



FEARLESS PRESENTATIONS[®]

MINI COURSE

7 Presentation Habits that Cause You to Become a
More Nervous Speaker



INTRODUCTION

“Many of the things that people do to reduce fear actually cause fear.”

TERMS

Habit- a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up.

Introduction

Quite often, when we are nervous speaking in front of a group, we do innocent sounding things to help us be less nervous. However, many of the things that people do to reduce public speaking fear actually CAUSE PUBLIC SPEAKING FEAR.

Below are seven of the biggest things that people do to reduce stage fright that are actually more likely to make you nervous. If you feel nervous when you deliver presentations, make sure that you are not doing these things.

In fact, if you eliminate these "crutches", you will likely feel more comfortable right away.

- Writing Your Presentation Word-for-Word
- Designing Your PowerPoint Slideshow First
- Relying on Notes
- Asking for Critiques from Friends/Coworkers
- Practicing Alone
- Videoing Your Presentation and Reviewing It Alone
- Cognitive Dissonance

LESSON 2 / Eliminate these Bad Public Speaking Habits to Reduce Stage Fright

Writing Your Presentation Word-for-Word

One of the biggest (and most common) mistakes that presenters make is writing out their entire presentation word-for-word. Most of us learn this technique in Middle School or High School. Our teacher asks us to write a report or paper.

Then, later, we might be asked to present that paper to the class in an oral report. Of course, the student will nervously read through the presentation. The teachers believe that allowing the student to read the paper will be easier than just telling the class the content. In reality, though, reading a presentation is much more challenging.

First of all, when people read a presentation, it will often sound very, very, very boring. Think about the State of the Union Speeches that you have seen in the past. I'd wager that most of you have never actually watched or listened to an entire State of the Union Speech from start to finish. Why? Because they are often incredibly boring. Another mistake that presenters make when they realize that they can't just go in and read their whole speech is to try to memorize the entire written speech.

This one decision causes more presentation fear than any other. For some reason, we think that if we memorize the speech, we will sound better. That doesn't even make sense. You are saying the same thing, the same way, that you would have if you had the text in front of you. The difference is, though, that if you ever lose your place, your nervousness will increase exponentially.

We write out our presentation to reduce nervousness. However, this presentation habit will likely cause public speaking fear. A better way to design your speech is by identifying just the "most important" items that your audience wants or needs to know. Then, create an outline of these items. You can find a thorough description of how to do this in the post [How to Design Presentations Quickly](#).

LESSON 3 / Designing Your PowerPoint Slideshow First

Designing Your PowerPoint Slideshow First

If you've read many of my blog posts or listened to any of my podcasts, you'll know that I mention this one a lot. This is the absolute BIGGEST mistake that almost everyone who presents (even me on occasion) will commit. We start our preparation by creating the slideshow (or other visual aids). This part of the preparation typically takes longer to complete.

As a result, we will start doing this part way too early in the process. You will save yourself a lot of time and a lot of stress if you figure out what you want to say first. Then, after you have a pretty good presentation, design visual aids to help you explain the content.

A few years ago, I was called in to help a team of engineers practice a group presentation to one of their big clients. The vice president of the engineering firm along with the head of the marketing department made a PowerPoint deck for the entire group. So, they created the slide-deck by receiving input from the other four presenters ahead of time. However, the other four presenters were not intricately involved in the process. So, I arrived in the meeting room, and the presenters were confused and irritated already.

Each of them were trying to say interesting things based on the visual aids that had been pre-created for them. So, they were adapting what they wanted to say to what was on the screen. To be blunt, it was really, really boring. The four speakers who had little control over the slideshow were extremely nervous.

Luckily, I had seen this type of challenge before. So, I had each of the presenters disregard the slideshow temporarily and re-design their actual speaking part. We spent an hour or so re-creating the speech. Then, I had each of them practice their part of the presentation a couple of times. All total, this took about half a day. They all began to feel more comfortable with their speech. Finally, we redesigned the visual aids to help each of the presenters better explain his or her content. Interestingly, a couple of the presenters didn't use a slideshow at all. They chose to use props and posters instead. (These visuals were better for their part of the talk.)

Design your presentation first. Then, figure out what visuals will help you explain the content better.

LESSON 4 / Relying on Notes

Relying on Notes

"I am so nervous. I'm really afraid that I will forget something. I should make some notes for myself..." -- Everyone Who Has Ever Given a Formal Speech
Notes are not your friend!

Don't Rely on Notes When people make mistake #1 above, writing an entire presentation word-for-word, and then trying to memorize the speech, they will feel really uncomfortable. The way that most people will try to ease this tension is to jot down a few notes to refer to. This fix will almost always make the speaker feel more nervous (not less nervous).

When our eyes move down to our paper, we lose contact with the audience. Visual feedback from your audience is an important part of the communication process. When we say something that the audience understands and agrees with, we receive subtle cues from them. Slight nods of the head tell us that the audience is in sync with us. When we read a presentation, though, we are constantly looking away from the audience. We lose connection with them. When we look back up, we will see NONE of those subtle cues anymore. That lack of comfort will slowly (or quickly) grow. As a result, we quickly look to our only source of comfort... Our notes. The process intensifies.

Even if you don't have something as dramatic as this happen, you might still have negative consequences. In our presentation skills classes, we show presenters how to build confidence speaking without having to rely on notes -- at all. Still, though, from time to time, a class member will sneak a note sheet into their final speech. I taught a class on Friday, and one of the class members did this. Of course, the speaker started out strong. The moment that she finished her current thought, though, instead of mentally processing the "what is next?" question, she looked down at her notes.

ation, please register for one of our 2-Day classes. It will do you a world of good.

She actually remembered what was next before her eyes actually got to her notes, though. So, she just quickly glanced down. I doubt that she even read anything on her note page. That habit continued over and over throughout the presentation. When we do this we look like the proverbial drinking bird toy. We are constantly dipping our beak into the water. It looks weird to the audience. The good news, though, is that if you just design your presentation better and design your visual aids better, you don't need notes! Don't fall into the trap of relying on notes. If you feel like you really need to have notes to give a good presentation, please register for one of our 2-Day classes. It will do you a world of good.

LESSON 5 / Asking for Critiques from Friends/Coworkers

"Just about everything
that you have ever
learned about public
speaking is wrong."
-- Doug Staneart

Asking for Critiques from Friends/Coworkers

The first time that I ever said this to a public speaking class, I was really nervous about how the group was going to react. I was afraid that they were going to see me as arrogant. "Oh, so you are the expert, and everyone else is wrong?" Well... as a matter of fact... yeah. By the way, I wouldn't say that "everyone" or "everything" is wrong. But it is pretty high. Most people are taught to do many of the things in this list. They are taught to write their presentations word-for-word and memorize them. They are taught that a slide-show is the speech, not a visual aid. They are taught to slow down their delivery. They are taught to practice over and over... alone. They are taught to picture their audience naked. None of these things actually work.

So, when we ask well-meaning friends, coworkers, or significant others for feedback, they will often give us advice that also doesn't work. In fact, if you ask two people for advice, you might actually get contradictory advice from each.

Every speaker has strengths in communication and every speaker has weaknesses. Your strengths and your coworkers strengths may be really different. Your weaknesses may also be very different. So what works for your friend will often not actually work for you. An example of this is, let's say that your coworker is a high-energy, enthusiastic presenter, but you are more low-key and detailed. If you ask your coworker for advice, he will tell you to cut out a lot of your detailed content and increase your energy. If you did this, you will be actually eliminating the strength that you have and replacing it with your biggest weakness. You will feel really, really uncomfortable.

One of the reasons that the Fearless Presentations® class works so well is that our instructors help each presenter maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. Not maximize your weaknesses and minimize your strengths.

So, take advice from others with a grain of salt.

"You are your own worst critic"

Practicing Alone

You are your own worst critic. When you practice alone (especially in front of a mirror,) you will nitpick every single thing that you do wrong. You will be overly critical of yourself. In addition, when you practice alone, you will not get any feedback from an audience about how well you are communicating. A better way to practice is with a friend or coworker, though.

... Wait, wait, wait, a minute... you just said that friends and coworkers are terrible coaches? Now you want us to practice with them?

Yes, the verbal feedback that friends and coworkers give us can have a negative result. However, the VISUAL FEEDBACK that they give us is vital.

For instance, when we are communicating with someone and they nod their head as we speak, we are getting a visual cue that we have communicated effectively. When we say something that is confusing, we will see that in the face of the listener as well. These visual queue allow us to make appropriate adjustments to our speech. You won't make these adjustments as frequently if you are practicing alone.

It is kind of like practicing a bad golf swing all alone. They say that "Practice make perfect". However, that isn't true. "Practice makes permanent." So, if you practice a bad golf swing over and over, you will get really good at a bad golf swing. If you practice a presentation alone, you will likely get really good at delivering a bad presentation.

So, practice once or twice with at least one person. You will then be able to make appropriate adjustments to the presentation to increase better communication.

LESSON 7 / Videoing Your Presentation and Reviewing It Alone

"You will most likely have an negative reaction to watching yourself on video."

Videoing Your Presentation and Reviewing It Alone

If you video your presentation, you will take everything that we just talked about and intensify it exponentially. Many of my competitors believe that watching yourself on video is the key to a better presentation.

However, I have found that the opposite is true. (Remember, everything that you have ever learned about public speaking is wrong.) When most people see themselves on video, they are often more critical that when they practice alone.

I remember when I was a kid, we used to have cassette recorders. (Yes, I know I am very old.) I remember my brother and I recording songs off the radio so that we wouldn't have to buy them from the record store. We thought that it would be fun to pretend to be the disc jockey in between songs. I remember hearing my voice for the first time. My reaction was, "Who is that little girl speaking?"

My voice when I heard it on tape was TOTALLY different than how I heard it in my head. You will likely do the same. You will, most likely, have a negative reaction to watching yourself on video.

We do use some video feedback in our Fearless Presentations® classes.

However, our instructors are trained to point out the things that you are doing right. So, our instructor is constantly pointing out what a class member is doing well throughout the entire video review. When you review your video alone, you won't get that positive feedback.

Just like in the previous tip, practice once or twice with at least one person. Stay away from video feedback unless you have a trained presentation coach helping you.

LESSON 8 / Cognitive Dissonance

This one is not as common as the earlier ones, but it is the absolute most devastating to a person's confidence. Cognitive Dissonance is when a speaker has a success in front of a group but then believes that it was actually a failure. There was a great article in Psychology Today called Steps to Overcome Public Speaking Anxiety that referenced this challenge. In the article, the author talked about a student who had an extreme view of his success as a speaker. According to the article... One of [the student's] core irrational beliefs was "I MUST do perfectly or else I'm a failure," and "I MUST avoid public rejection for an imperfect performance." This inflexible thinking, even if expressed in different words, can evoke extreme public speaking anxiety.

I see this a lot in the early stages of my classes. One of the techniques that we use in Fearless Presentations® is to make sure that the students have a series of successful presentations. We start with something really simple. Then, when each presenter nails that first speech, we add a little difficulty. We do this over and over, and by the end of the first day, most often, each of the presenters will gain a tremendous amount of confidence. This process works because, as we have a success, the risk of failure drops on the next attempt.

The challenge occurs, though, when a speaker has a success, but the self-image that the person has actually views that success as an actual failure. Mentally, it sounds like, "Okay, I did okay, BUT..." whatever comes after that "but" will diminish the success and confidence of the speaker. "I did okay, but I don't really know any of these people.

- "I won't do as well when I speak in front of my coworkers."
- "I did okay, but this is a class, so the audience wasn't as tough as the audience I might have to speak to."
- "I did okay, but this group is really small. I won't do as well in front of a big group."
- "I did okay, but this audience is nice. My real audiences are mean."

Regardless of what your "but" is it can be very destructive. I've seen people come through my classes and have a tremendous success speaking in front of the group. As soon as they finish, I will compliment them. As I'm complimenting the success, I can see the person subtly shake his/her head back and forth mentally saying the word, "no". In some cases, other class members will see this reaction and jump in with additional compliments.

Sixth Sense Moment However, this all-or-nothing or perfect-or-failure mentality is a thick wall that is difficult to penetrate. As an instructor, I will often just continue to coach the participant so that he/she can have more and more successes. Most often, eventually, the person will begin to see that the presentations that he/she has given already are head-and-shoulders better than most presentations that the person has seen in the business world. When that happens, it is like a dam breaking. All of the sudden a clarity comes over the person.

I like to refer to this moment as the "Sixth Sense" moment. If you ever saw the movie, at the very end of it, there is a realization that is dramatic. All of the sudden, a series of flashbacks occur. Each of these flashbacks that seemed to be true earlier in the movie were actually much different in reality. When that moment is achieved, the confidence grows very, very quickly. If you think that you experience this Cognitive Dissonance, then I would encourage you to register for our two-day Fearless Presentations® class. It is very difficult to overcome this without outside help.



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NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines, similar to standard notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

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