

Faculty Best Practices for Public Speaking and Presentation Preparation

The first rule of thumb, remember that some of your students hate the idea of public speaking. They have been conditioned to think of it as a performance, much like theater. Surely, we can all agree that standing and speaking in front of people and having many eyes on you, can take you out of your comfort zone. It is no wonder that students fear getting up in front of their professors and peers, especially with technology today since most of our conversations are done via text or on our phones where we don't see the person. Perhaps your student has no problem speaking up in class, but once it's for a grade and they want to impress you, their internal fear builds. There are 3 main reasons, in no ranked order: fear of failure, lack of knowledge, and audience reception.

Things you can do to help combat:

Fear of Failure

- Tell them to interpret symptoms of their fears as normal, and to not perceive them as eminent disasters and predictors of disaster but as signs that you are ready.
- Share some info on fear of public speaking and symptoms that are completely normal: sweaty palms, dry mouth, heart rate up, weak knees, shaky hands, shortness of breath, queasy tummy.
- Remind them that flight, fight, or fright lower brain responses mean very little in the BIG picture of things. We can use that energy to be more engaging. Realizing you can be an effective speaker even with anxiety is key to most performance studies. Let them know that the first 30 secs are the hardest.
- Communicate with your students that you understand their fears. Validate them. Assure them you are on their side. Help them find strategies to combat their nerves.

Audience Reception

- Make talking/engaging in a class expectation. The more students feel that they can ask/engage in your class and be accepted, the more comfortable they become speaking. Find ice breakers or other exercises that put them at ease.
- Remind them that no points will ever be taken off for being nervous or showing their anxiety. The only time they should lose points is if they tell the audience they are unhappy about giving a speech or if they "self-talk" during the speech.
- Tell them that your notetaking can be positive on suggestions on how to improve, not punitive marks or criticisms.
- Have them share that EVERYONE is cheering for one another and that their imagined consequences of ridicule from class only worsen the symptoms. No one wants to see another person fail or do poorly. The reality is that your classmates are as nervous and want you to do well.

- Tell them to not view their presentation/speech as performance, but as human communication. Perceive the audience as listeners, not critics— you will see how quickly anxiety decreases.

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Feeling a Lack of Knowledge

- Remind them the more prepared they are, the lower the anxiety. Practicing is *not* optional. Do NOT expect to stand up without preparation. No one does...no actor, comedian, athlete, or successful person just “wings it.”
- Help them with picking topics that they are passionate about to lessen their fears.
- Have checkpoints throughout the outlining and planning stages that you give feedback to encourage them and show them they are gaining knowledge and getting better.
- Help them understand that there is a structure to every presentation and speech.
- Remind them to know as much as they can about their topic. They will never know everything, but they should be confident enough to speak about it.

General Tips

- Remind them to breathe and be mindful of it. Stand up straight and confident. Posture and proper breathing reduce anxiety.
- Visualize successfully presenting their content and getting a standing ovation.
- Use tools to reduce audience attention on you such as PowerPoints, show and tell objects to pass around handouts, and video clips.

Over 50% of the population shares a fear of public speaking. The goal is to *not* completely get rid of the fear but to channel that energy positively. As their guide to being successful young adults, you can be the catalyst to make or break their future by presenting and communicating publicly.