

Introduction to Public Speaking

By

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Public Speaking

for Confidence & Success

Today, Public Speaking has assumed a great importance. Anyone who wants to progress in life has to become adept in communications skills as well as gain sufficient confidence to make a good presentation.

The biggest problem, faced by people at all levels, is that they lack confidence to stand up and speak in front of people. This is stage fright. In some degree every individual suffers from stage fright in the beginning. Even when you know the subject you are not able to express yourself; that is the biggest dilemma.

The bookset will introduce you to the subject of public speaking in a simple manner.

Happy reading!

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STAGE FRIGHT:

The nature of stage fright

Stage fright is a much-used term for a comparatively rare phenomenon. Few of us are really frightened by an audience. If we were, the inevitable would more frequently take place. Flight would follow fright, and we would run away. Most of us, rather than being frightened, are more truly stimulated by an audience and the thought of having to face one. We may be excited and nervous, and somewhat concerned about our performance. But these elements do not, of themselves, constitute fear. To be sure, what happens to us physically and mentally when we are stimulated by an audience includes changes, which we also experience when afraid. A fear-like feeling is undoubtedly present. But the same element is present when we are experiencing pleasurable excitement and when we anticipate good things. We are not afraid while waiting for the seconds to tick away before the time of our big date. Why then, this confusion with fear or fright?

Physical symptoms

We confuse intense stimulation with fear because parts of the picture are the same. The physical symptoms of fear may include rapid pulse, strong heart-beat (palpitation), excessive perspiration, dryness of the mouth, trembling of the limbs (hands and legs), disturbances of secretion and excretion. All of these physical symptoms need not be present to cause the reaction known as fear, but usually two or more are present. In stage fright, the overt manifestations may include trembling of the arms and legs, quavering of the voice, random movements, and general lack of controlled and poised appearance. In general, the performer feels unstable; occasionally, he looks unstable.

Intellectual changes

In addition to the physical symptoms, fear includes an outstanding mental change. A frightened person is suffering from intellectual disorganization. A person afraid is one whose thinking has gone astray. Not knowing how to think, he does not know what to do. A person who is experiencing true fear either does nothing, or behaves in ways, which are inappropriate. Fear may cause a child to run into a path of an oncoming automobile. A well-organized adult, observing the behaviour of the child, may experience an intense, fear-like feeling. This feeling will not, however, prevent him from snatching the child out of the path of danger. In fact, the physical changes he experiences enable him to act more vigorously and quickly in the accomplishment of his task.

In stage fright, the performer may be blocked in his thinking and so find himself unable to go on with he had planned to say or do. In extreme stage fright, as in an extreme state of emotion such as fear, the individual is suffering temporarily from the dynamics of disintegration.

Heightened Feeling:

The difference between the behaviour of the child and the behaviour of the well-organized adult is the difference between fear and heightened feeling. The child suffered from fear because he did not know what to do. The adult experienced heightened (fear-like) feeling because he did know what to do. Heightened feeling prepares the body for vigorous emergency activity. The feeling results mostly from an increase in the amount of adrenalin supplied to the blood stream. The athlete preparing for a contest has such a feeling. So do we, as speakers, when we anticipate appearing before an audience. It is not only good but also necessary for us to have some feeling about facing an audience. It makes us more alert and alive. We sound and act interested in our job of speaking.

Perhaps we can approach the matter of stage fright as one of degree rather than of kind. We may then accept the term stage fright to mean any notable degree of psychological and physiological arousal experienced by a performer before an audience. Mild arousal may be disrupting and disorganizing and impair, rather than improve a performance.

Research finding of stage fright

In the growing literature on stage fright, the following generalized finding seem to be warranted:

1. All speakers, regardless of length and amount of experience, undergo some degree of psychological and physiological arousal before or during their speaking efforts.
2. Observers (listeners) are often less aware of disruption than the speaker anticipates or believes is taking place.
3. There is no significant relationship between stage fright, reasoning ability, and level of intelligence.
4. There is no significant relationship between personality traits, or aspects of personality, at least as these components are measured or are measurable by standard personality inventories.
5. Stage fright is no sparer of sex. Both, men and women, experience stage fright, but men are more likely to show overt and obvious manifestations of this state of feeling or emotion than are women.
6. A reduction in stage fright, at least as far as its disruptive influences are concerned, is associated with improved speaking ability, increased experience in speaking, and with age.

CAUSES OF STAGE FRIGHT:

1. Faulty evaluation

True fear of an audience may develop out of heightened feeling if the speaker fails to evaluate the physical changes occurring within him for what they are worth. A speaker may suddenly become aware of a palpitating heart or a dry mouth. He may also, consciously or unconsciously, recall that these symptoms were also present when he was

frightened. If he fails to recognize that the cause of his old fright is non-existent in his present situation, he may give way to fear. In effect, such a speaker is responding to two elements—palpitating heart and dry mouth—as he originally did to a total but different situation, which happened to include these two elements. The other fear symptoms such as trembling and excessive perspiration may take their appearance. If the speaker then becomes overwhelmed with the physical changes taking place within him, he may forget what he has to say. Random talking and random, disorganized movement may take the place of organized thoughts and gestures. True fear - stage fright in a real sense -has set in.

2. Inadequate preparation

Besides faulty evaluation, there is one other basic cause for stage fright. The cause is insufficient preparation. The speaker has reason—good reason, to be afraid. Not having organized his thoughts in advance, the speaker, especially the inexperienced speaker, becomes suddenly aware of his inadequacies. Fear arises when we feel ourselves inadequate to meet a situation. Stage fright is fear in a situation involving a speaker and an audience.

3. Intensification of feelings

Though extreme stage fright is a comparatively infrequent phenomenon, the intensification of feeling and a state of 'arousal' in anticipation of an audience, or while facing an audience, is a common experience. Most professional performers on stage, radio, television, or public platforms admit to such feelings. Winston Churchill admitted to an occasional discomfort he described as a feeling of "a nine-inch square block of ice in the pit of stomach". Fortunately, in most instances, the ice melts away as the performance is pursued, and often exhilaration replaces the initial state of discomfort.

Although professional performers use the term stage fright for their intensified feelings, they are not frightened by either the term or the feelings. In fact, many performers contend that unless they feel somewhat tense, aroused, or 'pepped up', their performances may fall flat. We may quite properly conclude that the internal changes, as well as some of the external; ones that result from the increased flow of adrenaline serve a useful purpose in supplying extra energy and muscle tones necessary for an effective performance.

4. An approach – avoidance conflict

Many of us accept commitments for a future date and then do whatever we can to avoid the deed and the day of reckoning. If an event is far enough away, our wishes to participate may dominate our behaviour, and so we may make a positive commitment regarding the event. As the time for the event approaches, so do our counter inclinations relative to it. Then, avoidance behaviour is increased, and we may look for ways out.

Many persons who have a choice about accepting or refusing public speaking engagements are likely to accept them if the time is not too near. The wish to speak—to perform and to impress—dominates the drives, and determines the immediate behaviour-acceptance of an engagement. As the time for speaking draws closer, then avoidance drives may set in. Unfortunately, such drives may result in a failure to prepare for the speaking situation, and this may strengthen the avoidance drive. Theoretically, if a speaker arrives at the time for the execution of his responsibilities with approach and avoidance equal in strength, he is in a state of impasse. If circumstances, or his conscience or his sense of responsibility, result in strengthening the approach, he may meet his commitment but possibly without adequate preparation and with shaky confidence in the performance to come.

HOW TO PREVENT STAGE FRIGHT:

1. Evaluation of situation

The first suggestion for overcoming the effects of stage fright is to evaluate what we are experiencing. In all probability, it is heightened feeling and not fear. The physical changes in heightened feeling, though they resemble the change in fear or fright, are, as we have indicated, useful to us. Moreover, they are common and shared by public performers of all degrees of ability and practice.

We should go beyond recognizing the changes when they occur. We should anticipate their occurrence so that the element of surprise is not present. To be able to say, 'oh, yes, that's what I expected would happen', is much less disconcerting than to ask, 'What's happening to me'? When the knees shake and the hands begin to quiver. An athlete expects his heart to beat fast while engaged in a contest. He does not get caught by surprise at changes he anticipates! The public speaker, similarly fortified by expectation, would not mistake feeling for fear. Fear is a response to the unknown. The familiar, for which we can prepare should command respect rather than fear. 'Nervousness' may be induced, but nervousness is not fear.

2. Preparation

Preparation, in all respects and with thoroughness, is probably the best direct equipment against stage fright. Preparation includes dress, audience analysis, and familiarity with speech material, including the sound of the words, the turn of the phrase, and the meaning of every utterance. If the need is felt for written notes, these should be prepared and available.

Notes should be written so that they can be easily read. They should be phrased so that they readily recall ideas to mind. The question of how much written help is necessary must be answered by each speaker for himself. Usually, as the speaker gains experience and confidence, he is able to get along with fewer notes and more reliance on memory.

Many speakers gain confidence in the knowledge that notes are available, if they should be needed.

Notes are best written on small filing cards, which can be handled inconspicuously. The cards should be numbered according to the order of the speech material. Inexperienced speakers will probably find it helpful to have the first card contain the complete opening sentence. The last card should have the tentative closing sentence. Intermediate cards should contain key ideas and transition sentences. Statistics should always be available in written form.

3. Confidence in subject matter

We must have confidence in our facts as well as in our notes. As speakers, we should be free of worrying about the validity of our statements. If we entertain doubt or feel insecure about confidence is to court fear. If facts are in proper order, they are deserving of confidence.

As speakers, we should avoid speaking on a topic which calls for greater qualifications than we possess. That does not mean that we should be an authority before we entertain an opinion. It does mean that we should not pose as an authority when merely presenting an opinion. If we are not qualified to speak, we should avoid appearing in public to display our lack of qualifications.

4. Interest in subject

As speakers, we should feel an urge to speak on the topic we select. The urge need be no greater than that of wishing to share a humorous anecdote or the experiences of a trip, but some wish to communicate must be present for the communication to be effective. The speaker who has an urge to share an idea and who has confidence in his idea will have little reason to have fear of fear. On the other hand, the speaker who lacks interest in what he is saying is probably correct in assuming that his audience will lack interest in listening to him.

5. Movement

The muscular tensions, which accompany heightened feeling, if not released may immobilize a speaker. A rigid, unmoving speaker is likely to produce tensions in his audience. The effect is disturbing to both speaker and listener. Fortunately, the muscular tensions can be put to use. Tension may be drained off through movement. As speakers, it is our task to engage in movements which have meaning and which re-in force rather than interfere with our task of communicating ideas. Adjusting clothing, twisting a handkerchief, shuffling notes, playing with a watch, rocking on the toes, walking for the sake of walking are movements which have significance not related to the purpose of the speech. Controlled gestures, walking towards or away from a speaker's stand according to the import of the spoken material, movements, which serve as punctuation and as emphasis, are recommended. This, however, should be remembered; almost any

movement is better than no movement. If a speaker feels tense and not intellectually equal to the task of using a meaningful gesture, he ought then to move for the sake of movement. With the draining of tension and the regaining of intellectual composure, the speaker will find himself able to use appropriate action to enhance communication.

6. Shifting focus of attention

In our discussion of the role of the speaker as a listener, we emphasized the need for the speaker to be aware of the reactions of the persons to whom he is talking. The public speaker does not ordinarily anticipate an immediate verbal response to his remarks. He should, nevertheless, be more concerned with what he has to say to his listeners, and with their possible reactions than he is with his own feelings. The speaker who assumes a mental attitude and set of talking to and with his listeners, who is actively engaged in communicating, will find less time and opportunity for excessive introspection and reaction to his own internal reactions. Such a speaker will gain confidence from the realization that his listeners are indeed listening and responding to his ideas. With such confidence, intensification of feeling will serve to stimulate the speaker rather than to produce disintegration and true stage fright.

7. Practice

Heightened tension to a degree, which becomes disturbing tends to disappear with repeated performances. For almost every public performer actor, teacher, or public speaker, a first performance is likely to be something of an ordeal. Repeated performances reduce the severity of the ordeal. In time, little more than mild excitement may be felt. The public speaker who has really experienced stage fright should follow the practice of the aviator who has crashed his plane. The aviator who wants to continue flying goes up again just as soon as he can. The public speaker who wants to continue speaking should find another occasion to perform just as soon as he can. Obviously, there is much less real danger repeated performance for the public speaker than there is for the aviator.

SPEECH PREPARATION:

Determine general purpose

The first part of speech preparation involves focusing on your topic and determining the general purpose for giving the speech or presentation in the first place. This process usually begins when you are asked to make a speech or presentation about some topic in which you have a certain level of knowledge or expertise. Once you have agreed to speak, determine your general purpose. Will you be informing your listeners? Persuading or convincing them?

Once you have determined your general purpose, you can begin your focus by tailoring it to fit the particular interests of your listeners and by narrowing it to fit the time limit available to you. The three main categories of speeches are:

1. **Speeches to Inform:** Here the general purpose is to teach your listeners new information. In short, you want them to know more about your topic after your speech than they did before hand.
2. **Speeches to persuade:** Persuasive speeches are designed to intensify or change listener's attitudes beliefs, or behaviour patterns.
3. **Speeches to Entertain:** Speeches to entertain are given simply for the enjoyment and relaxation of the listeners. They are frequently delivered as after-dinner speeches.

Analyse your audience:

Audience analysis begins with a series of questions designed to probe the relationship between the needs of your intended audience and your own goals and purposes as a speaker.

From a practical standpoint, your best opportunity to analyse your audience is not immediately before or during the speech, but rather at the time you are asked to address a particular group. Be sure to ask your invitee (or be sure you already know) the answers to the following questions:

- ◆ About how many persons will be in attendance?
- ◆ What will be the gender composition of my audience?
- ◆ If the speech purpose is to persuade or convince, what are my prospective listeners' attitudes about my topic?
- ◆ What about the age of my listeners? Will there be a mixture?
- ◆ What will be the level of formal education among my listeners?
- ◆ Will my audience be a highly specialized one?

Focus on your specific purpose:

Once you have determined your general topic and analyzed your audience, you are ready to focus on the specific purpose of your speech. The specific purpose is precisely what you want your listeners to know, think, believe, or do as a result of hearing your speech. Therefore, the easiest way to focus in on your specific purpose is to write out a single sentence in which you state as clearly what you want your listeners to know, believe, think, or do by the time your speech is over. This is called a purpose sentence. It will serve as a master guide by which you will write down all the details of your speech outline.

As you develop your speech purpose, also keep in mind the time limit available for the presentation. Some topics may be too broad for brief speech and will need to be pared down; ordinarily it is preferable to treat a limited topic in depth rather than to provide a shallow or sketch treatment of a broader subject.

Researching your Topic

One of the most difficult and time-consuming tasks in speech preparation is finding solid sources of support with which to inform or persuade your audience. Researching the topic involves determining what types of support for the information you need to back up the claims or opinions you plan to present in your speech, searching the library and using other valuable sources of support for the information you need, and recording the evidence you find in your search.

Recording the evidence

As you discover facts, statistics, testimony, and other forms of support for your speech, be sure to write them down. Even though you may not be certain you will use a particular piece of evidence in your speech record it and the source from where you discovered it anyway.

It is best to establish a consistent system for recording the speech evidence. Most speakers prefer to take their notes on 3" X 5" cards, recording only one item of information on each card. These can be arranged later in the best order for presentation and are easy to handle on the platform.

Constructing the Outline:

A good outline can be likened to a tree without leaves. All the basics are present in a tree – the base (the purpose sentence), the necessary support (the main heads), and the division into branches (the sub-heads). The leaves represent the full sentences you add when you actually make the presentation.

Purpose Sentence:

If your speech outline is to have any order to it, you must clearly know what your purpose is in making the speech. The best way to begin a clear speech outline is by writing at the top of your outline the purpose sentence you selected earlier. Remember the purpose sentence states exactly what you hope to accomplish by giving the speech.

Main Heads:

The major divisions of a speech outline are referred to as the main heads. Main heads are designated with Roman numerals – I, II, III, and so on. Ordinarily the fewer the main divisions you make of your topic the better. In fact, most speeches have just two or three main heads, although there are some exceptions to the rule.

Sub Heads:

Subheads relate to main heads in the same manner that heads relate to the purpose sentence. They sub-divide each main head into parallel and approximately equal parts. Sub-heads are designated by capital letters – A, B, C, and so on.

REHEARSING YOUR SPEECH

Rehearsal is the crowning point of your speech preparation. Nothing can take the place of thorough practice, and if well done, rehearsal can put you in top form for a successful speech. One or two brief run-through does not constitute thorough rehearsal. Start preparing your speech well before the speaking date and allow time for several rehearsal sessions. Rehearsal that is crammed into one evening is far less effective than three or four rehearsal sessions on successive nights.

In order to prepare yourself maximally for a speech you must progress through several rehearsal stages, developing gradually from the stage in which ideas are simply listed on your outline to the point where they are firmly implanted in your mind. Since people's brains work subconsciously on such ideas between rehearsal sessions, you need to find the time or place for well-spaced rehearsals if you are to have total command of the speech material.