

research sites in order to find out about the financial strength of the company and how analysts feel about its financial future.

6. Search for Job Fairs Online.

Here is an opportunity to meet with potential employers without ever leaving home. In most cases, they will be able to converse privately online with an interviewer and in real time. Usually these fairs are free.

Finally, to demonstrate that they have the basic skills necessary to conduct an online job search, I ask students to do the following: In two weeks, they are to send me their résumés electronically. In three weeks, they are to post/file their résumés electronically at two appropriate sites and to supply me with the URLs. One of those sites must be a bulletin board and the other a job search guide or database.

Address correspondence to the author, Department of English, The Pennsylvania State University, Mont Alto Campus, Mont Alto PA 17237 (e-mail: jmc9@psu.edu).



Facing the Fears Associated with Professional Speaking

Judith A. Rolls

University College of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia

I BEGIN TO ADDRESS presentation anxiety by presenting a lecture/discussion on controlling nervousness with five specific facts about nervousness and public speaking:

1. *The Book of Lists* (1977) notes that the number one fear of Americans is making a speech in public. Therefore, people who are nervous about speaking in public are pretty normal. Tell them the fear of death is ranked as the sixth greatest fear.
2. McCroskey (1977) divides nervousness or communication apprehension into two types. One is referred to as trait apprehension and the other is state communication apprehension. He suggests that people who suffer from trait communication apprehension are thought to be nervous in many kinds of situations and would be

classified as shy. State communication apprehension, on the other hand, refers to the nervousness felt before, and sometimes during, a presentation. Even professional, experienced speakers feel a degree of this type of nervousness.

3. Just because people are nervous, it does not mean they are doing a bad job. In fact, nervousness can enhance the vitality and enthusiasm brought to the situation. Most people think that if they are nervous they are poor public speakers. This is a myth.
4. Unless there are extreme signs of nervousness, audience members are not aware of a speaker's stage fright. For instance, students often complain that their faces are hot and assume they are blushing. However, a hot face does not necessarily mean that it is red. Or speakers might get sweaty palms as a result of their nervousness, but the audience would be unaware of this.
5. Nervousness can be controlled. I advise students that the next time their bodies begin to tremble (or however nervousness is manifested in them) rather than getting nervous about being nervous, they should instead focus on getting their message across to the audience. They have probably trembled before and will likely do so again. That's just how nervousness is manifested in their particular bodies. No big deal.

Group Work

After the lecture/discussion, I inform the class that they are going to do a communication exercise to demonstrate the variety of ways in which nervousness is manifested in different people. I tell them they are going to work in small groups, and each group's mission is to brainstorm (and record on a piece of paper) all the ways in which they, or people they know, experience nervousness when making presentations. I give examples such as going blank, having shaky body parts, getting itchy armpits, feeling your face become hot, wondering what to do with your hands, and the like.

Learners are given fifteen to twenty minutes to complete their lists, and they should be encouraged to be as thorough as possible. Have them commence the group work with introductions and a little background about each person. Then I ask if they understand the directions and call for a volunteer to explain what they are supposed to do.

Students are divided into small groups of five persons each by counting off one through five until each person in the room has a number. I ask the “ones” to gather in a particular area, the “twos” in another, and so forth, until each number is represented by a group. If there is space available or if appropriate, groups could meet elsewhere. I then go to each group and give them a piece of blank paper and a pen so they can record their answers.

While the groups are working, I make sure a flip chart and markers are ready to record the groups’ results. Then I visit the groups. As they finish their lists, they are asked to tell stories about nervousness—what they felt, what they did, how it made them feel about speaking in public.

Listing Fears

After the allotted time, groups are brought together as a whole, but the small groups are kept intact. I ask for a volunteer group to list the ways in which nervousness is felt by people in their group or by people who group members know. The manifestations are recorded on a chalk board or flip chart. As a flip chart page fills, it is torn off and taped on the wall. I go from group to group until each has presented a list.

When all the groups have given their lists, I ask for anything anyone has forgotten and add it to the list. By this time, the board is filled with every conceivable manifestation of communication apprehension. Or there are flip chart papers all over the room, each loaded with signs of nervousness. Learners are amazed to see these symptoms all at once.

Conclusions

I conclude the exercise by asking students what they have learned. Inevitably, they say they had no idea others felt nervous. They are no longer alone in their fears. Further, some students actually feel less apprehensive as a result of the visualization and fantasizing of the many ways in which nervousness can be experienced. Through the process and through the group discussions and disclosures, the mystique of nervousness is destroyed. It is put into perspective and participants feel more normal in their fears. Most important, they claim that the exercise has made them less apprehensive about speaking in front of a group.

References

McCroskey, J. (1977). Oral communication apprehension: A summary of recent theory and research. *Human Communication Research*, 4, 78-96.

Wallechinsky, D., Wallace, I., & Wallace, A. (1977). *The book of lists*. New York: Bantam Books.

Address correspondence to the author, Department of Communication, University College of Cape Breton, Box 5300, Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada B1P 612 (e-mail: jrolls@sparc.uccb.ns.ca).

Copyright of Business Communication Quarterly is the property of Association for Business Communication and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.