

Why you get nervous when you speak and what to do about it!



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1WHY YOU GET NERVOUS... AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

First: Nervous Does NOT Mean Bad

Public-speaking nerves are incredibly common, even among people who look completely calm. You may feel your heart racing, your mouth getting dry, your hands shaking, or your thoughts moving way too fast. The audience usually has no idea most of that is happening. You feel more nervous than you look.

And remember:

The minute you stop getting nervous is the minute you stop caring.

Nervousness can simply mean you understand the stakes and want to do well.

- The goal is NOT to become a person who never gets nervous.
- The goal is to become a person who can perform well while nervous.

WHY YOUR BODY FREAKS OUT

Public speaking can trigger the same fight, flight, or freeze response your body uses when it thinks you are in danger.

Your brain hears: "They want you to give a presentation."

Your body hears: "RELEASE THE ADRENALINE. WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE."

That response can create:

- Faster heart rate
- Changes in breathing
- Dry mouth
- Shaky hands
- Racing thoughts

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Then we accidentally make it worse:

“Oh NO. I’m nervous.”

becomes

“They can tell I’m nervous.”

which becomes

“Now I’m even MORE nervous because they know.”

Remember: most of what you are feeling is happening inside your body. The audience cannot feel your butterflies or hear your heartbeat.

STOP ASSUMING THE AUDIENCE IS AGAINST YOU

Yes, audiences evaluate speakers.

They are wondering:

- Are you credible?
- Are you prepared?
- Are you interesting?
- Is this worth my time?

But evaluation is not the same as rejection.

Most people are hoping you: make sense, help them, give them something useful, and get to the point.

And yes, occasionally there is one person with crossed arms and a dead-fish face.

Do not build your entire presentation for that person or try to “break them”.

THEY DO NOT HAVE YOUR SCRIPT

This is one of the easiest ways to reduce pressure on yourself.

Your audience does not know:

- The sentence you meant to say
- The order you planned
- The example you forgot
- The hilarious story you skipped
- The exact wording you rehearsed

Only you know what was “supposed” to happen. If you keep moving, they probably will too.

Kristin Scroggin, 2026 (C)

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THE 3 THINGS THAT OFTEN MAKE NERVES WORSE

1. Writing the Whole Presentation Word-for-Word

A full script can actually make you more nervous because now you have something you can “lose your place” in.

Instead of a script, create a road map:

Main Point → Story/Example → Takeaway → Next Point

Know where you are going without requiring yourself to use one exact sentence.

2. Memorizing Every Word

Memorization turns a presentation into a pass/fail test.

If you believe there is only one “right” way to say something, every pause, word change, or vocal filler suddenly feels like failure.

Instead:

KNOW THE IDEA. NOT THE SENTENCE.

Ask yourself:

- What is the main thing I want them to remember?
- What story or example proves it?
- What data makes it real?
- What do I want them to do next?

Memorizing word-for-word creates a standard the audience never asked for.

3. Avoiding Preparation Because It Makes You Anxious

This becomes a nasty little cycle:

Presentation anxiety → avoid preparing → presentation gets closer → heightened panic

Avoidance gives you temporary relief and future panic.

Do your future self a favor: **GET STARTED.**

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7 THINGS THAT ACTUALLY HELP

1. PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE

Preparation does not mean memorization.

Preparation means you know:

- Your audience
- Your purpose
- Your three main ideas
- Your examples
- Your opening

The fewer unknowns your brain has to treat as threats, the better. Your deck describes the progression as:

Familiarity → Competence → Confidence

2. PRACTICE WITH HUMANS

Your mirror is a terrible audience.

It does not:

- Laugh
- Nod
- Look confused
- Interrupt
- Ask weird questions

Practice with an actual human who can give you real reactions.

And don't just practice everything going RIGHT.

3 PRACTICE RECOVERY.

During practice:

- Forget where you are.
- Advance the wrong slide.
- Lose a word.
- Stop for a second.
- Figure out what you would do next.

Confidence grows when you know:

“Even if something goes wrong, I know how to recover.”

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4, KNOW YOUR FIRST 60 SECONDS

Your opening deserves extra practice.

You will usually feel the most adrenaline at the beginning, so rehearse your opening until it feels familiar.

Once you get moving, your body can start to realize:

“Oh. I’m doing it.”

You do NOT have to memorize your whole presentation.

But you should know exactly how you plan to START.

5 SHOW UP EARLY

Give yourself enough time to remove unnecessary surprises.

Check:

- The room
- The lectern
- The stairs
- Your slides
- The microphone

Then...GET OUT OF THERE.

Do not sit in the room for 30 minutes marinating in your anxiety.

Check everything, then go warm up.

6. GET THE ANXIETY OUT OF YOUR BODY

Your body is carrying all that extra energy, so use it.

Before speaking:

- Move around
- Shake out your hands
- Roll your shoulders
- Relax your jaw
- Warm up your voice

Nervous bodies tend to get SMALL:

Shoulders rise.

Chin drops.

Arms collapse inward.

Hands lock.

Voice gets smaller.

Instead, deliberately make your body communicate confidence:

Relax your shoulders. Plant your feet. Open your arms. Look at people. Finish the sentence. PAUSE. (C)

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7. FIND THE FRIENDLY FACES

Every audience has people giving you positive feedback.

Look for:

The Nodder

The Smiler

The Note Taker

The "YES!" Face

Those people are your fuel.

Spend your energy communicating with the people who are engaged instead of obsessing over the one person who looks miserable.

8. CREATE YOUR "SUPER SPEAKER"

The person you are standing on stage does not have to behave exactly like the everyday version of you.

Create and practice your SUPER SPEAKER version.

Ask yourself:

- How does my Super Speaker stand?
- How do they speak?
- How do they use their hands?
- How do they handle silence?
- What do they do if they lose their place?
- How do they project confidence even while feeling nervous?

You are not becoming fake.

You are intentionally practicing the version of yourself that knows what to do when the pressure hits.

THE BIG REMINDER

- You can be nervous and credible.
- You can be nervous and funny.
- You can be nervous and clear.
- You can be nervous and persuasive.
- You can be nervous and prepared.
- Your nerves can come with you.
- They just do not get the microphone.
- And most importantly: ***Do not try to stop caring. Get good enough that the nerves do not get to decide what happens next.***