LEADERS THAT LISTEN

PUBLIC SPEAKING CURRICULUM

Confidence-Building Guide



Sometimes, even the idea of speaking publicly makes you so nervous and anxious that you hold yourself back from taking on leadership roles or even expressing what is on your mind. If this is the case, know you are not alone! The resources in this toolkit are applicable to all forms of public speaking covered in this curriculum to help people cope with the public speaking anxiety that often interferes with their ability to participate and speak up. Use these resources to become more comfortable with nervousness and develop the habits necessary to face the fear!

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Why We Need Leaders That Listen:

A Note from the Author

As a teacher and public speaking coach, I have always been drawn to the quirkiest students.

I love unexpected perspectives that make me think about an issue in a different way and inspire me to care about experiences I never understood. Unfortunately, we are surrounded by images of leadership and models of public speaking dominated by examples that are loud, angry, and driven by ego. Every day, I encounter students from as young as 7 all the way to adulthood who have beautiful voices and incredible stories but do not believe they are important. They have been taught that they aren't leaders because they do not look, act, or sound like the people in power.

It is important to have mentors and a community to help you have the courage of your own convictions; just because you don't look or sound like everyone else doesn't mean you don't deserve to have a voice. Our society needs leaders who know how to facilitate diverse perspectives, learn from different experiences, care about human beings, and listen without an agenda. This curriculum is a starting point for educators, coaches, and emerging public speakers of all ages who want methods for communicating in a way that is authentic and real, empowering their inner leader and encouraging diverse voices through inclusive education. Explore the guides in any order and choose tools that best fit your needs and build your confidence. Gather inspiration and feel free to adapt as you develop your skills and the abilities of those you lead.



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About the Author

As Founder and Executive Director of Bay Area non-profit, The Practice Space, AnnMarie Baines brings 20 years of experience coaching public speaking for youth and adults and currently teaches public speaking at UC Berkeley. As a Filipina leader, Dr. Baines is deeply committed to equity, and was awarded a Deeper Learning Equity Fellowship. In prior work, Dr. Baines was a program officer at the George Lucas Educational Foundation, where she applied her expertise in curriculum, project-based learning, and professional development. She began her career as a high school special education teacher and utilizes the Universal Design for Learning framework. Dr. Baines received her PhD in Learning Sciences from University of Washington, teaching credential from Boston Teacher Residency, and Master's in Education Policy from Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE

Table of Contents

Resource 1 Confidence and the Impact of Fear on Equity 1

Resource 2 Qualities of a Fearless Classroom 2

Resource 3 Unpacking the Fear of Public Speaking 3

Resource 4 Theories About Facing the Fear 4

Resource 5 What Fear Looks Like and Sounds Like 6

Resource 6 Communication Anxiety Quiz 7

Resource 7 How to Feel Less Nervous Speaking in Public 10

Resource 8 How to Cope with Public Speaking Anxiety 11

Resource 9 Why Fear Prevents Students from Meeting Standards 12

Resource 10 Anxieties in the Classroom: A Teacher Checklist 14

Resource 11 Four Techniques to Encourage Diverse Voices 15

Resource 12 Nine Ways to Lower the Stakes in Public Speaking 17

Resource 13 Embracing Social Fears and Anxieties 18

Resource 14 Four Activities to Practice Anxiety-Coping at Home 20

Resource 15 Day-Of Prep: How to Overcome Stage Fright 21

Resource 16 The Audience's Burden: How Positive Community Conquers Fear 23

CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 1

Confidence and the Impact of Fear on Equity



To be a leader, you have to feel like your voice matters and you have something of value to say and contribute to the world. Unfortunately, we live in a society where many people are taught from an early age that their voice is less important. As a naturally shy student, I personally remember being in a high school speech and debate class and thinking to myself, "Everyone else here is so much smarter than me. I can't possibly add anything better, so I'll just take notes." No one told me that my voice wasn't important, but I also wasn't able to find a way to participate, so I kept silent.

For many people, the clues that our voices are worth less than others are much more explicit. Racism, prejudice, and stereotypes intentionally silence people, especially when accompanied by language like, "that's so stupid," or "what do you know?" Even when everyone is on their best behavior, non-verbal cues and more indirect behavior can position some voices as more important than others. In a two-year study I conducted on how students with disabilities learn to perceive themselves as "smart", I saw a stark difference between academic classes and after-school debate clubs (Baines, 2014). In these two environments, the same students who were seen as "slackers" or "troublemakers" in school, were positioned as leaders and champions in debate. But why? For one student, who we'll call "James", school was a place he would always be disabled, because as he said in an interview, "What's the point? I'm never going to be a good student. No one cares what I have to say. At school, they definitely don't know anything about you." In contrast, so many more definitions of success existed outside of school, making James feel so much more free to be himself and according to James' father, "Take James out of that school setting and he's a leader."

Freedom from fear allows you to speak your mind and express who you are. The fear of judgment leads to the silencing of diverse perspectives and hampers learning, equity, and change. According to 16-year old Ava Remler, one of the students at The Practice Space, "When you find you're the only voice to a certain position, you need to be able to find the strength to overcome it. And even in a situation where no one is going to appreciate what you say, you have to know that just them hearing your voice matters so much."

Unfortunately, negative judgment and evaluation is very real -- it is not all in our heads. And it is unjust to expect that the people being silenced also have to be the ones to be vulnerable and strong enough to just put themselves out there and face their fears. To make leadership equitable, those of us who do not fear public speaking have a moral responsibility to create opportunities and learning experiences that help others feel capable and valued. For me as a student, I needed someone to help me take baby steps towards sharing my opinions. I needed a way to get started and a method for participating and asking questions, as well as the assurance that I wouldn't be ridiculed if it didn't go as planned. Facing the fear of public speaking does involve putting yourself out there, but it also involves finding experiences where you won't be permanently hammered into a negative status position, simply for something you once said.

> Classrooms can be important places to disrupt the inequities that result when some students are afraid to speak, but only if they are places that welcome risk taking and push back against fixed assumptions about what success should look like.

The fear of public speaking stems from a fear of discovering that no one cares about what you have to say, no one values you as a person, and no one will ever change their conclusions about you. Classrooms should be places that push back against this default assumption, and ultimately, the one place where these fears are unfounded.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 2

Qualities of a Fearless Classroom

A fearless classroom is a place where each and every student...

1

Knows why their perspective is important.

2

Feels like an expert in something and has opportunities to express that expertise.

3

Has the chance to surprise people about what they know and can do.

4

Believes their peers have valuable perspectives to offer.

5

Remains open to changing their mind about another person.

6

Can push beyond their comfort level without being punished or ridiculed.

7

Discovers a first step or entry point to develop their voice.

8

Hopes that everyone else will be able to improve their ability to speak up.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 3

Unpacking the Fear of Public Speaking

What Am I Afraid Of?	What Do I Need Instead?
Exclusion. • I am afraid of people making fun or thinking less of me. • I am afraid that people won't accept me for who I am.	**Acceptance.** • I need to know that my natural style and approach is valuable. • I need to know that everyone struggles and makes mistakes. • I need to know that someone is rooting for me to succeed.
Shame. • I am afraid of not doing anything right. • I am afraid that I don't know what to do. • I am afraid of getting stuck, messing up, or missing something.	**Guidance.** • I need to know how to get started with every new skill and activity. • I need more time to experiment, try, and practice. • I need clear directions and specific criticism to get me to the next level. • I need concrete next steps on how I can make my own improvements.
Failure. • I am afraid I won't measure up to my past success. • I am afraid of letting people down. • I am afraid that I won't be able to achieve my goals.	**Success.** • I need to know what it feels like to succeed. • I need to lower the stakes so that the situation is less scary. • I need to know that if I make a mistake, people will still be there for me.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 4

Theories About Facing the Fear

Public speaking is often scary because it feels overwhelming and daunting to even figure out how to begin facing the fear.

The fear of public speaking is often cited as being our number one fear, even before death. While this actually isn't true (the original source of that particular statistic was the comedian Jerry Seinfeld), it is up there. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, over 15 million Americans suffer from social anxiety, which affects men and women equally and tends to begin by age 13. The fear of public speaking falls under the category of "communication apprehension", which is fear or anxiety experienced by a person due to real or perceived communication with another person. You feel anxious communicating with others.



As highlighted by Louisiana State Professor of Communication Studies, Graham Bodie, in his review of studies about the fear of public speaking, our fears can be divided into two categories. Sometimes, the fear of public speaking is part of a general trait, a tendency to experience anxiety related to any kind of communication. Other times, it depends on the state, where our anxiety occurs only in specific situations and time. In terms of situations that raise our anxiety, Psychology Today says this depends on whether we are being evaluated, whether there is a substantial difference in status or power, whether the ideas we are communicating are new to us, and whether we are speaking in front of a new audience.

Regardless of category, the most common trigger of this anxiety is whether we are in a new or uncertain situation -- unfortunately, for many of us who don't have to speak that often, public speaking is new and uncertain. When faced with an audience, we release the same physiological response as when faced with a wild animal, with all the hormones, cortisol, adrenaline that accompany that reaction. Other common triggers include the fear of being judged and the negative thoughts we tell ourselves about what others think about us.

In these situations, the majority of people in the United States use the avoidance coping strategy -- just don't do it. But at what cost? We are caught in a dilemma: when we avoid communication, we are severely limited in how we can interact and live. But we can never truly eliminate anxiety, even when we try. What we can do though, is change how we think about public speaking and push for support systems that buffer these fears, especially for people of color or groups who have been historically marginalized.

Theories about Addressing Fear

The University of Minnesota's "Communication in the Real World" lists three methods for facing the fear of public speaking: 1) systematic desensitization; 2) cognitive restructuring; and 3) skills training. What this means is that we become less anxious when we are more exposed to something, when we change the way we think about something, and when we have the tools to do something about our situation.

Sometimes, it helps to remind yourself that the negative consequences of any moment of communication aren't as bad as we think and instead visualize it going well. It lowers anxiety to think of public speaking as a conversation that aims to express your ideas or tell your story, rather than a performance that will be judged. Physical relaxation exercises and self-talk statements can also be used to remind us of what is really important.

The communication studies research also highlights the importance of having quality information and topics we know deeply: we are more confident when we know what we are talking about. It is also important to have practice and feedback from a trusted source and have very specific ways of assessing whether we did well. Rather than just judging our public speaking based on the awful memories we have of the experience -- we will always think we did badly -- we need to instead define what success means in advance and evaluate ourselves based on those specific definitions.

Unfortunately, many of the suggestions from the realm of social psychology focus more on internal anxiety barriers, as opposed to the external institutional barriers stemming from systemic oppression. When people of color have to speak up in situations where their voices are unwelcome or where they will be greeted by suspicion and discrimination, fear goes beyond emotional discomfort and enters the high-stakes realm of risk and real harm. When you have been oppressed and marginalized, the fear of public speaking is compounded by systems designed to silence your voice. Exposure to public speaking is limited when not everyone is privileged enough to be invited to speak and it is difficult for someone to visualize something going well without seeing role models who look like them. Having to speak in front of an audience in a non-native language adds an additional layer of uncertainty and fear. Addressing these fears must include an entire ecosystem, where allies, families, colleagues, and support systems are in place to provide opportunities to practice and mentorship to build confidence. In her 2002 book, Nilda Flores-Gonzalez calls for community contexts to create networks of support that buffer the negative impacts of stereotyping and recognize the effects of prejudice, mistrust, and blame.

The Final Takeaway

Changing the way we think about our fear of public speaking involves coming up with statements that remind us that there is something more important than our fear. Remind yourself that the work and the message are more important than your nerves, but that sometimes, you cannot embrace these fears alone, especially if you are facing a harmful and dangerous context. Even in the face of danger and fear, we have to remind ourselves why our stories are important to tell. The fear never goes away, but hopefully we can build support systems to help us put it aside, just for a little while, while we express what matters.

When you have been oppressed and marginalized, the fear of public speaking is compounded by systems designed to silence your voice.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 5

What Fear Looks Like and Sounds Like

The Fear of Public Speaking...

What Fear of Public Speaking Looks Like	What Fear of Public Speaking Sounds Like
 **Physical Discomfort** Stomach pain or feeling sick, pale face, sweating, trembling hands and tense posture, restlessness (i.e. fiddling with clothes, tearing up paper, chair rocking)	 **Stalling or avoiding the task** Lack of facial expressions, shrugging shoulders and not saying anything, uncontrollable laughter, close to tears and shaky breaths, inability to complete sentences, avoiding eye contact
 **Feeling on edge or wanting to escape** Lack of facial expressions, shrugging shoulders and not saying anything, uncontrollable laughter, close to tears and shaky breaths, inability to complete sentences, avoiding eye contact	 **Making the task seem less important** “Why do we have to do this anyway?” “This is stupid.” “It doesn’t matter anyway.”
 **Defiance** Refusal to participate, disengagement or shutting down, being absent, distracting others or telling jokes	 **Predicting a negative outcome** “I’m so bad at this.” “This isn’t going to be as good as his.” “This is going to be awful.” “Too bad I have to follow her.” “I’ll never be smart enough.” “She’s so going to beat me.” “I’m going to lose/fail.”

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 6

Communication Anxiety Quiz

Student Name:

Background:

1) What is your experience with public speaking?

A. I have never given a speech in public.
B. I have given presentations for school or work assignments.
C. I have public speaking experience through my extracurricular activities.
D. I have been a public speaking coach, mentor, or teacher.

2) How do you react to the following statement:
"I enjoy public speaking."

A. Strongly Agree.
B. Agree.
C. No Opinion.
D. Disagree.
E. Strongly Disagree.

Communication Traits:

On the following questions, rate yourself in terms of:
"Developing" -- beginning level, either new to the skill or lacking confidence in this area.
"Solid" -- intermediate level, average ability and can hold their own most of the time.
"Expert" -- expert level, outstanding ability and/or able to teach this trait to others

	Developing	Solid	Expert
3) Authenticity: When I speak publicly, I am able to be myself and I feel free to speak about what I care about.			
4) Compelling: When I speak publicly, I am able to inspire interest and action from others.			
5) Clear: When I speak publicly, I am able to be understandable and to the point.			
6) Credible: When I speak publicly, I come off as expert and trustworthy.			
7) Polished: When I speak publicly, I use appropriate gestures, movement, facial expressions, and vocal techniques to enhance my message.			
8) Connected: When I speak publicly, I am able to connect to what my audience finds relevant, interesting, and motivating.			

Anxiety Triggers

9) Which of the following make you nervous about public speaking?

- ☐ Forgetting what to say
- ☐ Getting stuck and losing track of my points
- ☐ Making a mistake
- ☐ Not feeling ready or not having enough time to prepare
- ☐ Not knowing my content well enough
- ☐ People staring at me and being on the spot
- ☐ Failing to impress or please my audience
- ☐ Worrying about people disliking what I have to say
- ☐ Not being loud enough
- ☐ Not looking good when I present
- ☐ Stuttering or stumbling over words
- ☐ Not having enough experience with public speaking
- ☐ Other: _____

10) How do nerves and fear affect you?

- ☐ Sweating and jitters
- ☐ Speaking too quickly
- ☐ Feeling sick/stomach pain
- ☐ Stumbling or stuttering
- ☐ Making me laugh uncontrollably
- ☐ Going blank and/or forgetting my points
- ☐ Getting defensive or short-tempered
- ☐ Getting distracted or restless
- ☐ Wanting to run away or avoid things

Situations

Please rate your level of anxiety in different public speaking situations.

1 - No fear or anxiety at all.
2 - Some fear and anxiety, but I can get through it with a little more preparation.
3 - Some fear and anxiety, but I can get through it with hard work.
4 - My fear and anxiety make it extremely difficult to speak publicly in these situations.
5 - My fear and anxiety makes it impossible to speak publicly in these situations.

	1	2	3	4	5
11) Situations where I have to speak spontaneously and come up with ideas on the spot, with little to no time to prepare.					
12) One-on-one conversations.					
13) Small group discussions.					
14) Whole class discussions.					
15) Presentations for a small audience (less than 30 people).					
16) Presentations for a large audience (more than 50 people).					
17) Presentations for people I know.					
18) Presentations for people I don't know.					

19) What makes you feel more comfortable

- ☐ Having notes or slides to use during my speech
- ☐ Having a microphone
- ☐ Having a podium or stand
- ☐ Having time to collect my thoughts and prepare remarks
- ☐ Practicing and rehearsing my remarks ahead of time
- ☐ Specific feedback and guidance to improve ahead of time
- ☐ Collaborating with a partner or group on ideas ahead of time
- ☐ Knowing what to expect from the situation
- ☐ Knowing how I will be evaluated or judged by the audience
- ☐ Positive encouragement from my peers or teacher/coach
- ☐ Giving myself pep talks
- ☐ Warming up and getting myself energized
- ☐ Friendly-looking, attentive audience members
- ☐ Having someone who makes sure the audience is focused and supportive (i.e. facilitator, teacher, leader)
- ☐ Other: _____

20) Is there anything that people should know to help you? (open response)

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 7

How to Feel Less Nervous Speaking in Public

Public speaking can be terrifying, especially if you don't do it often!

Take comfort in the fact that 15 million Americans suffer from social anxiety, which affects men and women and often begins by age 13. It helps to build your self-awareness of what situations make you the most nervous, so that you can hopefully anticipate these feelings in the future and do your best to prepare for them.

Common Issue	Coping Tips
Fear of Evaluation or Judgment	• Preparing your content – outlines and scripting • Knowing your stuff – research on content and on the audience, to know what they will care about • Anticipate where the audience might get stuck, frustrated, or doubtful and work that into your talk • In a presentation situation: Find the nodders!
Uncertainty (unfamiliar ideas, unfamiliar audience, unfamiliar situation)	• Ask questions about the situation (what is the purpose of the talk, how many people, what are people expecting, what is the seating situation like, what is the sound situation like, where am I standing, is there a podium) • Talk to the people around you and ask them questions, get used to them • Come up with a routine for yourself for what you do before a talk, so you feel some sense of control
Difference in Power	• Self-talk: remind yourself that people are just people • Remember that you don't have to know everything – you can ask questions to learn – but also, that you have specific expertise to offer
Negative personal thoughts or inability to be yourself	• Breathing exercises • Calming activities: singing, listening to music, meditation, visualization exercises • Sleep, food, and water • Self-talk: think about what you are proud of and what are you excited to talk about • Get excited and pumped! Humor and laughter • Have a secret weapon – a lucky charm, a favorite outfit that makes you feel secretly powerful • Remind yourself to be okay with silences • Don't beat yourself up! Put things in perspective.
Avoidance	• Always practice your remarks out loud beforehand • Face your fears. Start with something small and create practice experiences for yourself

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 8

How to Cope with Public Speaking Anxiety

Coping with public speaking anxiety is part emotional and part preparation.

Of course, feeling completely "ready" to speak can go a long way to feeling less anxious. Knowing what you are going to say and feeling confident about the flow of ideas helps you stay focused on the point of your message and less on what might go wrong.

At the same time, you cannot ignore the emotions you feel, even when they are negative and filled with self-doubt. Resetting expectations and embracing the possibility that the experience might not go perfectly is an essential piece of coping with anxiety. Remind yourself that the goal is not to say everything exactly right; instead, the goal should be to express yourself authentically and connect to your audience. Ask yourself: "Was I able to be myself?" "Did I clearly communicate something important?" "Did I connect to the audience?" If your answer is yes to all of these questions, try to let go of anything that did not go exactly to plan.

Tip 1

Create self-affirmation statements.

Internalize go-to statements that remind you that your message is important and your audience cares about what you have to say.

Tip 2

Prepare a strong outline.

Feeling more prepared with your content helps and ensures that you connect to what your audience needs to hear.

Tip 3

Warm-up out loud.

Even if you are running out of time or feel uncomfortable talking to yourself, warm-ups can help avoid stuttering, rambling, mistakes, or poor vocal technique.

Tip 4

Practice internalizing your message.

Figure out opportunities to talk about your message or ideas as many different times and ways as possible, so you don't have to think so hard about what to say.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 9

Why Fear Prevents Students from Meeting Standards

If every student is going to have the chance of learning to lead, then it is essential that students master standards for speaking and listening.



Communication is a skill to develop (not an innate trait) and one that employers and colleges alike are valuing among the most desired qualities in potential candidates. While fear and anxiety may seem like something that each individual student has to overcome on his or her own, classrooms have to be places where students can face their fears and develop this skill.

The Common Core English Language Arts Standards include a set of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening, broken down by grades K through 12. Specific components of the Speaking & Listening Strand are divided into skills associated with the "Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas" and "Comprehension and Collaboration". There are elements of the standards that rely on understanding of the material or the ability to integrate multimedia, which do not depend on a student's confidence to express his or her ideas. Unfortunately, when it comes to developing the actual skill of communication, fear can become a barrier to the experiences necessary to practice and improve.

Fear and the Presentation Standards

Possessing the courage to present your ideas and questions is a gatekeeper to developing communication skills. Beginning in Kindergarten, one of the central standards is to "ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood." When students are too nervous to speak in the first place, it becomes impossible for them to advocate for themselves or express their questions. In the case of presentation, a first-grade standard is to publicly "describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly." Once again, fear can paralyze students and prevent them from giving a presentation, even if they are able to meet these standards in the context of written expression.

Throughout all grades, the Speaking & Listening Standards emphasize the ability to be clear, adapt to audiences, and recount stories and experiences, which all depend on practice getting up in front of an audience. Unfortunately, it is hard to practice when you are someone who feels uncomfortable voicing personal experiences, making it even scarier to meet a standard like the fourth-grade requirement to "tell a story or recount an experience in an organized manner." Beyond the content itself, fear can also become an obstacle to practicing and demonstrating oral delivery skills. Standards across grade levels require students to master eye contact, volume, pace, and pronunciation, all of which can be directly affected by nerves and anxiety.

Fear and the Comprehension and Collaboration Standards

Fear can also interfere with a teacher's ability to assess whether a student comprehends the academic material. Even when a student comes to a discussion prepared, it can be difficult to "stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas" when he or she is distracted by the fear of judgment or making a mistake in front of peers. This is especially the case with debates, where having to "present points of agreement and disagreement" or "identify insufficient evidence" requires a student to feel confident in their speaking abilities and secure enough in their ideas to be able to

take a stand. While strong teamwork, preparation, and research can go a long way to building this confidence, it is not enough in the face of public speaking anxiety.

The bulk of the communication skills outlined in the Common Core Standards revolve around the development of spontaneous speaking skills, where students have limited preparation time to form their ideas. Given that most speaking that takes place in classrooms is spontaneous and on-the-spot, the inability to ever feel truly prepared only heightens the fear of public speaking. Standards such as “challenging ideas and conclusions”, “posing and responding to questions”, “asking for clarification”, or “linking to comments by others” all involve being able to formulate and organize ideas immediately. For some students, spontaneous speaking comes naturally and can even be fun; for others, the prospect is terrifying.

Helping Everyone Face Their Fears

Framing the standards in the context of fears highlights the support needed when teachers translate standards into classroom activities and assessments. Rather than relying on the skills and experiences that students already bring to discussions and presentations, it is important to treat communication skills as something that must be taught to everyone. Too often, student fears around public speaking are left to emerge in high-stakes situations, like final presentations or debates, where some students shine because they happen to have access to public speaking experience or role models. Instead, students also need to know that communication is something to practice and develop over time with guidance and instruction, just like any other academic skill. Classrooms must be places where students can face their fears and access the material, if they are ever to be truly inclusive learning environments.

Given that most speaking that takes place in classrooms is spontaneous and on-the-spot, the inability to ever feel truly prepared only heightens the fear of public speaking.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 10

Anxieties in the Classroom: A Teacher Checklist

Knowledge of Students

- ☐ Do I know how my students feel about public speaking?
- ☐ Do I know what makes different students nervous about public speaking?
- ☐ Have I considered any specific student needs that may affect their public speaking (i.e. difficulty with English, stutters or lisp, slower information processing, challenges with vocabulary, difficulty reading aloud, volume/vocal issues)?
- ☐ Do my students know how to support one another and make each other feel confident?

Opportunities to Succeed

- ☐ Have I provided my students with a clear description of my expectations for public speaking?
- ☐ Do I have warm-ups, activities, lessons, or units that are focused explicitly on teaching and practicing communication skills?
- ☐ Does my class include a balance of prepared public speaking assignments (i.e. presentations) and spontaneous public speaking activities (i.e. discussions and debates)?
- ☐ When appropriate, do I lower the stakes to make students feel less nervous (i.e. sitting instead of standing during speeches, presenting in small groups, increasing preparation time, letting them have notes)?

Balanced Assessments

- ☐ When I have discussions and other collaborative speaking activities, does everyone get the chance to contribute and express what they know?
- ☐ Have I created rubrics for all public speaking assignments?
- ☐ When I grade public speaking, do I reward students for their preparation ahead of time (i.e. content, collaboration) in addition to factors that are harder to control (i.e. presentation delivery, responding to questions)?
- ☐ Do I share presentation rubrics with my students?

Coaching and Preparation

- ☐ Does my classroom include clear norms for audience behavior and peer support?
- ☐ Do I offer opportunities for students to practice their speeches in class?
- ☐ Are there chances for students to receive detailed feedback to improve?
- ☐ Do I make myself available for additional support around public speaking?

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 11

Four Techniques to Encourage Diverse Voices

A classroom that cultivates leadership is one where all students feel like they have something to offer and feel secure in the knowledge that their voice will be valuable to others.

To encourage a diverse range of voices in the classroom, it is important to create a positive culture that builds upon student ideas as opposed to shutting them down. The goal is to avoid the type of classroom where students wait to hear the right answer from the teacher or feel like their perspective is going to be stupid or wrong. These techniques help: 1) set a positive tone that welcomes diversity; 2) make learning fun through skill-building games; 3) provide a mixture of expression formats; and 4) set routines that promote student leadership.

Technique	Examples
1 Welcome diversity, promote common connections. It is important to set a positive tone that invites students to discover their interests and what they have in common.	• Be careful about asking questions with a "right answer" voice, where it is clear that you know the answer. Explicitly say that you genuinely want to know or that you are curious about their perspective, that there isn't a right answer. Even if there is a right answer, pose an additional challenge to "push back against the experts". • Use activities where students have to work together to create a product that incorporates what they have in common (art projects and interviews work great!) • Include warm-up discussion activities where students have to get up and have conversations with different partners. When possible, mix up partners as many times as you can so that students can have time speaking one-on-one with more people in the class.
2 Hide the "vegetables". Students are always on the hunt for what is considered "right" or "wrong" with their speaking. Hiding skills instruction in the context of a fun game that involves public speaking can disrupt this pattern.	• Make public speaking fun through simulations where students have to use their public speaking skills in an imaginary world. Some examples include: simulations where the adults have disappeared and they have to create a new government or challenges where students have to build a company and pitch it to the class. • Warm-up public speaking skills using fun resources like fairy tales or favorite books. • Borrow from elementary school and practice informative speaking through familiar routines like "show and tell".

3 Mix it up. Creating an inclusive classroom means that there needs to be multiple forms of expression, so that students have a lot of ways to share what they know.	• Any public speaking activities should include a mix of spontaneous and prepared assignments, group/pair/solo speeches, seated vs. standing speaking activities; loud vs. quiet engagement. • Incorporate routines where students nominate different speech topics or story prompts – student input ensures that topics are relevant to different kinds of students. • Provide speech activities that can be pre-recorded, like a podcast or video, to support students who express themselves better through media.
4 Get started, then release. Students are great at experimenting and riffing with familiar structures and routines. It helps them to have a few routines to get started so that everyone has a common reference point to know what leadership looks like.	• Start a class once a week with an easy public speaking warm-up and then gradually open it up as something students take turns leading. Physical stretches and tongue twisters are a great kind of warm-up. • Practice consistent structures for debate and discussion and then have students facilitate them. Encourage them to include as many people as possible when they lead. • Pair up students in “coach buddies” to have someone who helps them with public speaking preparation. • Reward students for using discussion starters that invite more perspectives and voices.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 12

9 Ways to Lower the Stakes in Public Speaking Situations

1

Small Audiences

Start by practicing in pairs, then standing in small groups, then in front of the class, then in front of a public audience.

2

Seated Presentations

Have students practice speaking seated before they stand in front of the class.

3

Limited Choices

Offer students a limited set of 3 to 5 topic choices that range in difficulty, so that they aren't overwhelmed by unlimited possibilities but also have a choice.

4

Simultaneous Practice

Have students practice their remarks all at once -- it's noisy, but it makes them feel like they can blend in and no one is listening to them while they practice.

5

Frequent Rehearsal

Practice remarks in class...a lot!

6

Run-through the Opening Walk

Have students practice walking up to the front of the room and feeling secure in their opening stance.

7

Increase Presentations

Increase the number of public speaking assignments so that they become less of a big deal.

8

Adjust Grading

When appropriate, incorporate self-assessment as part of the grade and adjust the weight of some public speaking assignments to take the pressure off.

9

Be Careful What You Ask For

Take care when you include requirements that raise the pressure, like requiring students to memorize their speech.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 13

Embracing Social Fears and Anxieties

Leaders do not have to be fearless.

In fact, personal experience with anxiety and vulnerability is important to developing a sense of empathy and connection to the experiences of others. Leaders who are empathetic are able to encourage growth in others and are humble enough to know that they are not perfect themselves. Embracing imperfection and discomfort keeps us human and ultimately results in an authentic communication style that is much more effective than any overly polished, perfectly choreographed speech can ever be.



The pressure to be perfect only increases the fear of public speaking, regardless of a speaker's experience level. For students developing their communication skills, I consistently observe students go through two rounds of stage fright and anxiety. The first round comes when students are first learning new skills, where fear stems from the uncertainty and lack of familiarity they feel with speaking for an audience. The second round comes much later, after students have had some success with their public speaking. This fear emerges when students feel pressure (either from themselves or from others) to measure up to their past success and maintain their reputation as an effective speaker. I have watched champion high school debaters drop out of the activity because they don't think they'll be able to win anymore. And I personally know what it feels like to be positioned as someone who should speak to a high standard (I am a public speaking coach, after all!) and feel paralyzing worry that I won't reach that standard this time and others will judge or think less of me.

Tip #1: Value your connection to the audience.

All the anxiety-coping strategies in the world will not help until a speaker personally reframes the goal of public speaking. When the goal is still to "get through the speech unscathed" or "deliver a presentation without any mistakes" or "deliver everything perfectly from memory", the irony is that speakers are much more likely to be nervous and unsatisfied with their performance. Instead, public speakers need to frame goals that prioritize the effect they want to have on their audience. For instance, public speaking goals such as inspiring connections, communicating content that people remember, and encouraging follow-up conversations do not depend on perfection. Rather than having goals that are all about you, effective communication should value connection over seamless presentation.

Tip #2: Expect and embrace discomfort.

Aside from a rare few, public speaking is always an uncomfortable and somewhat unnatural experience. Many speakers and performers use visualization techniques, where they prepare themselves by imagining the result they want. Instead of imagining situations where you don't feel any nerves at all, it can help to imagine the jitters you might have at the start and then imagine them disappearing as you sink into the moment and connect with your audience. It can also help to embrace the reality that public speaking will sometimes feel awful, but also that the discomfort won't last forever -- sometimes, it is only a few minutes.

Effective communication should value connection over seamless presentation.

Tip #3: When you can, always speak about what excites you.

Given how fearful and anxious some people can feel about public speaking, the discomfort is only worthwhile if your message is personally important to you. Sometimes, when I am faced with a speech that is particularly nerve-wracking to me, I will say to myself, “right now, this work is more important than my fears.” While it is always useful to think about what your audience might want to hear, at the end of the day, every speech should always derive from content that drives, motivates, and excites you. When you talk about what genuinely interests you, it is easier to get lost in your message and drown out evil voices of self-critique and doubt. The byproduct is that your speaking delivery will automatically be better because you are speaking from the heart instead of from a place of stress.

When I interview my students about their growth and confidence, it always surprises me that they never say that their nerves have gone away. Even the most advanced students say that the fear is always there, but that they have learned to embrace it. In the words of one of my high school students, who was a champion public speaker and state champion finalist, “So I’m still kind of afraid of talking in front of people and I try to avoid it as much as possible or get other people to go before me, but I’m just kind of on terms with it now. I can choose to rise above it rather than let it inhibit me.”

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 14

Four Activities to Practice Anxiety-Coping at Home

A common public speaking fear is being able to deal with unexpected situations on the spot. Through practice and familiarity, these activities help you anticipate and become accustomed to the scenarios that scare you.

Activity 1

Random Word Deck

A major public speaking fear is being able to speak spontaneously without getting stuck. Create a deck of random words (or use the words from a game of Apples to Apples) that include one-word topics or themes that might come up for you in life, work, or school. You can also just come up with topics that are silly and fun! When you are looking to practice spontaneous speaking, draw a card from the deck and then speak for one minute about that topic without any preparation. This can be done on your own, in the car with family, or with a partner.

Activity 2

Random Question Bag

When the issue is less about speaking about topics and more about fielding unexpected questions, it is helpful to practice responding to questions in general. Take 10 to 15 blank slips of paper and write down random questions about a range of topics. It can be helpful to have an entire group of people contribute to the random question bag to get a full range of unexpected questions. Draw a question out of the bag and then answer the question, in three parts: 1) state your immediate answer to the question; 2) give a concrete example of what the question brings up in your mind; 3) connect the question to additional follow-up questions. This can be a good class routine or even just something to practice at the dinner table at home.

Activity 3

Feared Questions List

The next time you have to give a presentation or speak in a situation that will include audience questions, make sure you leave time to anticipate difficult questions. In a notebook or separate document, create a list of your top 5 most feared questions. This might include questions you know you don't know the answer to, ones that seem unrelated or irrelevant, ones that require complex responses, or ones that leave you feeling vulnerable. Just creating the list is useful on its own, but as an added challenge, hand your list to a trusted friend and have them choose ones to ask you so that you can practice responding to your worst-case scenario questions.

Activity 4

Anxiety Journaling

In a journal or separate document, write about specific public speaking situations that make you especially nervous. Maybe it is forgetting your train of thought, maybe it is looking awkward, maybe it is being boring -- regardless of what the situation is, write about all the awful feelings you expect to feel in that situation. After that, write what you will do in that situation to make it better. Be as concrete as possible! Maybe you will move onto a different idea when you lose your thoughts, or maybe you will tell a personal story when you feel like you are being boring. It is good practice to create specific plans of action to train your brain to think of them when you get to the real thing.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 15

Day-Of Prep: How to Overcome Stage Fright

Time	Actions	Benefit
First thing, or 3 hours before your speech	• Review your content and make any final changes. • Create an index card or small sheet of paper with a rough outline or talking points	Give yourself enough time to finalize the content -- the outline also helps you review the flow of your points and gain perspective about the overall content.
2 hours before your speech	• Do slow breathing exercises. • Warm up vocally and physically. • Practice out loud. • Walk around or sing.	Warm ups help you get in the zone and work to calm nerves and get your body in performance-ready mode.
1 hour before your speech.	• Stop what you are doing. Don't overrehearse. • Let it go: remind yourself, "it is what it is."	Cramming increases nerves: instead, you need to get to a place of peace, where you give yourself some space from your preparation.
30 minutes beforehand	• Talk to people and converse with others around you.	Mindless chatter can take your mind off your presentation and put you in a more social place mentally. It is good to start speaking before you have to give your actual remarks.
15 minutes beforehand and while sitting in your seat, ready to give your speech	• Find a quiet place (an actual place or somewhere in your mind) and center yourself. • Tell yourself affirmations like "you got this" or "you've done this before" or "you have something important to say". • Take breaths and exhale slowly: repeat until the shakiness disappears.	It is important to reaffirm your trust in yourself. Rather than thinking about your nerves or overthinking your speech, it is helpful to remind yourself that your voice is worthy.

Your name has been called and it's time to go up to the front	• Turn it "on". Mentally switch into performance mode. • Look at people as you walk up.	A performance mode helps you switch into a person who doesn't feel fear. In this mode, you acknowledge the audience, instead of avoiding eye contact.
Moment before your speech	• Stand in a grounded position and acknowledge in audience.	Ground yourself when you get to the front. Don't speak while walking, but wait until you and the audience are ready.

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CONFIDENCE-BUILDING GUIDE: RESOURCE 16

The Audience's Burden: How Positive Community Conquers Fear

Facing the fear of public speaking shouldn't only be up to the speaker...

...the audience has an essential role to play in making situations less nerve-wracking in the first place. While every public speaker has a lot of work to do to feel more prepared and ready to embrace discomfort, the audience carries the burden of creating a space that welcomes what people have to offer. It takes courage to put your voice into the world and that courage should be welcomed by eager listeners who are ready to learn, especially in schools and classrooms.



Audience Behaviors That Make Things Worse

Regardless of age or experience, the worst case scenario for most public speakers is that people will dislike them and what they say. This is especially the case for young children and adolescents, who are afraid of being laughed at or stereotyped. They are therefore hyper aware of audience behavior, including facial expressions, actions, and responses. In general, speakers actually hold audiences to a fairly high standard -- they are looking for engaged faces and people who will remember what they say and be moved by their remarks. Most audience members, on the other hand, hold themselves to an incredibly low standard, treating listening as a passive activity or chance to do nothing. Passive audiences are ones who somehow think that no one can see them as they watch the speaker, when in reality, their actions are actually discouraging and distracting. This translates into physical behavior that includes:

- Looking tired or bored (e.g. scowling at the speaker)
- Fidgeting and noisy nervous habits (e.g. pen-clicking or playing with chair)
- Spacing out or looking vacant (e.g. head on table or arm)
- Looking distracted or impatient (e.g. glancing at the time or vgoing on the phone)

Changing the Audience Mindset

The solution isn't to fake interest or sit in the audience with a plastered smile; rather, the audience's role is to actively listen to the speaker and contribute to an environment that invites new ideas. In the classroom, a positive sense of community goes a long way to ease the fear of public speaking. Remind students that as an audience member, their burden is to:

1. Be present and show they are listening.
2. Avoid making it harder for the speaker to do his or her best work.
3. Consider ways they can ease the speaker's doubts and fears.
4. Facilitate people's voices through their behavior or participation.
5. Take on the role of the learner -- actively try to learn something.
6. Delay any judgment until the speaker is finished.

It takes courage to put your voice into the world and that courage should be welcomed by eager listeners who are ready to learn, especially in schools and classrooms.

Setting People Free

It is not always possible for anyone to be the perfect audience member: after all, everyone has moments where they feel tired, uncomfortable, disinterested or frustrated by what someone is saying. It is important to react and engage honestly and authentically and it can be difficult to be a helpful audience member in some situations. The takeaway is to rethink the job of an audience member and consider ways that audiences can contribute to helping people feel free of doubt, anxiety, and fear as they communicate and lead. When classrooms are inclusive places where people are genuinely eager to learn from one another, it is easier to let go of the fear of being judged. To become leaders who listen, students need role models and facilitators to guide them in creating positive learning environments where people look out for one another and appreciate diverse voices.

Rethink the job of an audience member and consider ways that audiences can contribute to helping people feel free of doubt, anxiety, and fear as they communicate and lead.

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