

U4Ch2. Managing stage fright and overcoming anxiety in public speaking

PAPER 01 — Communicative Skills

Unit 4 · Public Speaking & Presentation Skills

Chapter 2 · Managing Stage Fright & Overcoming Anxiety in Public Speaking

1 Understanding Stage Fright

Aspect	Key Points	Practical Implication
Definition	Stage fright (glossophobia) is the <i>anticipatory fear</i> of speaking before an audience.	Knowing it is common normalises the sensation.
Physiology	Triggers the body's "fight-or-flight" cascade: ↑ heart rate, dry mouth, shaky hands, blank mind.	Physical techniques can target these symptoms directly.
Psychology	Rooted in fear of negative evaluation, perfectionism, past embarrassment, or unfamiliar settings.	Cognitive strategies address these thought patterns.
Prevalence	Surveys show 70-75 % of adults experience moderate-to-high speaking anxiety.	You are not alone—shared experience reduces self-judgment.

Mind-Shift Mini-Mantra

"Nerves are *energy*. I can channel them into *focus*."

2 Myths vs. Facts

Myth	Reality	Reframe
Only shy people get stage fright.	Extroverts can suffer equally; adrenaline is universal.	Skill, not personality, governs control.
Good speakers feel no anxiety.	They <i>manage</i> it with practice.	Aim for mastery of nerves , not elimination.
Visible symptoms ruin credibility.	Audience often misreads signs as passion or enthusiasm.	Focus on message over microscopic self-analysis.
Memorising every word removes fear.	Rigid scripts increase slip-up panic.	Internalise key ideas, allow natural wording.

3 Comprehensive Toolkit for Anxiety Management

3.1 Long-Term Conditioning (Weeks-Days Before)

Technique	How To Do It	Outcome
Systematic Desensitisation	Gradually expose yourself: speak to mirror → friend → small group → larger audience.	Nervous system habituates; fear curve flattens.
Cognitive Re-framing	List catastrophic thoughts → write realistic alternatives ("They'll judge me" → "They want insights").	Reduces rumination, builds self-efficacy.
Content Mastery	Over-prepare research; rehearse with varied question drills.	Confidence in knowledge weakens fear trigger.



Technique	How To Do It	Outcome
Lifestyle Support	Regular exercise, consistent sleep, limited caffeine/alcohol pre-event.	Balanced neurochemistry moderates anxiety peaks.
Visualization	Daily 5-minute mental movie of successful delivery: vivid sights, sounds, applause.	Brain “pre-lives” success; lowers novelty shock.

3.2 Immediate Pre-Presentation (60-5 Minutes Before)

Step	Goal	Specific Actions
Venue Familiarization	Shrink unknowns.	Walk stage, test mic & clicker, note audience sight-lines.
Body Warm-Up	Release muscle tension.	Shoulder rolls, neck stretches, “power stance” for 2 min.
Breath Control	Lower heart rate & steady voice.	Box breathing: inhale 4 s → hold 4 s → exhale 4 s → hold 4 s (repeat x5).
Positive Self-Talk	Replace doubt loops.	Cue phrase on phone wallpaper: “Message > Nerves.”
Hydration & Voice Prep	Prevent dry mouth/cracks.	Sip lukewarm water; gentle hum on descending scale.

3.3 On-Stage Execution

Trigger Sign	Counter-Move
Mind blank	Glance at keyword card; pause, breathe, re-state thesis.
Voice quiver	Slow pace, elongate exhalation, emphasise consonants.
Hand shake	Gesture with purposeful open palms; hold remote lightly.
Rapid heartbeat	Plant feet hip-width, shift weight slowly, resume box breath.
Audience frown	Ask an engaging question, affirm feedback: “Is the pace good so far?”

“Reset Button” Mini-Routine (≈10 seconds)

1. Pause.
- 2) Smile & sip water.
- 3) Scan friendly face.
- 4) Continue with next bullet.

4 Structured Rehearsal for Anxiety Reduction

1. **Content Rehearsal** — speak *through* outline thrice without slides.
2. **Integrated Rehearsal** — add slides, gestures, transitions; time it.
3. **Stress Simulation** — reproduce pressure: bright lights, camera, small audience, mild distractions (door open/phone buzz).
4. **Feedback Loop** — solicit two “keeps” and two “improves” from listeners.
5. **Micro-Improv Drills** — practise 1-minute ad-lib on random slide to build spontaneity muscle.

5 Cognitive-Behavioural Quick Fixes

Distortion

Replacement Question

- “If I stumble, I’ll look stupid.” “When others stumble, do I judge harshly—or empathise?”
“I must cover everything.” “What are the 3 outcomes my audience truly needs?”
“They’ll notice my nerves.” “Can they read my heartbeat? Unlikely.”

Write distortions on left side of card, rational responses on right; review pre-talk.



6 Leveraging the Audience as Allies

- **Eye-Contact Triangle** - Left → Centre → Right sections; 3-second sweeps foster inclusion and calm.
- **Early Engagement** - Ask a rhetorical question or quick show of hands within first minute; converts listeners into participants.
- **Feedback Beacon** - Identify a nodding, friendly face; return to them when anxiety spikes.

7 Post-Presentation Reflection (Growth Loop)

Step	Tool	Purpose
Immediate debrief	Voice memo of feelings & perceived hiccups	Captures raw data before memory fades
Audience feedback	Quick poll / colleague notes	External viewpoint balances self-critique
Video review	Annotate timestamps of strong & weak moments	Objective evidence of progress
Action plan	1 keep, 1 stop, 1 start for next talk	Incremental improvement sustains momentum

8 Self-Practice Corner

1. **Anxiety Journal** - Track physical symptoms during daily mini-speeches (e.g., explaining a news item to the mirror). Note trigger ↔ response.
2. **Five-Face Drill** - Rehearse while alternating gaze among five objects; trains even eye contact.
3. **Disruption Exercise** - Deliver a paragraph while a friend creates mild distraction (shuffle papers); practise staying composed.
4. **Physio Reset Timer** - Set phone alarm hourly on prep day; perform 1-minute box breathing + stretch.
5. **Positive Reel** - Compile 30-second video montage of your best speaking snippets; watch pre-event.

Chapter Takeaways

- Stage fright is *physiological and psychological*—acknowledge, don't deny.
- Blend **long-term conditioning**, **pre-talk rituals**, and **on-stage counter-moves** for full-spectrum control.
- Rehearsal under simulated stress inoculates you against real pressure.
- Objectively re-frame anxious thoughts; your audience wants you to succeed.
- Convert nerves into *dynamic energy*—they are evidence you care about delivering value.