

PRESENTING & PUBLIC SPEAKING TIPS

Managing Anxiety & Nerves

You Are In Good Company

Feeling nervous or anxious about speaking in front of other people, no matter if it is 2 or 200, is super common. In fact, many behavior analysts who are excellent public speakers experience discomfort related to public speaking.

Practice Under Relevant Conditions

Practice under conditions that mimic the problematic public speaking context. If you hate standing at a podium or with a microphone, practice in similar contexts. If public speaking produces specific physical sensations for you (e.g., increased heart rate, sweaty palms) try to bring about those sensations before or during your practice. You could practice while jogging on the treadmill or sitting in the sauna at the gym.

Lock Down First & Last 5 Minutes

Because nerves and anxiety are usually the most present just before we start and for the first several minutes of presenting, it can be helpful to memorize and get very fluent with the first 5 minutes of your presentation. This allows you to start strong. After the first 5 minutes you are likely to hit your stride and relax a bit. It can also be helpful to memorize the last few minutes so that you are sure to end strong too!

Arrive Early

Relax and don't exert yourself. Engaging in moderate to high levels of physical activity will produce physiological changes (e.g., increased heart rate, breathing, body temperature) that you will likely tact as anxiety. So, arrive with enough time to just chill and take some deep breaths. This also allows you to test out technology (e.g., laptop connection, remote slide advancer, audio or video, internet connection) and trouble shoot any issues.

Engage in Competing or Alternative Responses

Try engaging in some competing or alternative responses. Take some slow deep breaths to slow your heart rate. Listen to music, talk to other presenters or audience members, or calmly walk around the room and silently tact the things you see and hear help quiet nervous thoughts. If you find yourself feeling nervous or anxious, flip the script! Tact those feelings as EXCITEMENT!

Helpful article

Heinicke, M. R., Juanico, J. F., Valentino, A. L., & Sellers, T. P. (2022). Improving behavior analysts' public speaking: Recommendations from expert interviews. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, 15(1), 203-218.