

8 Tips to Avoid the Presentation Butterflies

AN ARTICLE BY MARIE MORAN

Even the most polished business professionals get those jittery feelings, “the butterflies,” before going on stage, especially when the stakes are really high. Fortunately, there are proven steps every presenter can take to have greater ease, whatever size the audience!



1. Know your material.

This is the basis for building and holding your confidence! If the content is new to you, rehearse more than usual until you are comfortable with it. Then, give thought to the content-related questions your audience may ask. Prepare your answers in advance.

2. Rehearse correctly.

Actors and trained speakers know the incredible power of proper rehearsal, but most non-professional presenters fail to rehearse correctly, if at all! Keep in mind that, like acting, *presenting is a physical activity*. If you rehearse only “in your head” by reading your notes or PowerPoint slides, you will not be prepared! Rehearsing correctly includes going through your presentation one or two times to refine content and to time it out. Next, rehearse your actual physical delivery by running through the entire presentation one or more times, fully using your voice, posture, gestures, movement, eye contact and interaction with slides. You’ll know you’re ready when the material flows smoothly and you easily anticipate your transitions.

3. Develop a strong opening, and stick with it.

The opening establishes your credibility and first impression with the audience, but it’s also when you’re coping with the highest adrenalin! It’s vital to get your opening words out of your mouth articulately

and confidently, even while attempting to get initial presentation butterflies to fly in formation! Therefore, prepare specifically what you will say and do in your first 1-2 minutes. Write out your first one or two opening paragraphs. Focus on the key thoughts you want to get across. Keep sentences short and pithy so that when speaking, you can get plenty of breath under your voice. *Now rehearse until your opening is wired in!* Don’t change your opening at the last minute — that’s a formula for disaster!



4. Focus on being prepared, not perfect.

Once you know (and have rehearsed) where you’re going with your presentation, be sure to leave room for spontaneity along the way! You want your delivery to come across as *planned, not canned*, to avoid appearing stiff, controlling, or unresponsive to audience reaction. For example, if you are over-rehearsed and locked into a specific delivery, you’re at risk of missing an important “audience vibe” that would cue you to

move a little faster or slower through your material. The best presenters are prepared to respond to audience cues and adjust their flow.

5. Avoid negative self-talk prior to your presentation.

Your mind may chatter, “I wish I were more prepared,” “Oh no, the Senior VP is out there,” or “What if I lose my train of thought?” Negative thinking will throw you off your game entirely. Instead, stay present and focus on remaining calm. Replace negative chatter with acknowledgements such as “I’m ready,” “I can stay calm” or “I can have fun with this presentation!” Make it a regular part of your preparation for any presentation to keep picturing yourself relaxed and in the flow in front of the audience.

6. Focus on breathing.

Breathing deeply is a requirement for good voice volume and tone. Start your deep breaths well before you take the stage — don’t wait until it’s time for you to begin speaking. As soon as you feel the adrenaline begin to flow, begin slow, deep breaths to relax your diaphragm and rib cage so you can get sufficient air in your lungs.

7. Slow down your eyes.

“Flitting” eye movements overstimulate activity in the brain, which leads to increased nervousness. When speaking, slow down your eye movement by focusing on “one thought to one person” in your delivery. You’ll come across steady and strong. Keep in mind that one thought tends to be about six seconds, much longer than you might think! Spend one rehearsal focusing solely on deliberate, steady eye movement around the room, combined with proper breathing (Tip 6). Your

presentation pace will be relaxed and deliberate, and you’ll be better able to think and control those nerves!



8. Don’t fight the adrenaline — Use it!

It’s natural for the adrenaline to flow before a major event, athletic competition, or exciting or challenging moment in our lives. Rather than being disabled by this surge of energy, *harness its power by changing your perspective*. When the butterflies strike, think of that adrenaline as fuel for your passion and drive — it will greatly increase your performance power! Channel the energy into more dynamic gestures, vocal volume, and overall animation in your delivery. Use it to make your presentation vibrant and memorable. Reach out and grab your audience!

About the Author

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