing link later on.

2.) I will freeze up when speaking (35%)

To prevent this happening - This is the **`rabbit caught in the headlights of the car`** syndrome. You have prepared for the big day, begin to speak and suddenly realise all these people are looking at **YOU**. The reason is that they are **interested** in what you are going to say, so just say it. The audience want you to succeed, they want the information and they want to enjoy the performance. Firstly, have that **great opening paragraph** nailed down - make sure you are word perfect here and once you have done this, the rest will flow. Secondly, remember it is not about **YOU**, it is about **THEM**. So focus on the audience's needs, and how you are there to help them. Finally, follow the plan on the card or the mind map you prepared.

Remedial action - Three great techniques to buy some recovery time - a.) Repeat that last point you made, **reiterate** its importance or b.) Ask the audience a **question** relating to your last point *"Can I have a show of hands please, how many people today have ever felt ..."* or c.) Before commencing place a **glass of water** on the stage a number of paces away from you. If you freeze, slowly walk over and take a sip. Return, face the audience again, smile and continue. I guarantee the audience will think - *"wow that speaker is relaxed and confident"*

3.) Audience will hate me (32%)

To prevent this happening - As I said above they want you to succeed, unless it is a work rival! There is a saying that the **"audience will forgive anything, except being bored"**. So how do you bore them? Well eliminate these **five** for a start - a.) Lots and lots of facts and figures - instead use stories/examples/case studies b.) Speaking in a monotone voice - when rehearsing your speech **underline** the important words and phrases and practise stressing these when speaking, this will help vary the pitch and tone of your voice c.) Speak from the heart, **speak with passion** and you will always carry the audience with you d.) **Reading** from a script - guaranteed to bore the audience. Use note cards etc and make sure you maintain great eye contact with them and e.) **Cut down** on the PowerPoint slideshow.

Remedial action - Always make sure you know where the **emergency** exit is...only kidding; it will never come to this. But if you feel that the audience is becoming a little restless, then be flexible - make the presentation **more interactive** by asking questions. Or move onto your next point, they won't mind if you finish early.

4.) Technology breaks down (26%)

To prevent this happening – Who is responsible for this? If your answer is the company or the organiser then you are making a **big mistake**. You are going to be the one standing there, fiddling with a slide show and looking like an amateur so **Be Prepared**. Get there early, try everything out, try it out again, bring a back up on a memory stick, be nice to the technical people (a bottle of wine or a box of sweets will guarantee great emergency back up).

Remedial action – The best-laid plans etc so if it does go wrong, **explain** this to the audience and move on. Your presentation shouldn't be reliant on the PowerPoint for instance, if so why are you there? If the sound goes, could be a big problem; try speaking without the mike, move closer to the audience or even amongst them.

5.) I start sweating excessively (18%)

To prevent this happening – This is a big fear, especially for women. But unless you are like the guy in the Lynx ad the audience won't notice. Be sensible about your clothes, possibly it will be hot and sticky up there so wear dark clothes. Have an **extra** shirt/blouse/jacket as necessary and change shortly before you are on.

Remedial action – What can I say on this? Bring a mop...I have never noticed this before and like all nervous reactions it is not a problem unless you make it a problem by drawing attention to it.

6.) My voice trembles and I blush (15%)

To prevent this happening – Both are physical reactions to nerves - a.) **Plan and prepare** so that you will be as confident as possible. As I said previously have your opening paragraph memorised, the confident delivery of this will relax you b.) **Slow done**, this will enable you to breathe less rapidly and c.) Keep up the **eye contact** with the group, it takes the focus away from `ME` and onto the important people `THEM`.

Remedial action – Again for the voice, **slow down**. Remember the `**Power of the Pause**` and take a sip of water as necessary. You are the one in control up there; the audience will always wait for you. If you are blushing, **who cares?** You might, but no one else. Don't draw attention to it, the audience won't even notice. Instead use the nervous energy to put **controlled passion** into your presentation.

7.) I fall over on the stage (5%)

Yes a number of people do obsess about falling down as they come to the stage.

To prevent this happening – practise your route to the stage. Are there any traps/furniture/tricky steps to negotiate? If female avoid the stilettos, if male...well it might be a lifestyle thing, but still avoid them. Similarly with clothes, wear clothes that allow you to move with ease. Avoid the free bar, seems a shame but you can celebrate afterwards.

Remedial action – We often role-play this for a laugh. In the very unlikely event that you did tip over don't ignore it, go with it. Do your first line lying down, or get up and take a bow. Ask for any solicitors in the audience to contact you later on etc. You will have the audience on your side immediately and it could earn you £25 on one of those TV programmes!

Finally, **enjoy** the day. It can be a nerve wracking experience, but speaking in public is addictive and once you get over those first few moments you will begin to relax and really enjoy `*Speaking Up and Speaking Out*`.

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