

Speech Anxiety

Every time Jane stands behind a podium facing a group of people she immediately gets sweaty palms, a dry mouth, weak knees, shaky hands and butterflies in her stomach. Her symptoms are real and according to a recent survey approximately 85 percent of Americans experience this same phenomenon--known as "speech anxiety." Public speaking can be a most unpleasant experience, both physically and emotionally, due to the extra adrenalin released in the body causing your heart to race and leaving you short of breath. You may fear that the most you will be able to do is utter a few words in between panting and gasping for air, right? Wrong!

Dr. Michael Motley, professor of rhetoric and communication at the University of California, acknowledges that speech anxiety is a real fear but explains that it does not have to leave you speechless. According to his research, confident speakers see the physical symptoms of speech anxiety as a positive sign that indicates that they are emotionally ready for the speech. However, most of us interpret these feelings as fear. That's when you begin to imagine what will happen if your speech is less than perfect, or that you will embarrass yourself.

Motley claims that our irrational fears combined with our physiological symptoms often feed on each other. The fears increase the symptoms, which in turn increase the fears until extreme physiological arousal combines with thoughts of catastrophe. Conquering the fear of public speaking is no easy feat. You can alleviate some of the anxiety by thinking of your speech in terms of ordinary communication, rather than as a public performance. By approaching the podium with the objective of communicating a point, instead of worrying about your oratorical flair, you can make your audience feel as if they are being spoken with rather than lectured to. In essence, all you really need are the gestures, vocal inflections and facial expressions that you use in everyday conversation. By concentrating on communicating a point the hardest part of public speaking should be preparing, not delivering the speech.

TIPS FOR SPEAKERS

- Decide on your specific objectives first.
- Put yourself in your audience's place; speak in terms that they'll understand.
- Practice your speech privately. This can help you to feel more confident with what you will say.
- Don't memorize or read your speech; use brief notes or an outline.
- Speak to one person at a time; try to make eye contact with everyone at least once.
- Don't worry about your hands or your facial expressions.
- Take it slow and easy, speaking as you do in casual conversation.
- Use slow, deep breathing both before and during your talk to help reduce physical tension.
- Ask for advice and feedback from someone you trust.

Call the **Counseling Center at 974-2831** for more information.

For more information or assistance:

USF students may call 974-2831;

Faculty and staff may call 974-5469