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Hospitality Leadership Through Learning



## Cornell Hospitality Tools

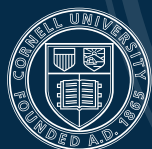
How to Feel Confident for a Presentation...  
and Overcome Speech Anxiety

by Amy Newman

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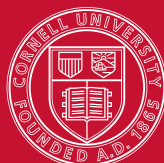
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# How to Feel Confident for a Presentation... and Overcome Speech Anxiety

by Amy Newman

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**his web-based tool presents a set of recommendations and tips that help hospitality managers (and other speakers) become more confident presenters. Speech anxiety is common but does not have to detract from a presentation. The tool offers a comprehensive list of strategies that the presenter can use before, during, and after a presentation. By selecting and implementing a few appropriate strategies, even the most nervous presenters can improve how they think and feel about their delivery skills—and how they perform in front of an audience. The tool summarizes research on what works to reduce anxiety and allows users to create a custom, individual plan, using a selected combination of cognitive, physical, and affective strategies presented here.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Amy Newman** is a senior lecturer of management communication. She teaches two core communication courses and an elective, Corporate Communication. She is co-author of *Business Communication: In Person, In Print, Online* (Cengage, 8e). Newman's work focuses on communication technologies, and she has developed several web-based simulations. Prior to joining Cornell, she was an adjunct instructor at Ithaca College, eCornell, and Milano, The New School for Management and Urban Policy in New York City. Newman spent most of her career in corporate positions and external consulting roles to improve employee performance and communication in hospitality, technology, education, publishing, financial services, and entertainment companies. Newman has won grants to develop technology-based learning solutions and awards for teaching excellence and student advising.

# How to Feel Confident for a Presentation...and Overcome Speech Anxiety

by Amy Newman

**A**lmost everyone feels some level of anxiety before delivering a presentation. The ways that we experience nervousness—how it manifests in our bodies—and how we combat counterproductive thoughts and feelings differ. What works for one person will not necessarily work for another. This tool presents research to answer the question, What can presenters do to feel more confident? In creating this tool, I wanted to develop a way to help people prevent excessive anxiety from interfering with their presentations. A review of the research tells us that people can manage their anxiety by changing their thinking, trying new behavioral approaches, and keeping their emotions in check. From this research, I have compiled as many strategies and tactics as possible, to allow tool users to select the approaches that will be most helpful.

## Accepting the Importance of Delivery Skills

Audiences can be tough critics. Even if you present a clever idea, an exhaustive data analysis, and beautifully designed graphics, your audience may not consider that you've made an effective or memorable presentation. We judge presentations not just on what people say but on how they say it.

As an example, the series of TED Talks, which involve relatively brief presentations regarding technology, entertainment, or design, has well over a million followers on Google+ alone. They have become so popular because the topics are current and engaging and because the presentations themselves are well constructed and delivered. Billions of people have watched these videos because the speakers know how to capture attention. They unveil a story and connect with their audience. TED Talk “curator” Chris Anderson describes what sounds like a painful, six-to-nine-month process of coaching presenters to craft and practice their speech. Presenters memorize their speech and practice dozens of times in front of live audiences.<sup>1</sup> Although not a practical approach for most people, we can learn from Anderson's coaching experience: Delivery counts, and even world-class speakers work hard to perfect their skills.

## Understanding Speech Anxiety

Speech anxiety is the most prevalent social phobia.<sup>2</sup> While severe cases may require professional help, fear of public speaking is common—and even the most confident speakers feel some natural nervousness in front of groups.

Research tells us that speech anxiety has negative effects. Considered a “situation-specific social anxiety,” public speaking anxiety causes people to underprepare and make poor decisions, and it can lead to a performance that is not as strong as it could be.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chris Anderson, “How to Give a Killer Presentation: Lessons from TED Experience,” *Harvard Business Review*, June 2013, [hbr.org/2013/06/how-to-give-a-killer-presentation](http://hbr.org/2013/06/how-to-give-a-killer-presentation), viewed December 11, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Anke W. Blöte, Marcia J.W. Kint, Anne C. Miers, and P. Michiel Westenberg, “The relation between public speaking anxiety and social anxiety: A review,” *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, Vol. 23 (2009), pp. 305-313.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Bodie, “A Racing Heart, Rattling Knees, and Ruminative Thoughts: Defining, Explaining, and Treating Public Speaking Anxiety,” *Communication Education*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (2010), pp. 70–105.

However, research findings give us hope. First, anxiety can be managed. People experience anxiety differently and can mitigate negative thoughts and feelings about themselves—along with troubling behavioral reactions. Second, our nervousness itself is often the only issue. Cognitive approaches—simply changing how we think about ourselves—can reduce speech anxiety.

## Identifying Strategies for Managing Speech Anxiety

Because anxiety affects people differently, a single solution won't work for every person. One presenter might manage nervousness by over-preparing, while another becomes obsessive about content. But either of those activities may just feed the anxiety of a third person. This tool classifies 22 possible preparation strategies according to whether they are cognitive, behavioral, or affective, although there is some overlap. Cognitive strategies involve changing what you believe or how you think about your fears, your audience, your presentations, or yourself. Behavioral (or physical) strategies focus on how you prepare, understand, and use your body. Affective strategies relate to emotions. Changing how you feel helps you focus on your success.

With various tactics to try before, the day of, and after a presentation, this tool generates a custom plan.

### ***Before the Presentation***

How you prepare for and think about a presentation can help reduce anxiety. Writing coping statements, understanding one's physical reactions, and practicing in front of others are among the strategies that can reduce nervousness.

### ***The Day of the Presentation***

On the day of the presentation, presenters can improve their delivery by, for example, practicing Amy Cuddy's “power poses,” breathing deeply, and visualizing success.

### ***After the Presentation***

Research shows that watching a video of yourself with an open mind, letting yourself relax, and writing down what went well can improve how a presenter feels about his or her delivery.

## Log-in for presentation tool



### Using the Tool to Create an Individual Plan

The tool itself is posted on a website I created for this purpose (see Exhibit 1). Use the log-in below.

Website: [speaking.amynewman.com](http://speaking.amynewman.com)

Email: user

Password: statler65

After logging in, you will see the 22 strategies listed in links on the left side of the screen. Click on each of the links to see a brief description of the strategy, links to additional resources, and references. For many strategies, you'll find a link to a video or worksheet for individual planning.

Choose a few strategies you would like to try, by dragging them to the appropriate column. Some strategies apply before the presentation, others operate on presentation day, and the

final set are for after your presentation. The 22 strategies are listed in roughly that order, but you should choose the timing that works for you. To remove a strategy, simply drag it back outside the column. To see all of the strategies and descriptions at once, go to [this page](#), or click on the link at the top of the tool: “[Click here](#) for a mobile and printer-friendly list of strategies and descriptions.”

As you see in the screen shot on the next page, the strategies are color coded as cognitive (teal), physical or behavioral (red), or affective (orange). All three categories are important—and you'll see overlap among them—but you might focus on one area more than another.

After selecting your strategies, you may print the page or save it as a PDF.

Presentation tool screen shot

**How to Feel Confident for a Presentation**  
*...and overcome speech anxiety*

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Click on a strategy to read a more detailed description and reference. Drag a few strategies to try before, the day of, and after a presentation. [Click here](#) for a mobile and printer-friendly list of strategies and descriptions. [Read more instructions.](#)

Write out all your fears, identify which are irrational, and write a coping statement for each one.	Think of your presentation as a conversation—not a performance.
Exercise.	Power pose.
Focus on the audience instead of yourself.	Pause just before you start.
Don't worry about being nervous.	Distract yourself so you don't think about it.
Practice focusing on your words and actions.	Think and act positively.
Practice mindfulness.	Practice out loud, using different words each time.
Recognize that you don't look as nervous as you feel.	Visualize success.
Find ways to relax.	Breathe from your diaphragm and tighten and release muscles. Yawn.
Understand physical reactions as biological differences.	Let yourself relax.
Practice in front of 4 or more people.	Watch a video of your presentation with an open mind.
Practice in front of a mirror.	Write down everything you did well.

Teal = Cognitive, Red = Physical/Behavioral, Orange = Affective

**Implementing the Tool in Your Organization**

Within an organization, presenters may find it useful to discuss with co-workers the strategies they have chosen. In our management communication classes at the School of Hotel Administration, students use the tool as homework and bring their results to class. In teams, they discuss their concerns about public speaking and share their individual plan. This activity takes place before a scheduled team presentation so that students can support each other and give each other feedback during practice sessions.

Working with other employees may help reduce your speech anxiety. It may be helpful to practice in front of a few

trusted colleagues before the actual presentation and then to get their feedback after the presentation. Sharing fears and how to overcome them assures people that they are not the only ones who experience nervousness in front of groups. In fact, you'll find that even the most experienced presenters still have a certain level of anxiety—they use that energy as part of their preparation, rather than allow it to sabotage their presentation. The strategies presented in this tool should also help you draw on that energy to build a confident delivery and make your best possible presentation. ■

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