

# speaking with confidence

## chapter 11

By Ronald P. Grapsy, Ph.D.  
Kutztown University, Kutztown, PA

### introduction

*“I have to do what?”*

*You receive your syllabus on the first day of history class, and you see that a significant percentage of your overall grade for the semester depends upon one, ten-minute oral presentation in front of the class. The presentation is to be based on an original research project and is due in eight weeks.*

*You are excited to get an email after a very positive job interview. They ask you to come to a second interview prepared to answer a number of questions from a panel made up of senior management. The questions are contained in an attachment. “Please be ready to stand in the front of the room to answer,” the email reads; ending with “See you next week!”*

*The plans are finalized: You will have dinner to meet your new fiancé’s family on Saturday night – just days away. But, then you are told that your fiancé’s father, a former Marine and retired police officer, will want to talk about politics and current events – and that he will likely judge what sort of person you are based on how well you can defend your ideas.*

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*I get nervous when I don't get nervous. If I'm nervous, I know I'm going to have a good show.*

*~ Beyonce Knowles*

In this chapter, you will learn about dealing with one of the most common

### chapter objectives:

*After studying this module, you should be able to:*

1. Understand the nature of communicative apprehension (CA), and be in a better position to deal with your particular “brand” of CA
2. Analyze objectively the formation of your habitual frame of reference
3. Apply cognitive restructuring (CR) techniques to create a more positive frame of reference
4. Understand the importance of customized practice to become conversant in your topic
5. Create a personal preparation routine to minimize your apprehension

fears in our society: **the fear of public speaking**, which is referred to as **communication apprehension (CA)**. If you are one of those folks – take comfort in the fact that you are not alone! Research indicates that 20% or more of the U.S. population has a high degree of communicative apprehension (McCroskey, 1976). CA is an isolating phenomenon; something that makes one feel alone in the struggle. This is true even as programs designed to help people overcome it – like this program and this chapter, for instance – are spreading nationwide. CA is a real phenomenon that represents a well-documented obstacle not only to



### chapter outline:

- **Introduction**
- **Classifying Communication Apprehension (CA)**
  - Trait-anxiety
  - State-anxiety
  - Scrutiny Fear
- **Frames of Reference**
  - Habitual Frame of Reference
  - Personal Frame of Reference
- **Cognitive Restructuring (CR)**
  - Sources of Apprehension
  - Impact of Apprehension
  - Learning Confidence
- **Techniques for Building Confidence**
  - Prepare Well
  - Visualize Success
  - Avoid Gimmicks
  - Breathe and Release
  - Minimize What You Memorize
  - Practice Out Loud
  - Customize Your Practice
- **Conclusion**
- **Chapter Activities and Exercises**
- **Glossary**
- **References**

academic, but also to professional success. CA can impact many diverse areas; from one’s level of self-esteem (Adler, 1980) and how you are perceived by others (Dwyer & Cruz, 1998), to success in school, achieving high grade-point averages, and even landing job interview opportunities (Daly & Leth, 1976). People with higher levels of CA have demonstrated that they will avoid communicative interaction in personal and professional relationships, social situations, and importantly, classrooms. Such avoidance can result in miscommunication and misunderstanding,



which only becomes compounded by further avoidance. CA left unaddressed can even lead to a negative disposition toward public interaction, which leads to a lesser degree of engagement, thus perpetuating the fear and further compounding the situation (Menzel & Carrell, 1994). The anxiety creates a vicious cycle and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. But it is a cycle that need not continue.

By reading this chapter, you will learn about CA; not necessarily how it develops, as that can be different in every individual, but rather about how people can deal with it effectively. You will learn how therapies employed by psychologists to help people deal with phobias can be translated into effective techniques to deal with CA. You will learn the differences between *trait-anxiety*, *state-anxiety*, and *scrutiny fear*, and how understanding the differences between them can help a person deal with their “personal brand” of CA. You will learn about how people develop habitual frames of reference that come to define the way they approach an anticipated experience – and how anyone can employ cognitive restructuring to help change habits that are counter-productive to delivering effective presentations. Habits can be very difficult to break, but the first step is becoming aware and wanting to succeed. Going into any activity with a positive attitude is one of the basic ways of maximizing performance. CA is not something that can easily be

eliminated – turned “off” as if controlled by an internal toggle switch. But it doesn’t have to remain an obstacle to success either.

Effective public speaking is not simply about learning what to say, but about developing the confidence to say it. For many, it all comes down to overcoming those nerves and convincing yourself that you can actually get up there and speak! Each individual deals with CA most effectively through increased self-awareness and a willingness to work on reducing its impact. To conquer the nervousness associated with public speaking, one must identify the factors that lead to this anxiety, and then take specific steps to overcome this apprehension.

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*As soon as the fear  
approaches near, attack  
and destroy it.*

~ Chanakya

### classifying communication apprehension (CA)

CA is not the result of a single cause, and so the phenomenon itself comes in many forms. It is important for each person to recognize that their particular sort of CA (we’ll call it a “personal brand”) is a phenomenon that has developed uniquely through each of their lives and experiences. Just as each individual is different, so too is each case of CA. There are specific distinctions between “stage fright” – a term reserved for the common, virtually universal nervousness felt by *everyone* – and CA – which is essentially “stage fright” with a corresponding emotional trauma attached. Scholars are somewhat divided, however, on whether CA is something inherent in the individual, or if it is the result of experience. In most people, it is very likely a combination of factors.

#### trait-anxiety

Some researchers (McCroskey, et al. 1976) describe CA as **trait-anxiety**,

meaning that it is a type of anxiety that is aligned with an individual’s personality. People who would call themselves “shy” often seek to avoid interaction with others because they are uncertain of how they will be perceived. Avoiding such judgment is generally not difficult, and so becomes a pattern of behavior. These folks, according to researchers, are likely view any chance to express themselves publicly with skepticism and hesitation. This personal tendency is what is known as trait-anxiety.

#### State-anxiety

Other researchers (Beatty, 1988) describe CA as **state-anxiety**, meaning that it is a type of anxiety that is derived from the external situation which individuals find themselves. While some may fear public speaking due to some personal trait or broader social anxiety, researchers have found that CA more often stems from the fear associated with scrutiny and negative evaluation. Some people may have had a negative experience in public at an early age – they forgot a line in a play, they lost a spelling bee, they did poorly when called on in front of their class – something that resulted in a bit of public embarrassment. Others may have never actually experienced that stress themselves, but may have watched friends struggle and thus empathized with them. These sorts of experiences can often lead to the formation of a state-anxiety in an individual.



### scrutiny fear

Still other researchers (Mattick et al., 1989) discuss CA as what is called a **scrutiny fear**; which stems from an activity that does not necessarily involve interacting with other people, but is simply the fear of being in a situation where one is being watched or observed, or one perceives him or herself as being watched, while undertaking an activity. When asked to categorize their own type of CA, many people will identify with this phenomenon.

In order for anybody to effectively deal with CA, the first step is to consider what may be its primary cause. CA is what is known as a **resultant condition**; and those who are dealing with the challenge will recognize different intensities associated with different situations or triggers. This means that overcoming the condition requires first that you recognize, and then minimize, the cause. Each person is different, and so each case of CA is personal and unique. Trait-anxiety can be one contributing factor to CA, but is often part of a much larger condition. It is important to understand that, while the techniques discussed here would help in improving an individual's approach to public speaking opportunities, we do not claim that these techniques would work with more significant personality disorders. However, both the presence of state-anxiety, and the appearance of scrutiny fear, can be effectively addressed through the application of cognitive restructuring (CR) and careful, deliberate experience.

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*How little do they see what is, who frame their hasty judgments upon that which seems.*

~ Robert Southey

### frames of reference

Many popular movies are now based on multiple-book series like the "Harry Potter" or "Lord of the Rings" movies.



If you are a fan of these book series, you know about the anticipation you felt as the next film was ready to be released – you get swept away by the memories, you look forward to seeing the characters again. Before you even enter the theatre and take your seat, you are in a very positive mood and you are looking forward to being entertained. Perhaps you are even familiar with the details of the story you are about to watch on film; and this only adds to your feelings of anticipation. Because of your previous experiences, you have developed a frame of reference toward future events. One's **frame of reference** is the context, viewpoint, or set of presuppositions or evaluative criteria within which a person's perception and thinking seem always to occur; and which constrains *selectively* the course and outcome of these activities. Once your anticipation is rewarded, this frame of reference becomes how you "approach" the release of each new film in the series – your frame of reference becomes "habitual." Evidence for this can be seen in the consistent success of the serial movies – even if critics' opinions are harsh, fans will go see the film.

### habitual frame of reference

Developing the habitual frame of reference with regard to public speaking usually comes from a combination of personal experiences and what has been witnessed. Formal public speaking opportunities are most prevalent within the context of formal education – thus, public presentations are generally student-oriented experiences which are strongly associated with being evaluated or judged. Because there is such a focus upon the grade that results from the assignment, there is much less focus upon the integrity of the presentation itself. Studies have even shown that the possibility of a negative experience can lead to many students to skip assignments or drop a class – even when that class is required for graduation (Pelias, 1989). Students will often worry more about their grade rather than what is contained in their presentation. Thus, the act of public speaking takes on the pressure of taking a final exam with everyone watching. It's no wonder so many students report that they are stressed out by public speaking!

### personal frame of reference

We can all recall a time when we've met a group of friends for lunch. Try to recall an instance when the conversation centered on the latest popular movie – and you happen to be the person in the group who saw it the night before. Was it fun? Was it worth the money? Should we go see it too? Everyone else around the table would look at you and wait to hear what you had to say. And what happened when you were faced with all these questions? Well, *probably* you focused on your favorite parts; *probably* you told the story in some sort of organized manner; *probably* you asked your friends whether or not they wanted you to give away the ending; and *probably* you were fine with any of your friends interrupting while you were talking. In short, you *presented* to your audience. But, since the action of public presentation was not undertaken within the stressful context of a “graded assignment,” but rather within the positive context of “lunch with friends,” you did not feel the same level of CA as with other presentations. The action was essentially the same, but the way you approached the action was completely different – solely because you perceived of yourself engaging in a fun activity (lunch with friends), and not a stressful one (public speaking). Think about how many different experiences have prompted the formation of a habitual frame of reference in you: social events with friends, holidays with family, the weekly staff meeting at work. Consider whether the way you approach the situation has anything at all to do with the sort of experience that follows. Is there a correlation between



positive mood and positive outcome? Think of all the motivational aphorisms and advice you've heard: “Think Positive!” or “Expect Success!” all of which are based on the idea that approaching an activity with a positive attitude about your potential success is the best strategy. We need to build a positive attitude about doing something we are afraid to do.

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*I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.*

~ Nelson Mandela

### cognitive restructuring

Since the major difference between “presenting” to a public audience versus “presenting” to a small group of close friends involves one’s attitude about the situation. Overcoming CA is as much a matter of changing one’s attitude as it is developing one’s skills as a speaker. A change in attitude can be fostered through a self-reflective regimen called **cognitive restructuring** (CR), which is an internal process through which individuals can deliberately adjust how they perceive an action or experience (Mattick et al., 1989).

Cognitive Restructuring is a three-step, internal process:

1. Identify objectively what you think
2. Identify any inconsistencies between perception and reality
3. Replace destructive thinking with supportive thinking

These steps are easy to understand, but perhaps may be a bit difficult to execute! The first step is to identify objectively what you are thinking as you approach a public speaking opportunity. Recall your habitual frame of reference. The first step in



CR is to shine a bright light directly on it. This will be different for each student undertaking the process.

### sources of apprehension

After years of interviewing students from my classes, the two concerns most often described are the feeling of being the center of attention – as if you are under some collective microscope with everybody’s eyes on you; and the feeling that the audience is just waiting for you to make a mistake or slip up somehow – and that their disapproval will be swift, immediate, and embarrassing. Let’s discuss how CR might be applied to each of these widely-held perceptions.

### impact of apprehension

Probably the most common concern people have is being the “center of attention.” When people describe this specific scrutiny fear, they use phrases like “everyone just stares at me,” or “I don’t like having all eyes on me.” Consider for a moment what your experiences have been like when you have been a member of the audience for another speaker. Where did you look while the person spoke? Did you look at the speaker? Direct eye contact can mean different things in different cultures, but in U.S. culture, eye contact is the primary means for an audience to demonstrate that they are listening to a speaker. Nobody likes to

**Table 11.1**  
**Impact of Cognitive Restructuring**

<b>Before Cognitive Restructuring:</b>	<b>After Cognitive Restructuring:</b>
One is worried about being under scrutiny.	One recognizes that audiences look at who is speaking.
One is worried about being judged harshly.	One recognizes that audiences want success.
One is worried about making an embarrassing mistake.	One recognizes that audiences will empathize.

be ignored, and most members of an audience would not want to be perceived as ignoring the speaker – that would be rude! Compare: before CR, the frame of reference reflects the idea that “everyone is staring at me”; after CR, the perception is altered to “the audience is looking at me to be supportive and polite – after all, I’m the one doing the talking.”

Another common concern is the fear of being judged harshly or making an embarrassing mistake. Go back to that memory of you as a member of the audience, but this time reflect on what sort of expectations you had at the time. Did you expect the speaker to be flawless and riveting? Did you have in mind some super-high level of performance – below which the speaker would have disappointed you? Probably you did not (unless you had the chance to watch some prominent



speaker). Think back to any experiences you may have had watching another speaker struggle – perhaps a classmate during one of their presentations. Witnessing something like that can be uncomfortable. Did you feel empathy for the person struggling? Isn’t it a much more pleasant experience when the speaker does well? Again, the vast majority of people empathize with the speaker when it comes to the quality of the presentation. They are willing to give the speaker a chance to say what they want to say. Thus: before CR, the frame of reference reflects the idea that “everyone is judging me harshly”; and after CR, the perception is altered to “the audience is willing to listen to what I have to say because it’s a more pleasant experience for them if the speaker is successful.”

### **learning confidence**

Consider what comes into your mind if you are to deliver a public presentation. Are your thoughts consumed with many uncertainties. What if I make a mistake? What if they don’t like what I’m talking about? What if? Try your own version of CR. Put yourself in the role of audience member and ask yourself whether your fears as a speaker are consistent with your expectations as an audience member. Remember that, just like you, the audience wants the speaker to succeed. Of course CR, unfortunately, is always easier said than done. It is a process that takes time, patience, and practice. The most important thing to remember is that you are trying CR as a

means of breaking a habit, and habits are formed over periods of time, never instantaneously. The breaking of a habit, similarly, cannot be done instantaneously, but gradually, over time and with deliberate effort.

Changing your attitude is only one element in overcoming CA. The other involves improving your skills as a speaker. The presence of CA in any student brings with it the need to prepare more deliberately and more diligently. The other chapters in this book deal with the importance of preparation in all areas of public presentation. Readers should consider how the challenges involved with overcoming CA can impact the preparation process.

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*It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.*

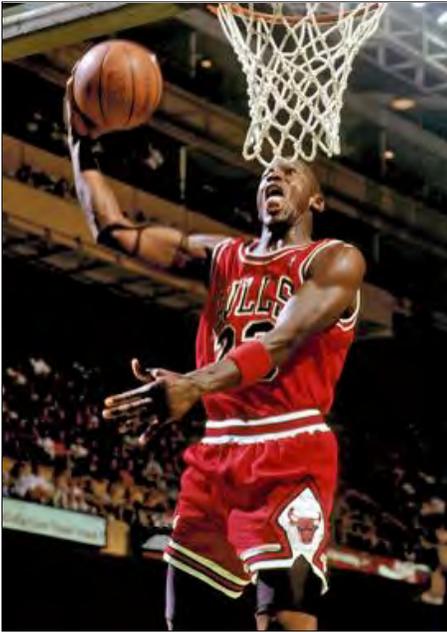
*~ Mark Twain*

## **techniques for building confidence**

### **prepare well**

The correlation between preparation and nervousness is consistent. More practice results in less nervousness. The best, most consistent and direct way to minimize the level of nervousness you feel is through effective preparation. This is always true. Importantly, the best sort of practice is the kind that prepares you properly.

Michael Jordan was once asked the best way to learn how to shoot free throws. He said that you cannot learn to shoot free throws by walking into a gym with a ball, walking up to the line, and shooting. Instead, he described how the first step in learning to shoot free throws is to run sprints. Most importantly, his advice was to run until your body was under the same stress as it would be in a game when you needed to make those free throws – because only under those conditions would your practice become truly productive. *Only*



then do you pick up the ball and shoot. And when you managed to catch your breath? All types of preparation and practice yield some benefits, but there is a significant difference between practice that is merely *helpful* and practice that is *sufficient*. There is a difference between “knowing what you are talking about,” and “knowing what you are going to say.” Thinking about your presentation can be helpful, but that sort of preparation will not give you a sense of what you are actually going to say. Athletes know that the best practices will re-create game conditions and test their abilities to perform in real-life scenarios. Studying a playbook? This is helpful, but not sufficient. Going over a speech in your mind? Again, it is helpful, but not sufficient.

Many students do not practice effectively, and this can result in the wrong idea that practice isn’t helpful. Unfortunately, these same students usually have had little, if any, training in how one might prepare for a presentation, and so they employ the scholastic training they are most familiar with – how to write a paper. This is not the same activity as presenting, and so the lack of proper preparation only contributes to the lack

of confidence. Let’s look at a few elements of effective practice.

### visualize success

Athletes and performers are often coached to visualize what they are trying to do as a way to perform correctly. Baseball players need to anticipate what they will do if the ball is hit their way so that they are ready to perform without having to make split-second choices. Football and basketball players must envision how each member of the team will move during a particular play because team success depends on speedy and flawless coordination between individuals. Dancers and divers are trained to visualize the form and positioning of their bodies as they execute their moves. Golfers are coached to visualize the flight and arc of the shot they are about to attempt. Engaging the imagination in this way can be beneficial to performance.

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*I visualize things in my mind before I have to do them. It's like having a mental workshop.*

~ Jack Youngblood

Speakers too, should visualize success. As you practice, visualize yourself presenting with confidence to a receptive audience. “See” your relaxed facial expressions and “hear” your confident vocal tone. Imagine yourself moving gracefully, complementing what you say with expressive gestures. Imagine the audience reacting appropriately – nodding appreciatively and giving thoughtful consideration to your points. Imagine the gratification of watching the audience really “get it.” When you can honestly envision yourself performing at this level, you are taking an important step toward achieving that goal.

### avoid gimmicks

Some acting coaches (and speech teachers) encourage their students to practice in front of mirrors, so that they can watch themselves perform and evaluate how they move. In acting, this can be very useful; but in speaking, it is less so. When you practice your presentation, the most important element is expressiveness. You want to become more familiar with the volume of material, the order in which you plan to present it, and the phrasing you think would be most effective to express it. Watching yourself perform in a mirror will focus your attention on your appearance first – and on what you express second. This makes using a mirror during practice a distraction from what the practice ought to achieve.

Plus, consider what you are seeing in the mirror as you practice. Obviously, it is you! But more to the point, what you see in the mirror (your reflection) will not resemble, in any way, the audience that you would see while delivering your presentation. Just as you want to visualize success in yourself as part of your preparation; you also want to visualize success in your audience – which means that you want to imagine the members of your



audience reacting positively to your presentation, paying close attention and nodding their heads as you make your points.

For some reason, the myth persists that imagining your audience in their pajamas – or something similarly silly – is an effective way to make standing in front of them seem less scary. Many of my students have discussed hearing “tips” like imagining the audience wearing pink bunny-ears as a way to make them less intimidating. These sorts of gimmicks don’t work! In fact, concentrating on anything other than what you are doing is distracting and not beneficial at all. Do your best to avoid such advice. Visualize success!




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*Breathe. Let go. And remind yourself that this very moment is the only one you know you have for sure.*

~ Oprah Winfrey

### **breathe and release**

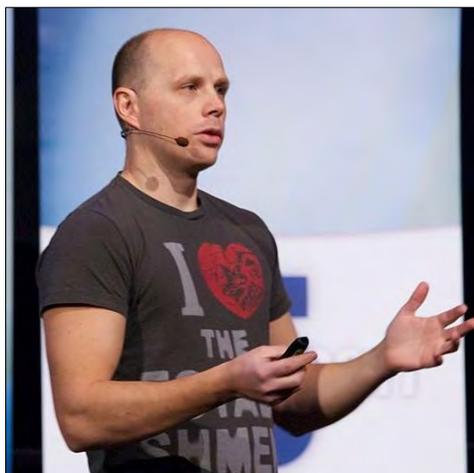
One type of pre-presentation exercise that might be helpful is based on a therapeutic idea called **systematic de-sensitization**, which is a multi-stage regimen to help patients deal with phobias through coping mechanisms. Going through both the cognitive and behavioral aspects of systematic desensitization often requires weeks of concerted effort to overcome the body’s involuntary reactions to stress. That sort of psychological therapy involves gradual exposure to what produces the anxiety, long-term self-reflection, and mental discipline. Here, we will discuss a shortened version called “**breathe and release**.” This is a short-cut relaxation technique that could be useful for nervous speakers – especially those who are concerned with the physical manifestations of nervousness, such as shaky hands or knees.

The key to “breathe and release” is to understand that when nervous tension results in minor trembling, the effort of trying to keep one’s hands

from shaking can contribute to the whole situation – that is, trying to stop literally can make it worse! Therefore, the best approach is through relaxation.

“Breathe and Release” involves three steps:

1. Imagine the nervousness within your body. Imagine that energy bubbling inside you, like liquid being cooked.
2. Draw that energy to a high point within your body with a deep, cleansing breath. Imagine this cleansing breath to be acting like a vacuum – drawing up all of the bubbling liquid.



3. Release the energy by deliberately relaxing the entirety of your upper extremities – not just your hands, or even your hands and arms – but all the way from your fingertips to the bottom edges of your shoulder blades. Imagine how keeping any part of your upper extremities tense would result in a “kink” in the release valve, and so complete relaxation is the key to success. Remember: Relax *everything* from the fingertips to the very bottom edges of your shoulder blades.

“Breathe and Release” is something that can be done even as one walks to the front of the classroom or boardroom to begin speaking. Many speakers, especially those who are concerned about the physical manifestations of nervousness, have used this relaxation technique effectively.

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*I've a grand memory for forgetting.*

~ Robert Louis Stevenson

### **minimize what you memorize**

One important hint for speech preparation involves avoiding the writing of an entirely scripted version of the presentation. Many people have the impression that writing a script of the entire speech is the necessary first step in preparation; that practicing can only happen after you are done writing the entire speech. Unfortunately, this common impression is mistaken. Remember that lunch with your friends? When you were describing the movie plot, you were being **conversant** in a prepared way. This means that you knew what you were describing, but you were not concerned with the specific words you were using. Being **conversant** is the condition of being prepared to discuss an issue intelligently. Fans of sports are **conversant** about their favorite teams. Experts are **conversant** in their fields. A well-prepared speaker is **conversant**

with regard to her topic. Consider how being *conversant* in this manner allows freer, more fluid communication, with no stress associated with your ability to remember what words you wanted to use. Being *conversant* also gives the speaker the best chance to recognize and react to audience feedback. If you are completely focused on the integrity of scripted comments, then you will be unable to read and react to your audience in any meaningful way. Imagine how frustrating it would be for your friends at that lunch if you would not respond to any of their questions until you were finished reading a few descriptive paragraphs about the movie. They would probably just wait until you were done reading and then try to engage you in a conversation!

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*If you wish to forget anything on the spot, make a note that this thing is to be remembered.*

~ Edgar Allan Poe

Many people have had experience being in a stage play or some other type of performance that involved memorized recitation of a script. Many of us might recall moments during rehearsals when our minds would “freeze” and we might need just a quick reminder – the next word or phrase, the next few notes – to get back on track. This is because people do not memorize in units, but in phrases or chunks. The mind attaches to a rhythm – not to each individual unit, word, or note. This is why it is best to minimize what you memorize. Prepare your opening carefully so that you start smoothly. Prepare your closing comments so that you can end sharply and with style. But avoid preparing and then memorizing an entire script.

Preparing for a speech by memorizing a written script engages your mind at a different level from that of a *conversant* speaker. Concentrating on remembering words is different from paying attention to how one’s

audience is reacting. The pressure that arises from trying to remember the next word can be considerable, yet that pressure is entirely avoidable. The goal of public speaking should never be about loyal recreation of a script – it is about getting the appropriate response from your audience. Trying to remember an entirely scripted speech can result in the rather ironic situation of a person being able confidently and smoothly to discuss the topic in casual conversation, but still quite stressed about their ability to remember their scripted comments.

Many students forget their lines while discussing topics like their families and hometowns. Of course they knew what they were talking about, but their minds were focused on the task of remembering specific words – a task different from effective speaking. So, should you write any prepared comments at all? Yes, of course you should. Specifically, the feedback you should be most concerned with will happen during the body of the speech – when you are discussing the substance of your presentation. It is during the body of the speech when you need especially to retain the ability to adjust to how your audience reacts. Thus, memorizing

your entire speech is ultimately detrimental to your ability to react to your audience. However, during the introduction and conclusion of your speech, the primary concerns are about connecting with your audience personally; which is something best assured through consistent eye contact. So, carefully preparing the introduction and the conclusion of your speech is a smart strategy – but don’t make the mistake of scripting everything that you plan to say. The best rule here: Minimize what you memorize – familiarize instead!

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*If I don't train enough, of course I'm nervous.*

~ Haile Gebrselassie

#### **practice out loud**

Remember the very first time you tried to do anything – a game, a sport, an activity, anything at all. How good were you out of the gate? Perhaps you had talent or were gifted with a “feel” for what you were doing. But even then, didn’t you get better with more experience? Nobody does anything the very best they can on their very first attempt, and everyone – even the most





talented among us – will benefit from effective practice.

Speaking in public is no different from any other activity in this way. To maximize the chance that your presentation will come out smooth and polished, you will need to hear it all the way through. By practicing out loud, from the beginning to the ending, you will be able to listen to your whole speech and properly gauge the flow of your entire presentation. Additionally, without at least one complete out-loud practice, there will be no way to accurately estimate the length of your speech and your preparation will remain insufficient. When dealing with CA, the last thing you want is to leave some questions unanswered in your own mind! The out-loud “dress rehearsal” is the single, most important element to your preparation. Without it, you will be delivering your presentation in full for the first time when it counts the most. Putting yourself at that sort of disadvantage isn’t wise, and is easily avoided.

Consider your current method of preparing a public presentation. At some point, you will have gathered notes and information together. That represents an opportune moment for your first *out-loud practice*. You might even consider trying that initial practice without the benefit of any notes. Stand

up; start speaking; see what comes out! Such a practice can serve as an “oral first draft” in the same vein as any written first draft of a paper, and can answer a number of questions for you:

1. Where, during your presentation, are you most – and least – *conversant*?
2. Where, during your presentation, are you most in need of supportive notes?
3. What do your notes need to contain?

Prepare for your public presentation by speaking and listening to yourself, rather than by writing, editing, and rewriting. Remember that when you are having a conversation, you never use the same sort of language and syntax as you do when you are writing a formal paper. Practice with the goal of becoming *conversant* in your topic, not fluent with a script.

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*You can't hire someone to practice for you.*

~ H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

#### **customize your practice**

We’ve discussed a variety of techniques in this chapter; from the importance of out-loud practice to suggestions of when, during your



preparation, you should start the out-loud practice. We’ve discussed Cognitive Restructuring as a means of changing your attitude about presenting in a positive way. Depending on your personal brand of CA, you may choose to implement these hints in different ways. Take a moment to reflect on what causes your CA. Do you dislike the feeling of being the center of attention? Are you more concerned with who is in the audience and what they might think of you? Or are you worried about “freezing” in front of the audience and forgetting what you wanted to say? Write some of these concerns down and put them into a priority order. If you are worried about a particular issue or problem, how might you prepare to minimize the chance of that issue arising?

Then consider your current method of preparation. Do you prepare more for a written paper than for an oral presentation? Do you have the goal of presenting a scripted message? Do you practice out loud? When, during your process, do you practice aloud? Do you practice at all *before* you begin to compose your speaking notes; or do you only practice after? Remember that dealing with CA often involves the breaking of a mental habit. It is a good idea to change what you have done previously. Be deliberate. Observe what works for your situation.

Recall what was discussed at the beginning of this chapter: CA is a condition unique to each person dealing with it. CA is the result of many varied causes – some internal and personal, some external and experiential. Dealing with anxiety may be as much dealing with your attitude as with your skills, as much a struggle with perception as with ability. Because of this, *you* are in the best position to know how to deal with your particular brand of CA. As stated earlier in the chapter: Each individual deals with CA most effectively through increased self-awareness and a willingness to take each of the steps in the entire process. After you acknowledge your reality, then you take the steps necessary to overcome apprehension. When you've read about the ways to overcome the debilitating impact of CA, the next steps in your process involve seeing what works best for you. Do not continue to prepare in exactly the same way as before. Speak more; write and revise less. Be sure to practice out-loud at least once during your preparation, in order to prepare yourself sufficiently. Reflect on your personal concerns and try Cognitive Restructuring on those concerns. Take your time. Do the work. Have confidence that your preparation will yield positive results.

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*Nothing in the affairs of men is worthy of great anxiety.*

~ Plato

### conclusion

In this chapter, we've discussed *Communication Apprehension* or CA. This difficult condition can be the result of many, varied causes. Even professional researchers don't always agree on whether CA is inherent in the person, or the result of what the person experiences or perceives – with some calling it "*trait-anxiety*;" others "*state-anxiety*;" and still others classifying it as "*scrutiny fear*." The first step for any person to address this condition is self-reflection. Try to identify what has



caused you to feel the way you do about public speaking. Careful introspection can result in a more productive level of self-awareness.

Whatever the root cause of CA might be for any particular individual, the first step in addressing CA is to objectively view the *habitual frame of reference* that has emerged in your mind regarding public speaking. Consider all those "what-if's" that keep cropping up in your mind and how you might begin to address them productively, rather than simply to ignore them and hope they go away. Go through the steps of *Cognitive Restructuring* or CR. Consider how many of those "what-if's" are nothing more than invented pressure that you place upon yourself.

Relaxation techniques, such as "*Breathe and Release*," have proven to be effective for many speakers, especially those concerned with the physical manifestations of nervousness like trembling hands or shaky knees. Remember that those sorts of tremors can often be exacerbated by efforts to hold still. Don't force yourself to hold still! Relax instead.

Lastly, we discussed the most effective means to prepare – which is toward the goal of becoming *conversant* in your topic, rather than being able to recite a memorized script. By familiarizing yourself with your topic, you become better able to consider the best way to talk to your audience, rather than becoming "married to your script" and ultimately consumed with saying the words in the right order. Practicing out-loud, without a mirror to distract you, is the best way to prepare yourself.

CA is a real issue, but it need not be an obstacle to success. Take the time to become more aware of your personal brand of CA. Take positive steps to minimize its impact. Your willingness to work and your positive attitude are the keys to your success.

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*Believe you can and you're halfway there.*

~ Theodore Roosevelt

## review questions and activities

### review questions

1. What percentage of the general population is likely dealing with CA?
2. What are some of the potential issues or problems that can result from CA?
3. What are some of the different ways researchers classify CA? What are the differences between these ideas?
4. What are some of your sources of CA? Would you classify these as examples of trait-anxiety or state-anxiety?
5. How does Cognitive Restructuring work? Does it work the same for every person who tries it?
6. What does it mean to become conversant in your topic?
7. Why is memorizing a presentation a risky move? Is there any part of your presentation that should be memorized?

### activities

1. Prior to a speech, practice the following relaxation technique from Williams College (from <http://wso.williams.edu/orgs/peerh/stress/relax.html>):
  - a) Tighten the muscles in your toes. Hold for a count of 10. Relax and enjoy the sensation of release from tension.
  - b) Flex the muscles in your feet. Hold for a count of 10. Relax.
  - c) Move slowly up through your body- legs, abdomen, back, neck, face- contracting and relaxing muscles as you go.
  - d) Breathe deeply and slowly.

After your speech, evaluate the technique. Did you find that this exercise reduced your nervousness? If so, why do you think it was effective? If not, what technique do you think would have been more effective?

2. Together with a partner or in a small group, generate a list of relaxation techniques that you currently use to relieve stress. Once you have run out of ideas, review the list and eliminate the techniques that would *not* work for helping you cope with nervousness before a speech. Of the remaining ideas, select the top three that you believe would help you personally and that you would be willing to try.
3. The author of this chapter says that one of the keys to overcoming nervousness is preparation. Make a list of the barriers to your own preparation process (e.g. “I don’t know how to use the library,” or “I have young children at home who make demands on my time”). Having identified some of the things that make it difficult for you to prepare, now think of at least one way to overcome each obstacle you have listed. If you need to, speak with other people to get their ideas too.

## glossary

### “Breathe and Release”

This is a short-cut version of systematic de-sensitization appropriate for public speaking preparation.

### Cognitive Restructuring (CR)

CR is an internal process through which individuals can deliberately adjust how they perceive an action or experience.

### Communication Apprehension

CA is the anxiety resulting from fear of public speaking.

### Conversant

Being conversant is the condition of being able to discuss an issue intelligently with others.

## Frame of Reference

A frame of reference refers to the context, viewpoint, or set of presuppositions or of evaluative criteria within which a person's perception and thinking seem always to occur; and which constrains selectively the course and outcome of these activities.

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 p. 6 Woman in wheelchair

## Scrutiny Fear

Anxiety resulting from being in a situation where one is being watched or observed, or where one perceives themselves as being watched, is known as scrutiny fear. This sort of anxiety does not necessarily involve interacting with other people.

## State-Anxiety

State-anxiety is derived from the external situation within which individuals find themselves.

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## Systematic De-sensitization

Systematic de-sensitization is a multi-stage, therapeutic regimen to help patients deal with phobias through coping mechanisms.

## Trait-Anxiety

Trait-anxiety is anxiety that is aligned with, or a manifestation of, an individual's personality.

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