

# Public speaking for the terrified



## Overcoming the jitters

It is perfectly normal to feel nervous if you have to give a presentation, a pitch, or speak to a group of experts. As a trainer, I sometimes still get stage fright, but I worry more about this not happening; a touch of nerves keeps us on our toes, shows we care about our audience, and take pride in what we do.

There are plenty of ways to counteract nervous feelings, such as deep breathing exercises, positive visualisation, relaxation techniques, and so on. All of these are very helpful, but it doesn't take us right to the root of the problem. It's a bit like taking a painkiller for a toothache; that masks the problem and gives temporary relief, but it doesn't cure it.

Confidence will be built up in time with practice, and while that's great to know, it doesn't necessarily help you right now, this minute. You're practicing your presentation, the nerves are kicking in, and you can't wait for it all to be over and done with. That's a shame really; public speaking can be an enormously rewarding experience.

So, let's not just mask the problem; we're going to get to the causes.

That starts with a change in attitude.

## The two culprits that cause the jitters

**Negative internal dialogue  
and  
Hyper responsibility**

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## Understand your jitters

Internal negative comments can nag speakers when they begin to think about the presentation. ("I wonder how I'll come across this time? Last time I made a presentation, I was sure everyone was amused when I had so much trouble with the equipment.")

The other source of anxiety comes from hyper-responsibility. Have you ever felt that you have sole responsibility for the well being of everyone in the room? If so, that's quite a responsibility you're heaping onto your own shoulders.

You believe in what you're saying. You know your stuff. You're prepared. In fact, for this presentation, you're the only person who is so well prepared. Your audience needs to know what you have to say. This is a great position to be in, so you need to be able to make the most of it!

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*You know your subject and people have come to hear you speak. Let those thoughts energise you rather than intimidate you*

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### Stay in control

Allow plenty of time to check out the room and equipment.

Start on time. Unless the decision maker in your audience is delayed, don't wait for latecomers. Delaying will make you and your audience twitchy.

Greet people as they come in. Chat with people you know until it's time to start.

Eliminate any physical barriers that stand between the audience and you. If you're behind a table or lectern, move away from it. Don't cling to the podium and if you're using notes, try not to hug them too tightly ☺.

Enjoy yourself. Really.

## Now beat the jitters

Change the words you say to yourself from negative messages to more positive ones. List your concerns before the presentation. Then, for every negative message, substitute a positive one. For instance, if your negative message is, "I'm a nervous wreck," write, "I can turn this into positive nervous energy for my presentation and give a better performance." You may have to tell yourself this a few times, but it really works.

The second kind of nervousness (taking responsibility for everyone in the room) can also be overcome. Come to terms with the fact that everyone in the room will not necessarily accept your ideas. It's not your job to please everyone; none of us can do that. Your job is to get your communication across in clearly understandable terms to the people who must have the information. Concentrate on the decision maker and on those who respond positively to you. Forget the others.

I'm going to let you into a secret here as my final thought. I am extremely shy and my jitters used to get the better of me. But not any more. I survive my job as a trainer because I use these techniques; and yes, confidence really does come with practice. However, if you turn your negative beliefs into positive ones, you won't have to wait for your confidence to grow.

Best of luck with your next presentation!

## Where can I learn more?

Contact [paula@6thlevel.co.uk](mailto:paula@6thlevel.co.uk) and we can help you with your team's public speaking and presentation skills.