The Public Speaking Playbook
2nd Edition

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PART ONE: Get Ready to Speak

Public Speaking and You: Building Confidence

UPON COMPLETING THIS CHAPTER’S TRAINING, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO

1. Demonstrate how developing public speaking skills can help you realize personal, professional, and societal goals
2. List and explain the essential elements of communication
3. Assess your confidence as a speaker
4. Identify the sources of public speaking anxiety
5. Use systematic desensitization, power posing, cognitive restructuring, centering, and skills training to alleviate symptoms of speech apprehension and build confidence
A playbook is a game plan—a plan of action designed to help you become a peak performer. We wrote this playbook because we believe every public speaking student needs a game plan to succeed. Why? Because effective speakers prepare, practice, and present speeches that others judge to be of high quality. To rise to this level, effective speakers first master and then apply skills. And just like elite athletes and others who appear in public, they perform under pressure, either individually or as members of a team. They also practice consistently, so that every one of their presentations is as good as or better than their last. With practice, you can join their ranks.

We place a high value on public speaking ability because it is such a vital means of communication. The ability to speak in public is a powerful skill to be honed. Audiences have been drawn to the words of Tony Robbins, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Clinton, Suze Orman, and the late Steve Jobs because each has been able to inspire, reassure, convince, or simply reach out to audiences. The ability to speak in public is a powerful skill and talent to be honed. What will you do? You can be the smartest person in the room, but if deficient speaking skills keep others from understanding your ideas, being smart isn’t enough. A class in public speaking gives you and your peers the opportunity to work together on improving your public speaking skills.

COACHING TIP

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.”
—Benjamin Franklin

Merely reading and talking about public speaking won’t make you a better speaker. Only involving yourself in the process and doing it will help you improve. The more you speak in public, the easier it will become, and the more you will improve. Doing it builds confidence.
Identify Speechmaking’s Benefits

Becoming a skilled public speaker has benefits for the individual, both personal and professional, and for society as a whole.

1.1a Benefits for Your Personal Life

Speaking in public precipitates self-discovery and builds confidence and can even trigger self-discovery as well as creative self-expression. For instance, as a result of researching a topic of interest, such as the problems faced by soldiers returning from a war zone, you might discover that you have the desire to engage in service learning by volunteering at a veteran’s facility.

As a public speaker you are expected to reflect on your interests, to explore where you stand on controversial issues, and to consider the needs and concerns of others. You would need to consider your position and how to best make your argument so that even those who disagreed with your stance initially would listen to and understand it.

Becoming a more confident speaker will also make you a more confident student. By developing the ability to speak in public, you develop your ability to speak up in class—any class.

At the same time, as you build speaking confidence, you might find yourself wanting to become more civically engaged, speaking up and sharing ideas beyond the classroom as well.

While mastering the material in a major field is necessary, whether your major is business, computer programming, nursing, or any other subject, unless you also can present information clearly and effectively, no matter how intelligent you are, others may question your credibility and knowledge. By mastering the ability to communicate your ideas in public, you harness the power of speech. By being better able to control yourself and your ideas, you enhance your ability to control your environment.

1.1b Benefits for Your Career

Success in public speaking helps you grow professionally. Your ability to attain professional success is related to your ability to communicate effectively what you think, know, and can do. This is especially helpful in a job interview, since prospective employers favor candidates who have public speaking abilities.²

How far you advance in your career may well depend on how capable you are in addressing, impressing, and influencing others and in communicating your ideas clearly and effectively.³ The executives and entrepreneurs of tomorrow need to be skilled public speakers—masters of the art of speaking before groups of all sizes, including the news media and online audiences.
1.1c Benefits for Society

Developing public speaking skills gives you a voice in influencing the direction of your college, community, and society as a whole. It gives you opportunities to let others know the issues you care about and want them to care about too. By speaking up, and listening to others who speak up, you exercise effective citizenship. Freedom of speech has always been viewed as an essential ingredient in a democracy. What does freedom of speech mean? It means

1. You can speak freely without fear of being punished for expressing your ideas.
2. You can expose yourself freely to all sides of a controversial issue.
3. You can debate freely all disputable questions of fact, value, or policy.
4. You can make decisions freely based on your evaluation of the choices confronting you.

Our political system depends on a commitment by citizens to speak openly and honestly and to listen freely and carefully to all sides of an issue. It depends on our ability to think critically about what we listen to, so that we are able to accept or reject the speaker’s goal. In so doing, we can make informed decisions about our future. Democracy depends on our willingness to understand and respond to expressions of opinion, belief, and value that are different from our own.

Rally around ideas. How can a speech influence your political attitudes and choices?
Understand the Context of Public Speaking

Skilled public speakers have unique powers to influence. But like other forms of communication, public speaking is a circle of give-and-take between presenter and audience. The better you understand how communication works, the better your ability to make it work for you. The following elements are an integral part of the process:

- The source
- The receiver
- The message
- The channel

One way to study the interactions of these elements is with a model of the communication process in action (see Figure 1.1).

Look closely at the variables depicted in Figure 1.1 to identify how they relate to each other dynamically during public speaking. Both the speaker, or source, and the listener, or receiver, participate in communication. Each party simultaneously and continually performs both sending functions (giving out messages) and receiving functions (taking in messages). Neither sending nor receiving is the exclusive job of any person.

Between the source and receiver, messages—both verbal and nonverbal—are sent and received. The words and visuals we use to express our ideas and feelings, the sounds of our voices, and our body language (or nonverbal communication) make up the content of our communication and convey information. Everything we do as senders and receivers has potential message value for those observing us. If a speaker’s voice quivers or a receiver checks his or her watch, it conveys a message.

**FIGURE 1.1**
The Communication Process in Action
**Channels** are pathways or media through which messages are carried. The auditory channel carries our spoken words; the visual channel carries our gestures, facial expressions, and postural cues; and the vocal channel carries cues such as rate, quality, volume, and pitch of speech. Communication is usually a multichannel event.

**Noise** is anything that interferes with our ability to send or receive a message. Noise need not be sound. Physical discomfort, a psychological state, intellectual ability, or the environment also can create noise. As the model in Figure 1.1 shows, noise can enter the communication event at any point; it can come from the context, the channel, the message, or the persons themselves. Different languages, translators, generational terms, jargon, and technical terms play a role in the day-to-day noise of communication in our diverse world.

The **situational/cultural context** is the setting or environment for communication. Because every message occurs in a situation with cultural and social meanings, conditions of place and time influence both behavior and the outcome of the communication event. The after-dinner speaker addressing a large number of people who have just eaten and are full will need to give a different kind of speech than the person whose task is to address the members of a union protesting a layoff.

**Feedback** is information we receive in response to a message we have sent. Feedback tells us how we are doing. Positive feedback, like applause, serves a reinforcing function and causes us to continue behaving as we are, whereas negative feedback, such as silent stares, serves a corrective function and leads us to eliminate any ineffective behaviors. Internal feedback is that which you give yourself (you laugh at a joke you tell); external feedback comes from others who are party to the communicative event (receivers laugh at your joke, too).

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Be reactive. Adapt your speech to the setting, adjusting to feedback from your audience and any interference impeding its delivery and reception.
1.2a Picture the Parts Working Together

All parts of the communicative model continuously interact with and affect each other—they are interconnected and interdependent. When something happens to one variable, all the other variables in the process are affected. Communication is also cumulative; the communicative experiences we have add up and have the potential to alter our perceptions and behaviors. The effects of communication cannot be erased; they become part of the total field of experience we bring to the next communication event. Ultimately, our field of experience—the sum of all our experiences—influences our attitudes toward the speech event and our receivers, affecting both our desire to communicate and the way we do it.

Your success as a source ultimately depends on your ability to

- Establish common ground with your receivers
- Encode or formulate a message effectively
- Adapt to cultural and situational differences
- Alleviate the effects of noise
- Understand and respond to the reactions of those with whom you are interacting

Your effectiveness depends not only on what you intend to communicate, but also on the meanings your receivers give to your message. A self-centered communicator is insensitive to the needs of receivers, which limits his or her effectiveness. Keep your eyes on your communication goal, instead of focusing solely on yourself.

Know your parts. Understand the relationships among the communication model's components to create a more dynamic and influential speech.
1.2b Consider Audience Expectations

Although being able to (1) organize ideas logically, (2) encode or express ideas clearly, and (3) analyze and adapt to receivers readily are skills every communicator needs, they are particularly important for public speakers.

Receivers usually have higher expectations for public speakers than for other communicators. For example, we expect public speakers to use more formal standards of grammar and usage, pay more attention to their presentation style and appearance, fit what they say into a specific time limit, and anticipate and then respond to questions their receivers will ask.

So, when speaking in public you will need to polish, formalize, and build on your basic conversational skills to reach your goal.

Consider your audience’s goals. How does your speech connect to their interests, needs, and knowledge?

**COACHING TIP**

“We live in an era where the best way to make a dent on the world may no longer be to write a letter to the editor or publish a book. It may be simply to stand up and say something . . . because both the words and the passion with which they are delivered can now spread across the world at warp speed.”

—Chris Anderson, TED TALKS: The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking

Picture the model in Figure 1.1. Communication and understanding are key. Focus on your audience. Make it easy for those in it to understand you. You just might significantly affect their lives.
Build Confidence

You are in good company if the thought of speaking in public causes you some concern. Speakers are not alone in experiencing fear or feeling stressed at the thought of performing in public. Athletes, dancers, actors, and musicians also have to handle their fear and emotional stress, which, if not channeled effectively, can interfere with their ability to perform. 4 When they control their fear, however, the stress becomes useful, helping them gain a competitive edge, boosting their energy, and readying them to deliver a peak performance. How does this happen? Quite simply, athletes and others who perform in public focus, face their fears, and train to handle pressure. And they do this gradually over time, not once, but regularly. 5 You can too. Start by confronting your feelings about giving a speech.

Self-Assessment: How Confident Are You About Public Speaking?

In the space before each of the following statements, enter the number in the rating scale that best represents your feelings about each statement:

Not at all concerned 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely concerned

1. ___ I will forget what I plan to say.
2. ___ My thoughts will confuse listeners.
3. ___ My words will offend listeners.
4. ___ Audience members will laugh at me when I don’t mean to be funny.
5. ___ I’m going to embarrass myself.
6. ___ My ideas will have no impact.
7. ___ I will look foolish in front of my audience because I won’t be able to look them in the eye and I won’t know what to do with my hands.
8. ___ My voice and body will shake uncontrollably.
9. ___ I will bore my audience.
10. ___ Audience members will stare at me unresponsively.

TOTAL ___

To determine your score, add the numbers you selected:

41–50 You have speech anxiety.
31–40 You are very apprehensive.
21–30 You are concerned to a normal extent.
10–20 You are very confident.

Although this self-survey is by no means a scientific indicator of your oral communication confidence, it can help you face your concerns. This is your first step in gaining control of your excess energy and using it to elicit a strong public speaking performance.
1.3a Understand Public Speaking Anxiety

Public speaking anxiety, also known as PSA, is a variant of communication anxiety that affects some 40 to 80 percent of all speakers. PSA has two dimensions, process anxiety and performance anxiety.

- **Process anxiety** is fear of preparing a speech. For example, when you experience process anxiety, you doubt your ability to select a topic, research it, and organize your ideas.
- **Performance anxiety** is fear of presenting a speech. It finds you stressful about delivering the speech, fearful that you’ll tremble, forget what you want to say, do something embarrassing, be unable to complete the speech, not make sense to receivers, or simply be assessed as a poor speaker.

Why are some of us afraid to speak before a group? What makes us fear public speaking more than we fear snakes, heights, bee stings, or death?

**Fear of Failure**

We all fear failure. If you choose not to take risks because you visualize yourself failing rather than succeeding, if you disagree with what you hear or read but choose to keep your thoughts to yourself, then you are probably letting your feelings of inferiority limit you.

**Fear of the Unknown**

Some fear what they do not know or have not had successful experience with. The unknown leaves much to the imagination—and far too frequently, we irrationally choose to imagine the worst thing that could happen when making a speech.

**Fear of Evaluation**

Some speechmakers also fear that others will judge their ideas, how they sound or look, or what they represent. When faced with such an option, we prefer not to be judged.

**Fear of Being the Center of Attention**

We may also fear being conspicuous or singled out. Audience members usually focus directly on a speaker. Some speakers interpret receivers’ gazes as scrutinizing and hostile rather than as revealing a genuine interest in them.

**Fear of Difference**

Ethnocentricty—the belief that one’s own group or culture is better than others—makes some speakers think they share nothing in common with the members of their audience. Feelings of difference make it harder to find common ground, which in turn increases the anxiety about making a speech.

**Fear Imposed by Culture**

Culture can influence attitudes toward speaking in public. For example, according to research, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, Israelis, and other Middle Eastern peoples are typically less apprehensive about public speaking than Americans. In these cultures, children are rewarded for merely trying, making judgment and communication anxiety a less intrusive force.

![Conquering fear. Visualize yourself giving a successful speech days, hours, and minutes beforehand to help combat public speaking anxiety.](Image)
1.3b Address the Physical Effects of Speech Anxiety

When we experience the physical effects of anxiety, adrenalin is released into our systems and our respiration rate and heart rate increase. When our anxiety levels get too high, we need to manage the physical effects of speech fright. For example, if we’re runners, we could go for a run. If not, we could take a moment to stretch our limbs.

Another technique is systematic desensitization, a way to reduce the physical responses of apprehension. The principle behind systematic desensitization is that after being tensed, a muscle relaxes. Try these methods:

**Tense/Relax**

Tense your neck and shoulders. Count to 10. Relax. Continue by tensing and relaxing other parts of your body including your hands, arms, legs, and feet. As you continue this process, you will find yourself growing calmer.

**Strike a Powerful Pose**

How we stand can affect our speaking success. Merely practicing a “power pose” in private before presenting a speech lowers speaker stress levels, thereby reducing outward signs of stress and enhancing confidence:

- Stand tall.
- Stand tall and lean slightly forward.
- Stand tall and open your limbs expansively.
- Leaning slightly forward, stake out a broad surface with your hands.

Leaning slightly forward engages an audience. Opening the limbs expresses power. Staking out a broad surface conveys a sense of control. In contrast to power poses, low-power cues increase stress and decrease confidence. Adopting a close-bodied posture conveys powerlessness, touching your neck or face is a symptom of anxiety, and folding your arms comes off as defensive. Use power poses that convey authority instead. Doing so will boost confidence at the same time.
1.3c Address the Mental Effects of Speech Anxiety

Far too often, our self-talk—our internal communication—fans the flames of our fears instead of extinguishing them. We create a self-fulfilling prophecy, meaning that we form an expectation and adjust our behavior to match. As a result, the expectation we created becomes true. This can cause unnecessary problems if our thoughts are negative.

The goal is to use thought stopping to make self-talk work in your favor. Every time you find yourself thinking an upsetting or anxiety-producing thought, every time you visualize yourself experiencing failure instead of success, say to yourself, “Stop!” and tell yourself, “Calm.” Thought stopping is an example of cognitive restructuring, a technique that focuses attention on our thoughts rather than on our bodily reactions. Cognitive restructuring works by altering the beliefs people have about themselves and their abilities.

A second technique is centering. When centering, we direct our thoughts internally. Key in this procedure is the centering breath, designed to help us focus on the task mentally. Try it. Take a deep breath. Follow it with a strong exhalation and muscle relaxation. This done, you’ll be better able to narrow your focus on the external task.

Using thought stopping and centering together allows you to gain control by diverting attention from thoughts that threaten your success to positive ones.

Deep thoughts. Taking deep breaths and relaxing your muscles can help mitigate the effects that negative thoughts have on your speeches.

COACHING TIP

“There are two types of speakers—those that are nervous and those that are liars.”

—Mark Twain

Nerves are not your enemy. Face them, control them, and you transform normal anxiety into a positive. Harnessing the excess energy that accompanies any apprehension you feel energizes you and enhances your development as a speaker.
1.3d Use Skills Training

We can combat both the physical and the mental effects of speech anxiety by making an effort to

- Speak on a topic about which we truly care
- Prepare thoroughly for the speechmaking event
- Keep in mind that our listeners are unlikely to perceive our signs of anxiety

Because you are just beginning your training to become a better speaker, it is reasonable to expect you may still feel anxious about speaking in public. As you increase your skill level by learning how to prepare and deliver speeches, you become consciously competent and aware of your competence. The idea of public speaking becomes less threatening. By making your anxiety work for you, by converting it into positive energy, you learn to fear anxiety less, and you learn to like public speaking more.

GAME PLAN

Conquering Speech Anxiety

☐ I have assessed my own feelings and fears about giving a speech.
☐ I have chosen a topic that I know and about which I feel passionate.
☐ Last night, I practiced a powerful pose—I stood tall, I leaned forward, and opened my arms to the audience, staking out a broad surface with my hands.
☐ The morning before my speech, I went for a walk, a run, or a swim.
☐ Just before my speech, I took a moment to center my breathing and thoughts.
☐ I am ready to deliver my speech.
1.3e Anxiety Can Be Transformative

Contrary to what you may think, as a speaker you neither can nor should rid yourself of all speech anxiety. Rather, using your anxiety to perform more effectively is better than experiencing none at all.

In the book *Face of Emotion*, author Eric Finzi suggests that “putting on a happy face” not only erases a frown, it actually can lift your mood.\(^7\) Nonverbal communication expert Paul Ekman agrees, acknowledging the possibility that facial expressions can affect our moods.\(^8\) It follows then that changing any negative thoughts you have about giving a speech to positive ones can similarly influence your performance. With that in mind, follow these suggestions:

**Prepare Thoroughly and Rehearse**

Preparation helps instill confidence. It includes everything you do between thinking up a topic and speech delivery. Prepared speakers are competent speakers.

**Visualize a Positive Experience**

Instead of focusing on your negative thoughts and fears, focus on the potential positives of your performance. Visualize yourself being successful from start to finish.

**Remind Yourself That Receivers Usually Cannot See or Hear Your Fear**

Although you may feel the flutters that speech anxiety causes, the audience generally cannot detect these in your performance. In fact, observers usually underestimate the amount of anxiety they believe a speaker is experiencing.\(^9\)

**Choose a Topic You Are Knowledgeable About and Are Comfortable With**

One of the best means of controlling your fear and laying the groundwork for a successful speech is to choose a topic that is important to you, that you know something about, and about which you want to find out even more. Highly anxious speakers rarely do this. As a result, they spend far too much preparation time trying to interest themselves in or master a subject, and far too little time rehearsing the presentation itself.\(^0\)

**Focus on Your Audience, Not on Yourself**

Highly anxious speakers tend to be self-obsessed, but more effective speakers focus their attention on their listeners. When you avoid focusing on your anxiety and concentrate on your audience instead, you shine the communication spotlight on those you are speaking to and you minimize your anxiety.

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**COACHING TIP**

"Think you can or think you can’t; either way you will be right.” —Henry Ford

It is important to believe in yourself. You can become a skilled, confident, and proficient public speaker. Do you believe in you?
Exercises

GET A STRONG START

Becoming proficient at public speaking, like any other skill, is accomplished with practice. With introspection comes insight; with practice comes mastery. Take advantage of every opportunity to build your speaking skills.

1. Deliver a Tip on How to Enhance Confidence

For practice, customize a topic related to speech apprehension, such as “Taking the Fear Out of Public Speaking,” “The Uses of Hypnosis,” or “How to De-stress.” Once you select a topic, research it, and explain the guidelines given to reduce apprehension.

2. TED on Power Poses

Watch the TED Talk about power poses available at http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html. In this presentation, Amy Cuddy reveals the extent to which body language shapes assessments of a person. Based on what you learn, identify what you can do to help others judge you to be a “powerful” presenter.

3. Analyze This: The Opening Monologue

View the opening monologue of an afternoon or late-night TV show such as Saturday Night Live, The Tonight Show With Jimmy Fallon, or The Ellen DeGeneres Show. Assess the host’s confidence delivering the opening monologue. What was the host’s topic? Did it appeal to the audience? Why? Did the host come across as knowledgeable? Why? Did she or he come across as confident? Why? What signs of anxiety, if any, did you see the host exhibit? Was the host’s focus on the audience or on him- or herself? How do you know? What three adjectives would you use to describe the host’s performance? What aspects of your analysis can you apply to your performance as a speaker?

4. Approach the Speaker’s Stand

Choose one of the following assignments and share your thoughts with your peers in a two- to three-minute presentation. Structure your presentation so it has a clear introduction, definite body, and strong conclusion.

a. Interview another member of the class to identify a number of interesting facts about that person. Be as creative as possible in organizing and sharing what you discovered about your partner and what it has taught you.

b. Describe a significant personal experience that challenged your sense of ethics.

c. Based on a review of recent news stories, share a concern you have regarding the ability of members of society to respect one another and get along.

d. Bring to class a picture, object, or brief literary or nonfiction selection that helps you express your feelings about a subject of importance to you. Share the selection with the class, discuss why you selected it, and explain how it helps you better understand yourself, others, or your relation to the subject.
1. **Demonstrate how developing public speaking skills can help you realize personal, professional, and societal goals.** Public speaking precipitates self-discovery and the art of creative self-expression. It enhances self-confidence and the ability to influence or control one’s environment. In addition, prospective employers favor persons with public speaking abilities. And society benefits from people who are able to function as responsible citizens and participate in the exchange of ideas.

2. **List and explain the essential elements of communication.** The following elements are integral to communicating: the source formulates and delivers a message; the receiver interprets the source’s message; the message is the content of the speech; the channel is the pathway that carries the message; noise is anything that interferes with the sending or receiving of a message; the cultural context is the environment in which communication occurs; feedback is information received in response to a sent message; effect is the outcome or exchange of influences occurring during communication; and the field of experience is the sum of all the experiences that a person carries with him or her when communicating.

3. **Assess your confidence as a speaker.** Public speaking anxiety is composed of process anxiety (the fear of preparing a speech) and performance anxiety (the fear of presenting a speech). It is important to acknowledge and face whatever fear you have so that you are able to harness the excess energy that accompanies it.

4. **Identify the sources of speechmaking anxiety.** Among the common sources of speechmaking anxiety are fear of failure, fear of the unknown, fear of evaluation, fear of being the center of attention, fear of difference, and fear imposed by culture.

5. **Use systematic desensitization, power posing, cognitive restructuring, centering, and skills training to alleviate the symptoms of speech apprehension.** A variety of strategies can help you address both the physical and mental effects of speech anxiety. Practice tensing and relaxing your muscles, strike a powerful pose, focus on changing your own negative thoughts, and take comfort in honing your own competence by practicing and delivering speeches.

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**KEY TERMS**

- Centering 13
- Centering breath 13
- Channel 7
- Cognitive restructuring 13
- Communication 3
- Effects of communication 8
- Ethnocentricity 11
- Feedback 7
- Field of experience 8
- Message 6
- Noise 7
- Performance anxiety 11
- Process anxiety 11
- Public speaking anxiety 11
- Receiver 6
- Self-talk 13
- Situational/cultural context 7
- Source 6
- Thought stopping 13

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