



# COPING WITH PUBLIC SPEAKING ANXIETY

The most important thing to remember when coping with anxiety is that even the most experienced public speaker is nervous before a presentation. However, the experienced public speaker also knows that nerves are not your enemy! In fact, being nervous can work to your advantage, giving you an added boost of energy.

## **Before the Presentation:**

- If possible, pick a topic that interests you. This sounds obvious but does make a difference.
- Consider the format. If a question & answer format is more comfortable for you than a formal presentation, structure your presentation as a series of questions you can answer.
- Prepare note cards or an outline with main ideas, transitions, and important arguments. Use these notes when practicing to get familiar with them. (Number your cards.)
- Practice, Practice, Practice! If you know the material really well, you won't be as worried about making a mistake.
- Ask your friends to listen to you give your presentation:
  - In addition to feedback on delivery, this can give you feedback on the clarity of your ideas.
  - If the person who is listening to you doesn't know how to give you feedback, ask them specific questions about your presentation or tell them ahead of time what you want them to listen for.
- Give your presentation out loud in your room or, if you can, practice in the room in which you will be presenting.
- Wear appropriate, yet comfortable clothes.
- If you are going to be wearing clothes that you are not used to wearing (heels or a suit), then practice the presentation in those clothes.
- If you know that when you are nervous you play with your jewelry, don't wear it. Wear your hair pulled back if you tend to play with it.
- Your clothes should not call too much attention to themselves.
- Picture yourself succeeding—think positively!

## **Mental Preparation and Tips:**

- Arrive in time to get organized so that you don't feel rushed when you get up to talk.
- Sometimes it helps to start with a question. Getting an initial reaction may help you relax.
- Using humor or wit can often relax you as much as the audience.
- Boost your confidence by making eye contact with people you know or who look interested.
- Don't worry about trying to please everyone. Remember that just because someone looks bored doesn't mean you are at fault.
- In class presentations, remember that your fellow students are rooting for you. They too will have to give a presentation and will understand your anxiety.
- Most of all remember that even if you are nervous no one needs to know. Don't call attention to your nervousness. Look confident and, when appropriate, keep smiling!
- Remind yourself that students want to hear what you've been researching or studying. This adds to your authority and confidence.

## **Physical Preparation and Tips:**

- Take a deep breath before you go to the front of the room. And remember to breathe during the presentation. Many symptoms of anxiety are the body's reaction to not getting enough oxygen.
- If your mouth gets dry, bite on the tip of your tongue to salivate.
- Act naturally, especially in a classroom oral presentation where you can feel free to be more informal and not hide your personality.
- Gestures are natural so go ahead and use them, but don't use gestures that give away your nervousness, such as wringing your hands.
- If you start to tremble, make a gesture to loosen up your body.
- Remember the power of the silent pause. If you lose your place or start to stumble, don't say, "Excuse me" or "Oh, I forgot." Chances are that no one will notice your mistake unless you point it out. The best things to do are pause and gather your thoughts. Pauses also give your audience an opportunity to process the information you just presented.