

## Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension...commonly known as “stage fright” or “nerves”. Often described as butterflies in the stomach. Communication apprehension is one of the most common fears in the world.

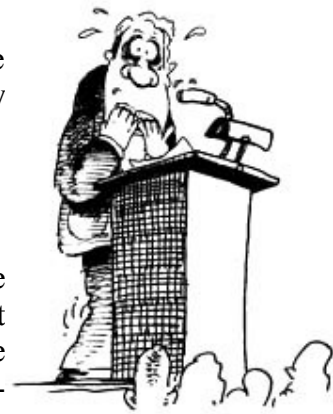
The most important thing you need to remember is that communication apprehension is a fear you can easily get a handle on. A lot of people believe that communication apprehension is a learned response, meaning that peoples' fear of public speaking is grounded in a bad public speaking experience.

### Why do we have this reaction?

It is a ready response. An emergency reaction in which the body prepares for combat or escape from potentially dangerous situations, animals, or people.

*It is also known as the **fight-or-flight mechanism**.*

**Evolution.** Fight-or-flight is an ancient sympathetic response pattern (in mammals and fish) which accelerates heartbeat rate, raises blood-sugar level, and releases hormones from the adrenal gland, preparing an alarmed creature to chase-and-bite, or to turn-and-flee.



In humans this is brought on by the release of large amounts of adrenaline and noradrenaline.

### Behavioral symptoms:

- Overreacting to minor problems
- Inappropriate anger or impatience
- Sense of humor failure
- Nervous laughing
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Increased use of tobacco or caffeine
- Unable to relax
- Constantly feeling anxious
- Disrupted sleeping patterns
- Decreased school or work performance
- Diminished ability to set priorities and make decisions
- Prone to make errors or be accident prone
- Repetitive behavior (hair pulling, face touching, coughing etc.)

**Physical symptoms:**

- Headaches
- Cold hands and feet
- Increased sweating and overheating
- Red face (Blushing)
- White face (pallor)
- Indigestion (butterflies in your stomach)
- Aching neck or back
- Ulcers
- Nausea
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Shortness of breath
- Heart palpitations
- Blinking too much or not at all
- Teeth grinding
- Muscle spasms

**Controlling the Symptoms**

By and large, the symptoms of stage fright are normal, expected physiological reactions to stress, excitement or fear, but they prepare you for a physical response, rather than a speaking engagement. The symptoms won't keep you from giving an excellent presentation, but the stress response also isn't doing much to help you until you learn to channel those physical reactions into a dynamic, energized, vigorous delivery.

- Recognize the stress as excitement. The physiological symptoms associated with public speaking are virtually the same as those you'd experience if you rode a roller coaster, went on your first rafting trip, or got married. The real difference is that you have learned to associate "fright" with being on stage and "fun" with being on a roller coaster. The goal of stage fright control is not to make the symptoms go away; the goal is to learn ways to make the adrenaline rush work for you, rather than against you.
- Use your large muscles. Those contracted muscles are waiting for you to throw a spear at a lion, and until you do, they can't relax. Walk briskly around the building a couple of times (watching out for wild animals, of course. Throw your arms around, or punch at a nearby wall. Clench your fists, scowl, make ugly faces, and then relax those smaller muscles too. Focus on your back and neck muscles, stretching and rolling your head until they relax.
- Take deep breaths, from the diaphragm. Regulating the breath cycle is the most accessible technique for changing the body's kinesthetic state. (Other techniques include meditation, trance inducement, alternate nostril breathing and other yoga exercises, and biofeedback.) As you force yourself to take a deep breath, the

oxygen/carbon dioxide balance is restored, and the body interprets the big sigh as an “all clear” signal. As the stress levels begin to decline, so will the rest of the symptoms.

- Exaggerate your symptoms. The body will not automatically produce a symptom that you are doing consciously. Start breathing rapidly on purpose, for example. You can then stop on purpose, but your body won't start up the automatic system again. This doesn't work for everything, of course. Most people can't sweat on purpose, or increase their pulse rates. But you can shake your legs, blink rapidly, scowl, or do whatever other little quirky things your body seems to want to do by itself.
- Watch what you eat. For many people the most debilitating symptoms of stage fright are the consequences of the digestive system shutting down. Figure out what your own digestive system does (or doesn't do) under stress, and see that you time your food intake to accommodate it.

**Presentation**

Choose one of the following topics:

- An embarrassing moment
- A misunderstanding
- What scares you the most and why

Before and during your presentation think about how you are feeling and make a note of any symptoms that you might have.

While you watch the other students give their presentations write down if you think they are more frightened or less frightened than you are.