

5 EASY PREPARATION TIPS TO REDUCE STAGE FRIGHT



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If you're like most people, you experience some jitters around the idea of public speaking. These 5 steps won't make your nerves disappear completely, but they will make your life on stage A LOT easier.

1. Rehearse your links:

You don't need to know your speech word for word. You don't need to spend hours rehearsing every day either. All you really need is to know which points to hit when. But you need to know that backwards. Make sure you have very clear, logical links from one point to the next. Practice them out of order to make sure it's a logical link, not a memorized one. If the links have a logical progression it doesn't matter how blank your mind goes you will never get lost. You don't need to hold the whole speech in your head from beginning to end, all you need to know is the very next step.

2. Read aloud daily:

Or at least read aloud every day for the week leading up to your speech. Read from a newspaper or a book you've never read before, so that you're seeing the words for the first time as you're reading them (actors call this a "cold read"). It doesn't need to be much, half a page will do. Reading aloud is magical, the most important thing it does is speed up the brain-mouth connection. If you ever feel like your brain is going a mile a minute and your mouth stumbles trying to keep up, this is a great way to smooth out those bumps.

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The other great thing that reading aloud does (providing you're reading something that is well written) is that it actually improves your vocabulary and grammar. You're essentially training the language part of your brain. Reading aloud daily will not only help you feel more comfortable in a performance setting, but it will help ease the overall flow of your speech patterns.

3. Add a pencil:

If you know you are prone to stumbling, stuttering or speaking too fast, put a pencil between your teeth when reading aloud. Of course, the aim of the exercise is to sound like you DON'T have a pencil in your mouth. Once your muscles become used to perfect diction around a pencil, speaking normally will seem a breeze in comparison. Another great trick is to read your speech with a pencil in your mouth. If there are any words groups that are particularly difficult to get your mouth around you may want to reword that section to avoid tripping over them on stage.

4. Wear unrestrictive clothing:

And don't wear anything brand new. Just like you want your mouth to be familiar with the shape of the words you are going to use, you also want your body to be familiar with the clothes you are wearing, the size of the stage and the way you are standing. You don't need any surprises or distractions when you're strutting your stuff. You want to be able to gesticulate and breath freely. Wear something that looks good, but also something that allows movement and that you feel comfortable in. If you usually wear high heels make sure you wear a pair you know how to walk in.

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and make sure the heel isn't too high. If you are already high up you don't want any extra wobbliness.

5. Chat during set up:

Half of what is so scary about being on stage is that you're not used to it. How can something you never do in your normal life feel easy? Get to the venue early and stand on the stage. Walk around and get to know it. More importantly chat to people who are in the auditorium. Chat to the person setting up the sound, bring a friend and get them to ask you questions on your subject. Avoid the temptation to “perform” this is less about rehearsing and more about making the stage your home. Talk to them like you would on the street, notice how natural it feels. This practice will also help break down some of the “us – them” mentality that comes from standing on a separate level to your audience. There are of course many other habits you can build to reduce stage fright, these are just a few of my favourites. The best thing you can do is get up there as often as possible. Even if you aren't speaking regularly, if you are able to build a little ritual for yourself around preparation for the event, the more you will feel like you've done this a million times and the more your anxiety will fade.

~Danielle Benzon



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