

Quick Tips to move from....

**NERVOUS  
TO  
NATURAL**

Tony Jeary  
Mr. Presentation™

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## Introduction

I travel the world training and teaching thousands of people how to present well. One of the most common areas people ask for help with is anxiety. I hear it time and again, "help me and my people with our nervousness." I have studied the subject extensively and would like to share with you my view of nervousness in this short introduction. I then encourage you to study the tips and techniques that assembled here and efficiently organized to help you make better presentations.

I believe the reason people are nervous when it comes to presenting is the simple fact that people fear the UNKNOWN. For example, they don't know how their audience is going to react, if they will remember all the points, they are afraid of forgetting something. How do you move the unknown to the known? Simple, know more. To know more you have to plan and prepare. The more you do, the more you know, the more know, the more you reduce nervousness. What do I mean? I mean if you rehearse right, you will know a lot more about your presentation function and content. If you test your equipment and room set up you will know a lot more. If you research your audience's reaction and feelings about your subject you will know a lot more. The list goes on and on. Simply put - the more you prepare, the more unknowns become known.

I have realized in more than 10 years of study on this subject that there is a chronological sequence that relates to nervousness. As such, we have divided this work into six steps, in the order of a typical presentation (chronological order). We start with the moment you find out you need to, or must, make a presentation. Step One is Preparation. Once you've thoroughly prepared, it's on to Step Two, Rehearsal. Step Three covers the last moments before you go on. Step Four covers the first three minutes, transitioning to Step Five, which is about maintaining proper pace. Of course, Step Six is about closing your presentation effectively.

You can apply techniques in each of these steps that will move the unknowns to known. Additionally, as you learn and apply these techniques, you will better understand what and how to do things to make you less nervous and to make you a better presenter.

I have designed this work to help you whether you read through the whole thing from beginning to end, or simply go to one specific step. I encourage you to study all these points and highlight or circle the tips that stand out to you. From time to time, re-read them. If you do, I am convinced that with only a few hours of study, and by implementing some of the ideas, you will be less nervous and give much better presentations. Good luck, good reading and call if we can help.

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# Preface

Interesting Facts About Nervousness/Anxiety - Understanding the causes of nervousness will get you started on your journey from Nervous to Natural.

1. You're not alone! Stage fright never killed anyone, but many people would rather die than give a speech! Just take a look at the Top 10 Fears Among Americans:

- \* Speaking before a group
- \* Heights
- \* Insects and bugs
- \* Financial problems
- \* Deep water
- \* Sickness
- \* Death
- \* Flying
- \* Loneliness
- \* Dogs

(from The Book of Lists)

2. Another survey of the American public showed:

50% -- sometimes nervous when they have to speak in public

25% -- struggle with anxiety, but manage despite the stress

25% -- so fearful that they avoid meetings, refuse promotions, or change jobs to escape an audience

3. If you will take these statistics to heart, you will realize that your audience is filled with people who have the same anxiety about speaking that you do - and who admire you for having the courage to step up to the plate and talk.

4. There are many fears that cause speech anxiety. Discover the sources of your nervousness and then plan and prepare accordingly:

- \* Fear of looking foolish
- \* Fear of not living up to your audience's expectations
- \* Fear of negative evaluations
- \* Fear of the unknown
- \* Expectations of perfection
- \* Negative memories of past speeches/presentations
- \* Fear of being the center of attention
- \* Fear of unfamiliar situations
- \* Fear of speaking to an audience of higher status

5. We can create additional anxiety through negative self-talk. "I can't possibly do a good job with this presentation. Why would anyone want to listen to me?" Negative thoughts create tension in your body, which sends distress signals back to the mind. Your mind then comes up with even more awful thoughts, and an endless cycle of anxiety has begun. Use Positive self talk. Create a phrase and mentally say it to your self over and over. Take a cue from the "Little Engine That Could."

6. Trying to achieve perfection is futile. It leads to anxiety and poor performance. Concentrate on the message you want to convey and, more specifically, the objectives you want to accomplish, not on doing it perfectly.

7. Confident speakers see the physical symptoms of speech anxiety as a positive sign that indicates that they are emotionally ready for the speech.

8. Put your fear into perspective. Is your fear rational? Does the future of the world - or even your city -- depend on the outcome of your presentation? Will anyone remember it in five years? You have something of value to give to your audience. If you're thoroughly prepared, your fear is irrational. Try to see it that way.

9. Feeling a little nervous before a speech is healthy. It shows that your speech is important to you and that you care about doing well.

10. If you're well prepared, and still feel nervous, your preparation will help reduce your nervousness once you begin to speak. Preparation pays big dividends!

11. Nervousness doesn't have to be your enemy. The day I stop feeling nervous is the day I know I'm no longer an effective presenter. Make your nervousness work for you rather than against you. Convert nervous energy to enthusiasm for your talk.

## STEP 1: Preparation

### Define Objectives

12. Define your objectives to clarify your message. You should be able to write three short, concise sentences to answer these questions:

- \* WHAT will be the actual content of the presentation?
- \* HOW detailed will the information in the presentation be and HOW long will the presentation last?
- \* WHY will audience members wish to act when they leave the presentation?

### Know Your Audience

13. Reframe the way you view your audience. Many people get nervous because they feel alone and isolated when speaking to a group. To overcome this, try to see your presentation as an interaction between you and your listeners - a chance to share ideas with each other. Seeing your audience this way, you will be less likely to be wrapped up in your fears.

14. Know your audience. Spend time thinking about their needs, rather than worrying about yourself. When your audience feels that you care about them, their warmth will melt your nervousness away. Before the presentation, know the answers to these questions:

- \* Who will attend the presentation?
- \* What are their concerns?
- \* Why will they attend?
- \* Are they already familiar with your subject?
- \* Do you need to use industry jargon to best relate to them?
- \* What do they want/need to learn from your presentation?
- \* What do they know about you?
- \* Will you have to establish credibility with them, or are you a "known commodity"?
- \* What is in your talk for them?

15. Just do it! Experts tell us that as much as 75% of speech anxiety can be avoided with adequate preparation.

16. Don't procrastinate! Nervousness and the fear of presenting often lead to putting off getting started until tomorrow. The longer you put it off, the less time there is to adequately prepare and rehearse -and the more pressure and nervousness you feel. Don't get caught in this vicious cycle!

17. Decide to perform as a service to others, not just for your own self-glorification. Change your focus to create less anxiety. Think about how to benefit your audience.

### Study Your Message/Know Your Content

18. Be very knowledgeable about current events by reading newspapers, magazines and watching newscasts on television. The more you know, the less anxious you'll feel. This is especially helpful in impromptu presentation situations.

### 3-D Outline™

19. Prepare a 3-D Outline™ of your talk (read Inspire Any Audience). Instead of just a regular outline, build an outline that has four headings: time, what, why and how. Fill in each, as if they were four columns side by side.

Time	What	Why	How

Most people prepare an agenda with just the What's and sometime with the (sub) times broken down - I suggest you go a bit further and fill in the Why's of each sub part as well as the How's. The How might be with a slide or video or a handout for example

### Prepare a Checklist

20. Create a checklist of things you need to do before your presentation (equipment prep, props set, research, people to contact, phone numbers, etc.) Keep the list close at hand to update as necessary. Knowing your action items are written down will give your brain - and your nerves - a break.

21. Make flipcharts and signs now. You will probably need to make a few flipcharts during your presentation, but it's best to prepare as many as you can ahead of time. They look better and are easier to read, and will allow you to focus on the audience more. They can also help eliminate your nervousness about misspelling.

### Back-Up Plan

22. Have a back-up plan. What will you do if the VCR doesn't work? If there is no flip chart stand? Anticipate that Murphy's Law will be fully operational on the day of your presentation and you won't be flustered by inconveniences that may come your way. Have a back up plan for everything and know what you can skip if you are required to shorten your talk. Mentally think out all the "what ifs".

23. Have some "standby" material ready if you think you may run short. Generally, most presentations run too long, rather than too short, but there is peace of mind in knowing you won't be trying to fill any remaining minutes with idle chatter.

24. Prepare a flip chart with the agenda for everyone to see. Often you can have a posted agenda that will allow you and the audience to see where you are leading them. Having a visual reminder of what's coming next can greatly reduce your anxiety.

## STEP 2: Rehearsal

\* Practice your speech so much that you can do it while on autopilot. That way, even if your brain freezes, your lips can still keep moving.

\* Effective rehearsal means making the best of your preparation time to become comfortable, relaxed, and in control - both mentally and physically. It also means anticipating and avoiding troubles before they happen.

### Mental Walk-through

25. The mental walk-through familiarizes you with the flow of your presentation. Do the following exercises until you become familiar with all the parts of your presentation. Then do it some more.

- Walk through each step
- Imagine your successful introduction of each step
- and each point
- Go through to the end each time. Repeat.

26. Go through each step of the presentation in your mind, as if you were reading a script. When you can visualize and imagine your performance completely, doing it for real becomes more like second nature.

27. Research shows that the brain and nervous system cannot differentiate between an activity that you thoroughly imagined and one that actually occurred. Visualization dramatically improves performance.

28. Use the rational emotive theory (developed by Robert Ellis) to overcome nervousness:

\* Imagine the worst possible thing that could happen

\* Estimate the chance of its happening

\* Picture what is likely to happen instead

\* Mentally minimize the potential problems - Don't worry about things you can't control!

### Fast Walk-through

29. Use your 3-D Outline™ to talk through your presentation and see how it flows verbally.

30. "Almost" Memorize the beginning. Since nervousness is most intense at first, get a head start by having the beginning totally under control.

31. Rehearse with audio or videotape practice sessions. Study your expressions and tone. There's no replacement for understanding how you look and sound when speaking.

32. Use 3x5 cards of key points, times, and directions while rehearsing. Number the 3x5 cards in case you drop them!

### Full/Dress Rehearsal

33. Actors do dress rehearsals - so should you!

34. Rehearse in the clothing you will wear for your presentation. If you have bought new clothing for the occasion, wear it a time or two before the presentation so that you'll feel more comfortable when it's time to speak.

35. Wear clothing that makes you feel confident and self-assured. Choose an outfit that you feel good and look good in. You need to be totally unworried about your clothing on the day of the presentation.

36. Wear comfortable shoes. Better to wear a pair of nice looking old shoes than a new pair that cramps your feet. (I speak from experience)

37. Rehearse in front of someone - associate, spouse, or friend.

38. Rehearse with the props you'll use - pointer, flip chart, and overheads. Don't leave anything to chance! If you don't have an overhead projector to practice with, yet you plan on using one then get a box or a stack of something and make believe it is the projector and actually turn paper or transparencies as you rehearse.

39. Rehearse with the equipment you will be using. Equipment can cause mechanical and logistical headaches. Get used to the mechanics in the right way and at the right time - ahead of schedule.

## STEP 3: Set Up (Before you go on)

### The Night Before

40. Create a relaxed atmosphere for the night before your presentation. Have a quiet dinner, or eat alone. Focus your thoughts on your presentation, not on other business.
41. Resist the urge to make any big changes to your presentation -- that would only add to your nervousness.
42. If you have made an audio or video tape of your presentation, listen to it now, to remind yourself that you really CAN do this, and that you have something important to say.
43. Write TAKE IT EASY! on a 3x5 card that you will keep close at hand all the way to putting it up on the podium.
44. Review your notes and run through your checklist(s) to be sure everything is complete.
45. Get to bed at a reasonable time - you want to be at your physical best!

### The Day of the Presentation

46. Try to organize your day so that it won't be a hectic one. A normal schedule is OK -- just don't try to cram in lots of extras that day.
47. Eat more lightly than usual. Butterflies and a full stomach are not a great combination!
48. Avoid caffeinated beverages.
49. Eat a banana or two about an hour before your presentation. If the presentation is 2 hours or more, try eating another banana during a break about half way through. Bananas contain a natural beta-blocker and can help control anxiety. (Beta blockers block the body's response to adrenaline.)
50. Set up your introduction. Be sure that the person who will be introducing you has all the information about you that he/she needs. Remember that the goal is no surprises, to make the unknown known.
51. Arrive early. It sends the message that you care enough to get things ready in advance.

### Owning the Presentation Environment

52. Know your room. Walk the room before your presentation. Make the room mentally yours. Know every corner of it from a presenter's perspective.
53. Sit in an audience seat to get a feel for the room. Find out how to make your listeners comfortable. Can everyone see the front of the room and hear what is said without straining? Is the seating too cramped? If your audience is comfortable, you have a much better chance of being comfortable too.
54. If you will be using a sound system, make sure the building engineer or electrician knows when you're scheduled to speak. Sound system controls are often in a locked closet, and you need to be sure they are accessible when you need them! Check them out... have new batteries installed for microphones.
55. Get a telephone number - for last minute things like audio-visual equipment troubles.

### Set Up and Test Equipment

56. If anyone tells you, "Don't worry, the VCR works fine. We checked it out last week", don't believe them. Test everything! Isn't your peace of mind worth it?

57. Check the lighting in the room. Locate the lighting controls. Many projection screens get washed out from the room lighting. Make adjustments to the lighting if necessary. Now! Before the presentation so that your audience will be able to see everything you want them to see.

58. If there is a telephone in the room, disconnect it if possible. Try to keep potential distractions to a minimum.

### Establish Champions in the Audience

59. Meet and greet the audience. Meeting a few people ahead of time will give you some obvious beginning points for eye contact later - and give you the feeling of talking to friends rather than strangers.

### Isometrics Etc.

60. Press fingertips gently together; then press harder and hold for a few seconds. You can do this even as you begin speaking (in some cases) - no one will know that you're burning bottled stress and reducing nerves.

61. Pull up on the bottom of your chair for 5 seconds; repeat often.

62. Press your palms together tightly; hold and repeat.

63. While sitting, let your arms dangle at your sides. Gently rotate your wrists and let your fingers shake loosely. Gently shake the stress out of your fingers, hands and arms.

64. Take several deep, slow breaths.

### Stretching

65. Yawn widely a few times. Yawning is the body's natural way of relaxing itself. It will also stretch the muscles of your neck to allow more natural speaking.

66. Say something to someone to be sure your voice sounds OK and to warm up your vocal cords. Start talking to everyone.

67. Do relaxation techniques: Focus on tense muscle groups. First relax scalp; then eyebrows and ears; then tongue and jaw; then shoulders, and on down to feet. Repeat as necessary.

68. Take a brisk 5-minute walk to burn off excess energy/stress. Breathe some fresh air if you can.

69. Create a Nervous to Natural routine - any combination of isometrics, breathing, stretching, exercising, etc. - and do it the same way before every presentation you make.

### The Last Few Minutes before "Show Time"

70. Review your checklist. Be sure everything is done, and you will be amazed at how your confidence level soars and how your anxiety goes down.

71. Concentrate on searching for current and immediate things that are happening at the event that you can mention during your talk - especially in the opening.

72. Visualize yourself giving a wonderful presentation.

73. Give yourself a pep talk. Tell yourself that you will do well, and everyone will love it. Picture your audience applauding for you at the end of your presentation, then work toward it. Examples:

- The audience is going to love me because they REALLY want me to succeed.
- If I take a deep breath and concentrate, I will be more than prepared on time.
- I have prepared thoroughly and I will be confident and competent.
- Last time I stood up in front of his group, I dropped my files, but I also got the audience laughing with me by the end of my presentation.

74. "Catastrophize" - and ask yourself "What's the worst possible thing that can happen?" In the big scheme of things, the worst possible thing that could happen during the presentation probably isn't that terrible anyway. It is only a blip on the radarscope of eternity. Think positively!

## STEP 4: Start Right

### Your First Words

75. When you walk to the front of the room, your smile should confidently suggest, "I'm glad to be here."
76. Anxiety is typically highest at the start of the presentation. If you carefully plan the introduction of your presentation, and you know it very well, you can confidently get through the early part of your presentation.
77. For obvious reasons, try not to hold the microphone in your hand during the first minute.
78. Place your 3x5 cards on the podium or lectern. Generally, don't hold them once you start. The audience can often see them quiver.
79. Find a friendly face - a champion you met before the meeting - and look at him/her first as a confidence builder
80. Concentrate on breathing slowly and deeply. This will keep a steady supply of oxygen flowing. Nervous people tend to take short, shallow breaths that can lead to hyperventilation.
81. If your voice is a little shaky, pause before starting. You are in charge. Look around the room, smile at a familiar face or two, and rearrange your notes. Sip your water. Adjust the microphone. Take a few deep breaths. Begin when you are ready!
82. Be yourself! Trying to imitate someone else is an anxiety producer.
83. Move and gesture to burn off nervous energy. It catches your audience's attention when you're animated!
84. If you feel a sudden flood of anxiety, try touching a familiar object - your glass of water, the podium, the change in your pocket - to cause yourself to stop focusing on your fear, and start focusing on the world around you and the people you're speaking to.
85. Use visual aids. Charts, photos and graphs help communicate your points and take the spotlight off of you for a few minutes.
86. Pause periodically. This conveys relaxation and confidence. Surprisingly, a pause of 2 to 3 seconds not only catches the attention of the audience, but also lets them know you're in command. Learn to use the power of silence!
87. Establish expectations early in the presentation so the audience will know what to expect, and so you will be able to show them at the end of the presentation that you have met the expectations.

### Prove You're Ready, Prepared and Credible

88. Prove to the audience that you are ready, prepared and credible. Tell them if possible about the time you spent in preparation for them.

### Getting Involvement

89. Get them involved immediately. Ask them to write things down - This gets their eyes off you and gives you a moment to own the environment.

90. Alleviate the four audience tensions:

1. Between the audience and other audience members -- Have people shake hands with each other or get up and moving
2. Between the audience and the presenter (you) - Establish and maintain eye contact. Smile
3. Between the audience and materials - Hand out materials only when participants need them. Instruct the audience to immediately write their names on their materials.
4. Between the audience and the environment - Try to make it as comfortable as possible. Act on any audience suggestions about room comfort.

## STEP 5: Keeping the Pace

### Setting the Tone of the Presentation

91. Set the tone of the presentation. Take it slow and easy, speaking as you do in casual conversation. Even a fast-paced seminar can be conversational.

92. Focus on your presentation, not on fear.

93. Use a thought stopper. Put a rubber band inconspicuously on your wrist. Snap it (out of sight of the audience) when you feel yourself becoming anxious. It will help you refocus.

94. Learn to laugh at yourself. There really is humor to be found in the problems that happen during a presentation - the equipment stops working; you discover that you wore mismatched shoes; you trip over an electrical cord. If you will find the humor, your audience will be much more at ease, and they will help put you at ease too.

95. If you forget an important point, keep going! Your audience didn't know it was coming, and will never miss it - unless you put them through the agony of listening to you stammer endlessly trying to remember.

96. Walk around while you talk. This can be a good stress reliever.

97. Make sure your body language matches what you're saying. If there is a conflict between the two, your audience will usually believe your body signals.

98. Remind yourself that you chose to be there and you have important things to say.

99. Keep to the schedule or agenda.

100. Use an electronic light pointer. It will help you appear more relaxed because it allows you to work off nervous energy by moving around the room. It also gives you something to do with your hands.

### Getting Audience Feedback

101. Get audience feedback - verbally and non-verbally. Speak to one person at a time, and try to make eye contact with everyone at least once.

102. Encourage audience members to ask questions in order to make them look good.

### Activities

103. Use Business Entertainment to keep your audience interested. Because of the short attention spans of most people, it's a good idea to include some form of Business Entertainment every 5 to 7 minutes. Some examples are:

- Music
- Games
- Stories
- Activities
- Skits
- Give away freebies

## Pre-Summarizing

104. Pre-summarize throughout the presentation to be sure you're covering all the necessary points.

105. To take the terror out of a Question and Answer session, try to rethink the way you look at questions from the audience. Every question shows that there is interest in your presentation. How can that be so bad?

## STEP 6: The Close

106. By the time you get to the close, you should be sailing. Nervousness should be a thing of the past. Now you need to help the audience feel good about what they have learned, and leave them with something to remember both you and your message.

107. Have a clear picture of your close before you start your presentation. Audience tension mounts when there is not a definite end to your talk. Never end with, "Well, I guess that's about it, any questions?"

108. Summarize to review the main points of your presentation and prove that you've met your objectives and the audience's expectations.

109. Follow these basic rules for any close:

- Appeal to emotion. Your audience thinks with their rational minds, but acts on emotion.
- Keep it short. Anything longer than 2 minutes will seem like an eternity to your listeners.
- Be positive. Never discuss negatives at the end.
- Be motivational. Assure your audience that their actions do matter.
- Be energetic. If the last thing they see is your enthusiasm, they will leave feeling enthusiastic and ready to act.

110. Always include a call to action.

111. Avoid these closing killers at all costs:

- Asking for questions at the end. The right place for questions is just before your summary.
- Apologizing.
- Admitting something was missed. It's too late to go back so why admit you missed something? Move on!
- Skipping the summary. This leaves the audience dangling.
- Rambling.

112. Make sure you do 3 things at the end of your presentation:

- Thank the audience for their time and participation.
- Say good-bye.
- Stick around to talk with audience members.

113. Give yourself a pat on the back. You did it! You accomplished something that most people are afraid to even attempt - and you did it well! Congratulations! You're a Natural!

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