

# Audition Workshop

## Tips for Coping With Stage Fright

1. If you want to talk (or sing, act, etc.), **you have to breathe**. And if you want to do these things calmly, you'll need to breathe diaphragmatically. This won't always come naturally, and you'll probably need to practice. You might think you already know everything there is to know about breathing, and if you're a professional singer you probably do. But everybody else, be sure to take a look at the breathing material.
2. Remind yourself that they're not here to see or hear you, unless you're a very famous person, or your mother's in the audience. They're just here to see the person who's playing/performing this piece or talking about this topic. Today that happens to be you. That's not really important to them in most circumstances.
3. **Expect, and accept, that you will feel anxious**, especially at first. That's OK. If you allow yourself to work with the anxiety, not against it, you'll be able to calm down and proceed. If you resist the anxiety, you'll make more trouble for yourself.
4. Take the emotions and passion you feel for your subject or artistic expression and **channel it into your performance**. Don't try to "hold it down". If you try to suppress it, it will work against you. Express it!
5. Establish the right **focus** for your task. What do I mean by focus? I mean what you're paying attention to as you engage in your performance. This, unlike the other four tips above, will vary depending on what kind of performance you're engaged in.
  - \* If you are giving a talk, your focus should be your material and the audience reaction to it, because your task is to inform or persuade them. You therefore want to be aware of how they are responding, so that you can connect with them in various ways.
  - \* Establish contact with the audience through eye contact and talking directly to them. Ask them questions to get them involved in your talk (i.e., How many of you here have ever had this experience...?) While your natural instinct will probably be to avoid the audience as much as possible, just like the reviewer cited above, you will actually feel less anxiety once you get the audience involved with you.
  - \* If your task is a performance art, your focus will be different. It's not your job to persuade or inform the audience. **You want to perform a piece for their enjoyment. In this case, you can ignore the audience**, and turn your focus to your music, or your character, and leave the audience to enjoy your performance on their own.
  - \* **Where you don't want your focus to be is on yourself and your anxiety**. This is why it's so useful to develop an accepting attitude toward the anxiety, to take a few steps to calm yourself a little, and then shift your focus to the task at hand.

## How to cure stage fright: The science behind public speaking.

POSTED BY MIKAEL CHO (Edited by Sarah Tye)

Palms sweaty. Heart racing. You know the feeling. Whether it's five people or fifty, public speaking is a gut-wrenching experience for many of us. The reality is, if you're planning on presenting pretty much anything in your life (which you most likely will), you'll need to be able to effectively communicate your ideas in front of at least a few people.

To get over my fear of public speaking, I realized a good place to start would be to understand why I was getting stage fright in the first place.

### What is stage fright, really?

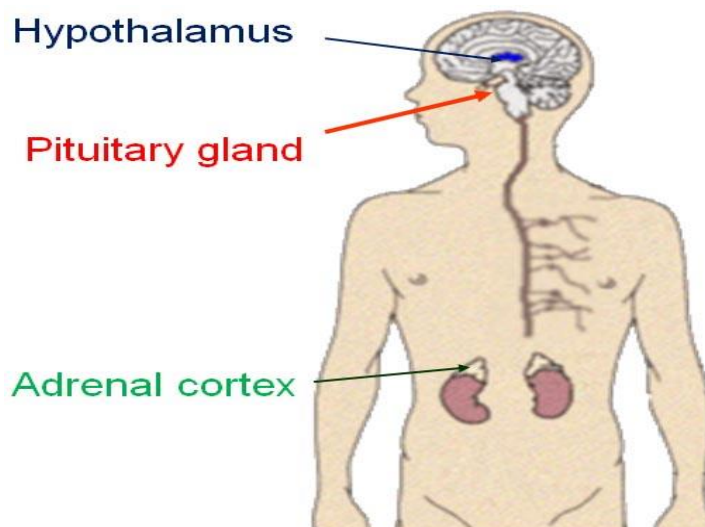
Sometimes, even weeks before a presentation, I would think, 'What happens if people think I suck or someone thinks I don't know what I'm talking about?'

As humans, we're hardwired to worry about our reputation above almost all things. There are primitive parts of your brain that control your reaction to threats on your reputation, making these reactions extremely difficult to control.

These reactions to threats are precisely what Charles Darwin tested when he visited a snake exhibit at a zoo in London. Darwin tried to remain perfectly calm while putting his face as close to the glass as possible in front of a puff adder snake that was ready to strike.

However, every time the snake would lunge toward him, he would grimace and jump backward. Darwin wrote his findings in his diary,

He concluded that his response to fear was an ancient reaction that has not been effected by nuances in modern civilization. This response is known as the 'fight or flight syndrome,' a natural process that is designed to protect your body from harm.



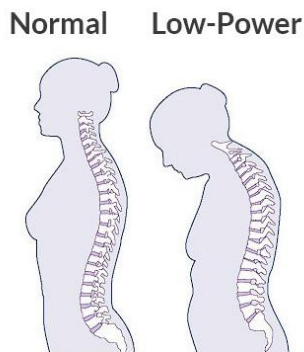
### What happens in our brain

When you think about negative consequences, a part of your brain, the hypothalamus, activates and triggers the pituitary gland to secrete the hormone ACTH.

This hormone stimulates the Adrenal Glands in your kidneys and results in the release of adrenaline into your blood.

It is at this point in the process when many of us experience the reactions of this process.

Your neck and back muscles contract (forcing your head down and your spine to curve) moving your posture into a slouch. This results in a low-power position as your body tries to force itself into the fetal position:



If you try to resist this position by pulling your shoulders back and lifting your head up, your legs and hands shake as the muscles in your body instinctively prepare for an impending attack.

Your blood pressure increases and your digestive system shuts down to maximize efficient delivery of even more nutrients and oxygen to your vital organs. When your digestive system shuts down, this is what leads to the feeling of dry mouth or butterflies.

Even your pupils dilate, which makes it hard to read anything up close (like presenter notes) but improves long range visibility, making you more aware of your audience's facial expressions.

## Your experience of stage fright is also affected by 3 main things:

### 1. Genes

Genetics play a huge role in how strong your feelings of anxiety are in social situations. For instance, even though John Lennon performed on stage thousands of times, he was known for throwing up before going on stage for his live performances.

Some people are simply genetically wired to feel more scared when performing or speaking in public.

### 2. Level of task mastery

We've all heard the saying, 'practice makes perfect.' The main benefit of practice is to increase your familiarity of a given task. As this familiarity increases, feelings of anxiety decrease, and have less of a negative impact on performance.

In other words, the anxiety you feel about speaking in public will be less, the more comfortable you feel with your presentation.

To support these findings, in 1982, a team of psychologists watched pool players play alone or in front of crowd. The study found that:

*Stronger pool players sank more shots when performing in front of a crowd, while poor pool players performed worse. Interestingly, the stronger pool players performed even better when people were watching them versus when they were playing alone.*

What this means is if you know your presentation inside out, it's more likely that you'll give an even better presentation in front of a large audience than when you rehearsed alone or in front of a friend.

### 3. Stakes

If you're giving a presentation where your business is on the line or the whole nation is watching you speak, there's an increased chance that your reputation could be massively damaged if you screw up.

As the stakes increase, there's a chance your reputation could be completely ruined if you perform poorly, which triggers the release of more adrenaline, and can result in paralyzing fear and anxiety.

We've seen the effect of stakes on reputation in online communities as well. For example, many eBay sellers worry about their reputation a ton because it directly effects how much money they make. One piece of negative feedback can ruin an eBay seller's profile and cause them to lose sales.

Having a good reputation is important to protect but, this also leads to having a fear that one slip-up could ruin your reputation and cause the loss of future opportunities.

### How I learned to cure stage fright: A 4-step guide

So now that we know the root causes of why public speaking is scary, here's what you can do to dramatically improve and overcome your on-stage jitters.

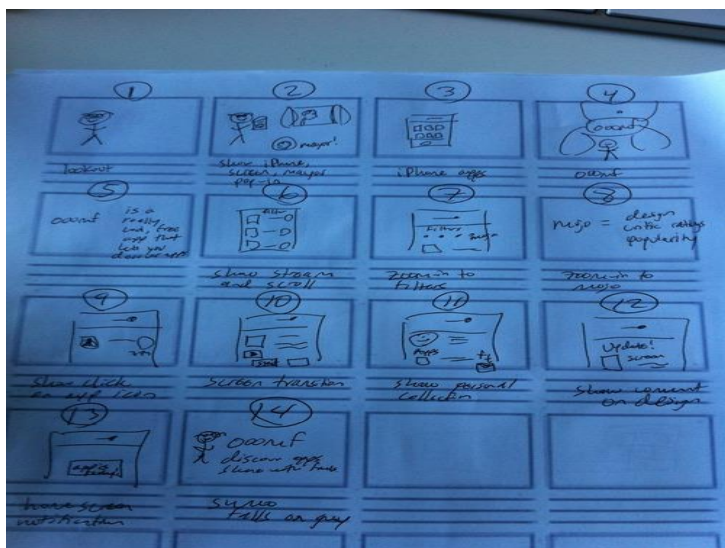
#### 1. Preparation

I've been to many conferences where I see speakers organizing slides a few minutes before their talk. That's not the optimal way to prepare for a quality performance. Would you see a musician learning their song 10 minutes before going on stage to perform it? No way.

This way of preparation is also not fair to your audience who is giving the next 10, 20, or 60 minutes of their attention to you.

When I'm preparing to give a presentation or a talk at a conference, here's my process:

About a week before, I draw out a storyboard of about 15-20 slides, thinking over the content using stick figures or a few words that I may put on my slides. Here's one of my storyboards:



Creating this storyboard helps me feel comfortable that I know the major points I want to cover and still leaves me plenty of time to rehearse and perfect slides.

I then layout my talk like this:

- introduction
- main topic 1
- point
- example (something unique from my experience)
- point (with key actionable take away)

- main topic 2
- point
- example (something unique from my experience)
- point (with key actionable take away)
- main topic 3
- point
- example (something unique from my experience)
- point (with key actionable take away)
- conclusion

Formatting your talk in this 'point, example, point' format not only helps you visualize your entire presentation but also allows you to think deeply about the subject matter you're covering so you don't leave your audience wanting more.

I start by filling in each main topic point first and then skip back to the introduction and finish with the conclusion.

When working on the introduction, I start with a story that covers who I am and why the audience should care about my talk. Tell your audience right away how you are going to help them so they tune in.

I then rehearse each of these individual parts (introduction, main topic 1, main topic 2, etc.) between 5-10 times each.

Once that's done, I recite the presentation content from start to finish at least 10 times.

This might seem like a lot of preparation but keep in mind, Steve Jobs was known to rehearse for hundreds of hours and prepare weeks in advance for his epic Apple keynote presentations.

## **2. How to practice like it's the real thing**

It's important while preparing your presentation to setup your environment in the same way you plan on giving your actual presentation. This removes unknown variables and requires you to spend less mental energy thinking about details when you're on stage for the actual presentation.

In 2009, a group of MIT researchers found that when there are many visual stimulants in front of you, only one or two things tend to get activated in the brain, indicating that we're really only able to focus on one or two items.

You want to get to a point where all you have to focus on is connecting with the audience and enhancing the delivery of your story, rather than worrying about what slide is coming up next or where you need to stand on stage.

When I'm rehearsing, I set up my computer on the same side it will be during the actual presentation, I use the same clicker, and deliver my presentation every time as if it were the real thing.

Another tip to help prepare for unknown variables is to say your presentation in front of someone or at least record yourself to replicate the effect of someone watching you. This will help you feel less anxious

when you get up in public, knowing that you've already said your presentation in front of at least one person.

### 3. Breath, stretch, and let it go.

The most nerve-racking part of public speaking for me is always those last few minutes before heading on stage. What I do to combat those feelings is I head into the bathroom, stretch my arms up, and take three deep breaths in and out. Here's how this stretch looks:



This exercise activates the hypothalamus, and sends out hormones to trigger a relaxation response.

In fact, researchers tested a single session of slow breathing on 46 trained musicians and the results of the study found that one session of slow breathing helped control arousal, especially for musicians that had high levels of anxiety.

The feelings associated with stage fright are usually the strongest during the lead-up to the presentation rather than during it, so take a minute to breath and stretch before heading out on stage.

### 4. After you present, book another speaking engagement right away

If you want to get better at public speaking, you have to do it more. Each time you speak, you will get less nervous and more comfortable.

At first, try to book speaking engagements that have lower stakes. For example, maybe it's a presentation to your family members about the importance of taking a vacation. Anything to help you rehearse the behavior of getting up and speaking in front of people.

Public speaking can be scary but it's a necessary part of almost every career. Hopefully, knowing why stage fright happens and using these tips on how to overcome it will help you own your next presentation.

## Audition Tips:

1. **Confidence:** It sounds simple but it takes practice. Walk in the door with your head high. Be wary of shuffling feet. You don't get sympathy points if you're nervous, not feeling well, or having a bad day. Leave it outside the door. You are being sized up the minute you walk in, so practice good posture and body language before you arrive. And don't forget to smile – that's the lasting impression you want to leave.

**2. Be prepared:** Being prepared is the best way to ace an audition. An audition is just like a job interview, and you should treat it as such. But what does it mean to be prepared?

Do your research. Who is the director? What else has she directed? Have you read the script? What do you know about your character? How would you play this role? The more questions you can answer about the project, the more empowered you'll be in the audition. Practice makes perfect: Have you memorized your material? (See the Play Study and Character Development file above for memorizing and acting tips). Have you made thoughtful acting choices? Did you rehearse it over and over again? The more you practice, the more empowered you'll be in the audition.

**3. Be professional:** Directors like working with people who work hard and are trustworthy. Dress and compose yourself like a professional.

**4. Take care of yourself:** As an actor, your best assets are yourself - your body, your voice and your mind. Exercise, eat well, keep yourself healthy, practice your performance skills, read and learn about your craft as much as possible. It's obvious at an audition which actors take good care of themselves and are continually learning.

**5. Choose appropriate material:** Choose a song and a monologue that fit you - your age, your looks, your best strengths and abilities. If you are a 17 year old boy, don't choose a monologue spoken from the perspective of a depressed 65 year old actress who can't let go of the past. It won't make sense, and doesn't fit you. Choose carefully.

**6. If you make a mistake, battle through it:** You will make a mistake at some point in your audition. You'll forget a line, your voice will crack on that high note or you'll rush through that beat that you told yourself you'd take. It's OK. No performance you do will be 100% perfect. The director wants to see you keep going. Every word you speak, every moment you have in performance is another chance to perform to the best of your ability. When you make a mistake, take a deep breath and keep going. You've got this.

**7. Don't be over-confident:** Re-read #1. Then don't overdo it. Divas are no fun to work with. A theatre production is a team effort, and everyone needs to be ready and willing to work as part of a team. Be friendly, listen well and be willing to try.

**8. If you don't get the part of you want, be gracious and don't argue:** The decisions about who to cast and who we have to say "no" to are not always easy. There is a lot of discussion about who does and who does not get a role. If the director decides that you are not the best fit for this show, or that you are best suited to a different role than the one you wanted, please respect their decision about what they feel is best for the show they are directing. It doesn't

always mean that you had a bad audition, or that you're not a good actor. It just means that you were not the best actor for this part in this show.

Arguing leave a bad impression on the people that cast the shows. You will not change anyone's mind. All it does is make it more difficult for the director and producers to cast you in a future production.

That being said, it is appropriate to ask what you could do to improve so you have a better chance of getting into future shows (although I will probably redirect you back to this list). If you follow the advice in this article list, you will continue to improve!

### **Audition demonstration: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly**

Watch each of the following auditions and make notes on what each person did well, and what didn't go so well.

**Audition #1:**

**Audition #2:**

**Audition #3:**