

1. **Mark your confusion.**
2. **Show evidence of a close reading.**
3. **Write a 1+ page reflection.**

Conquer Fear of Public Speaking through Emotional Intelligence

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What do you feel when you imagine standing up in front of an audience? Visualize the bright lights in your face, see all those people looking at you and expecting you to deliver a top-notch performance. Do butterflies start fluttering about in your stomach? Do your palms start to sweat? Does your head get light?

Indeed, research shows the large role played by speech anxiety in blocking our ability to give great speeches. However, public speaking is vital in being able to make progress in many careers.

Fortunately, a few tips can go a long way to build up confidence and address fears around public speaking. Fortunately, a little work can go a long way in building confidence and addressing fears about public speaking. Research shows that those with some training in public speaking not only improve their own communication, but can successfully teach others how to give better speeches. As a scholar of the role of emotions in public life, I decided to team up with Patrick Donadio to figure out the best strategies to address public speaking fears. He is a keynote speaker and communication/speech coach with over 30 years of experience working with leaders and their organizations, who authored the forthcoming *Communicating with IMPACT*. Together, we came up with a set of four research-informed techniques that anyone can use to improve their public speaking skills.

The keys to overcoming fear are mental preparation and practice. Emerson said, *“Do the thing you fear and the death of fear is certain!”* Now, you are never going to get rid of it totally, but we can help you get rid of most of it.

1. Focus on Dealing with the Fear Itself

Recognize that the first thing to do is to deal with the fear itself rather than focus on the speech. Sure, some anxiety is useful. It gets adrenaline going and can give you energy and enthusiasm. Yet beyond that limited amount, if you don't deal with the fear, you won't be able to give a great speech, no matter how hard you try.

This fear comes from your emotional self, not your rational self. It's not helpful for you to have fear to achieve your goal of giving a great speech, but your emotional self doesn't know that. You need to use intentional thinking strategies to manage your emotions in order to reach your goals.

To address your fear, remember you are not unique in your fear. There would not be the extensive research on speech anxiety if you were! Scientists even have a special term for this fear - glossophobia. Knowing that this term exists, and that it is a well-studied topic, should relieve some fear for you.

2. Be Positive

Next, apply the science-based strategy of positive self-talk. Give yourself a pep talk and psyche yourself up. You can do this in many different ways. Some people meditate, others pray, others listen to music, and others go jogging. There are many different ways to get your energy level high. Whatever works for you, do it! If you're not prepared mentally, you won't be prepared.

Besides positive self-talk, use positive thinking. If you want to be an effective public speaker, you have to believe in yourself. If you do not believe in yourself, how do you expect other people to believe in you? Remind yourself that you know more about the topic than the audience does. Now, you can expect a few people out there may be more knowledgeable. You are not going to know more than everybody does. However, chances are if you done your homework and picked a topic you know about you will know more than most people in your audience.

3. Use Your Body Well

Regardless of whether you use the strategies above, right before I get up to speak, you may get a little nervous. You have a lot of excess energy in there. You do not want to get rid of all of it, and believe me, you will not, but you want to get rid of some of it. Try some “tense and relax” techniques.

Clench and relax your fists. Clench your fists really hard, and then release them. Can you feel the tension leaving? It really works. Some people get a lot of tension in their necks, if you do try shoulder shrugs. Push your shoulders up to your ears hold them there for 10 seconds and release. A good overall tension reliever is stretching exercises. Do some deep knee bends, stretch your arms up, open your hands really wide and then close them. All of these exercises are good ways to release some of that tension.

4. Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice the speech to gain more confidence in your ability. It is especially helpful to do so in the exact room where you will be giving the speech. Get up in front of the room and try to envision what it is going to be like when you give my speech. This will help you feel more comfortable when you speak, and fill you with greater confidence.

If you can't practice in the room, try to use visualization, a research-based strategy widely employed by top athletes. Visualize what you know about the room and the audience, and imagine giving the speech. See with your mind's eye everyone staring at you, listening with rapt attention. Imagine the applause breaking out after your speech, and your boss giving you a big thumbs-up sign after you finished.

Speaking is a skill that grows stronger with practice and weaker with disuse. The secret to improving your speaking skills is experience. Where can you get speaking opportunities? They exist all around us—at work, in community groups, at a church. You can also set up speaking engagements at various organizations like Fraternal Order of Police, Toastmasters, Urban League, Community Action Agencies, Farm Bureaus, Rotary Clubs, Knights of Columbus, Kiwanis Club, church groups, or League of Women Voters. These are all great opportunities to practice. Remember, your first speech may be your worst speech, but you will keep getting better and less anxious going forward!

Even experienced public speakers may continue to experience fear. These tips, widely used by experienced speakers and informed by research, can help anyone minimize the impact of speaking anxiety. The sooner you get up in front of a group, realize that you have something important to say, and say it, the sooner you'll get rid of your fear.

Possible Response Questions:

- Do you have a fear of speaking in front of groups? Explain.
- Describe a time when you had to speak publicly.
- Pick a passage and respond to it.