Speaking Anxiety

The most common fear is the fear to speak or perform in front of a large audience. As scary and uncomfortable this scenario may look to most of us, there are certain techniques to ease anxiety.

Let’s break it down in three sections:

1. **Know your Subject and Rehearse, Rehearse, Rehearse**
   If you have ever played a musical instrument or performed live on stage, you are probably familiar with the expression “I have butterflies in my stomach” or the term “stage fright”.

   The easiest way to counter this performance fear is to know your subject inside and out. It doesn’t matter if it is a musical piece, a theater plot or a public speech. If you are speaking about something you are passionate about or something you are personally invested in, it should be easier to calm these “butterflies” as you are already and expert on the subject.

   Organized your speech with a strong outline, and then rehearse as many times as you can in order to develop a performance/delivery pattern. The more you rehearse, the less filler words you will need and the less you will have to depend on your note cards.

2. **Confidence**
   Ever have someone tell you that you are not good at something? Ever lost confidence in your abilities? Well, here is the good news: A. If you know your topic, you are basically and EXPERT in presenting it, and B. If you rehearsed enough, you should be well prepared to step in front of an audience. These two factors should help you build your CONFIDENCE!

   Never tell yourself before a speech that you can’t to this or your speech “sucks.” Visualize yourself presenting your speech well and your audience loving it.
   Never tell your audience that you are nervous, that there are weak points, or that you didn’t have enough time to prepare. They will most likely never notice this unless you draw their attention to it. You always feel more nervous than you appear to others.

3. **Turn something negative into something positive**
   Believe it or not, but you have the power to turn NEGATIVE energy into POSITIVE energy. The best example is the channeling of adrenaline from fear into positive excitement. You can channel nervous energy like foot tapping and rocking back and forth and turn it into purposeful movement in front of the audience. That way you are still moving but you are doing it in a controlled manner, matching your performance.
Always hold your note cards in your hands! Just make sure that you do not play with these notes. This will help you to feel more comfortable and confident; once again you can use the energy to move and put it to good use. Hand and arm gestures are also great, as long as they serve to enhance your speech. If you are not sure about your behavior and body movements, rehearse your speech in front of a friend or a tutor in the Communication Studies Lab to get feedback.

4. **Be forgiving but honest to yourself**

   NOBODY IS PERFECT and as corny as it sounds THE MORE YOU REHEARSE, THE BETTER YOU WILL GET. However, don’t be discouraged if your first speech doesn’t work out as great as you wanted it to be. The more you speak in front of others, the more comfortable and confident you will become, and that will be visible to your audience.

   Make sure that you are honest with yourself! Should you decide to record your rehearsal or speech, don’t watch it right after as your own opinion will be very biased at first. Take a walk or grab something to eat; step away from the recording and give it some time before you come back to evaluate your own performance. Giving yourself distance to your recorded performance will allow you to be more objective about your weaknesses and strong points.

GOOD LUCK TIGER!