

Tools for Managing Situational Anxiety

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn some tips for managing situational anxiety before your speech.

Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Practice, Practice, Practice
2. Warming Up Before You Present
3. Tap into the Relaxation Response

1. Practice, Practice, Practice

One of the biggest concerns people have about speaking publicly is how they'll sound to others. The easiest way to overcome this is to practice your speech early and often.

The more comfortable you become with the wording, the less you have to worry about in terms of delivery. Practice in front of a mirror or, better yet, record yourself.

Think of all this practice as training camp for the big game. You will want to make note of and analyze things that might be distracting or awkward, often the result of situational anxiety.

2. Warming Up Before You Present

An effective way to shake off the pre-speech jitters is to fight fire with fire. You may already be feeling an increased heart rate and shortness of breath.

Even brief physical activity can help you channel that nervous energy into a knockout performance for your speech. Get your endorphins firing by quickly jogging in place or bouncing on your toes or the balls of your feet.

You will also want to make sure your muscles are loose and limber, particularly those of your face and mouth. Try reciting some tongue twisters to loosen up your tongue and test your articulation. Gently massage your cheeks and jaw to relax your facial muscles.

3. Tap into the Relaxation Response

Dr. Herbert Benson described a series of physical responses you can use to calm the body down as the fear response ratchets the body up.

The key to triggering the **relaxation response** involves activating the following elements:

- Comfortable posture
- Using a mental device, such as thinking or saying a meaningful word or phrase
- A quiet environment
- Deep breathing and passive awareness

Deep breathing is one of the keys to activating the relaxation response. A simple way to achieve this is to close your eyes and try to quiet your mind. Breathe in slowly and deeply for four heartbeats. Hold for a heartbeat or two and then slowly exhale for four heartbeats. Continue for twenty breaths, or until you feel yourself begin to calm down.



TERM TO KNOW

Relaxation Response

A collective term referring to how meditation induces a host of biochemical and physical changes in the body that include changes in metabolism, heart rate, respiration, blood pressure, and brain chemistry; coined by Dr. Herbert Benson in 1975.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned several methods for combatting situational anxiety before a speech.

Practice your speech early and often so that you are as familiar and comfortable as you can be with your wording. **Warm up** your tongue and face by repeating tongue twisters as quickly, correctly, and articulately as you can. Activate your body's natural **relaxation response** by practicing some deep breathing to calm your nerves.

Source: Boundless. "Tools for Managing Situational Anxiety." Boundless Communications Boundless, Invalid Date Invalid Date. Invalid Date. Retrieved 19 May. 2017 from

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