



Unit 4 Overcoming Nervousness

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Develop techniques to create a professional presence
- ✓ Learn some different ways to prepare and organize information

Unit 4

Overcoming Nervousness

ABOUT NERVOUSNESS

Some **nervousness is normal** for everyone, especially the first few times you make a presentation or speak in public. These jitters can actually help you and give you an edge when you redirect that energy into enthusiasm and passion for your topic.

Confidence will grow as you give more presentations and become comfortable with the routine. The other major confidence builder is a change in **attitude**. When you learn to shift your focus from yourself to the audience, it helps to eliminate fear.

Nervousness can have many sources.

One is the constant stream of internal **negative comments** that nags speakers when they begin to think about the presentation. ("I wonder how I will come across this time. Last time I made a presentation, I was sure everyone was laughing at me when I had so much trouble with the equipment.")

Another source of tension comes from **hyper-responsibility**. The presenter feels that they are responsible for the reactions and well-being of everyone in the room. Do not be so hard on yourself. Recognize that we are all different and have different ways of interpreting things. We do not have to be responsible for what other people think.

Think about it this way: you believe in what you are saying. You are prepared. In fact, for this presentation, you are the only person who is so well prepared. Your audience needs to know what you have to say.

Change the words you say to yourself from negative messages to more positive ones. List your concerns on a sheet of paper before the presentation. Then, for every negative message, substitute a positive one. For instance, if your negative message is, "I am a nervous wreck," write, "I can channel this nervous energy into the presentation and give a more enthusiastic performance." This effort may take some repetition, but eventually it works.

The second kind of nervousness (taking responsibility for everyone in the room) can also be fought. Come to terms with the fact that everyone in the room will not necessarily accept your ideas. It is not your job to please everyone. Your job is to get your message across in clearly understandable terms to the people who must have the information. **Concentrate on the decision maker and on those who respond positively to you.** Forget the others.

Because it is hard to counteract nervousness if you do not feel in control of the situation, take time before the presentation begins to **put yourself in control**.

- Allow plenty of time to check out the room and equipment.
- Start on time. Unless the decision maker in your audience is delayed, do not wait for stragglers. Delaying will make you and your audience fidgety.
- Greet people as they come in. Chat casually with people you know until it is time to start.
- Eliminate any physical barriers that stand between the audience and you. If you are behind a table or lectern, move away from it. Do not cling to the podium or your projector.

- Do some deep breathing. The increased oxygen helps, and the rhythm of regular breathing helps you to focus.
- Avoid caffeine, which can increase anxiety and jitters.
- Speak about things that you care about.

Mastering Non-Verbal Communication

You are confident. You have rehearsed. You have a powerful, logical argument. You are ready now to take on the task of presenting your points in such a way that you do not distract from your argument. In management presentations, the drama should be in the content, not in the person. Once you are aware of the way people react to you, you can control the way you present yourself.

Leave the Appropriate Distance between You and the Audience

Although a **public speaker** may be 12 to 15 feet from the first row of listeners without being viewed as aloof and impersonal, a **management presenter** (who generally deals with far fewer people) should be no more than four to five feet away. If you are any farther away, the listeners may regard you as either stuffy or fearful. If you get any closer, people will become uncomfortable.

When you are speaking to a group with whom you have had little or no personal or professional relationship, start speaking from a position farther away and move in slightly as the presentation progresses and as you establish rapport. But do not get too close. A tall presenter, for example, who approaches within inches of his listeners and leans forward, is expressing dominance more than friendliness. To judge whether you tend to invade others' personal space, recall whether people ever inched away from you when you were engaged in informal conversations.

Physical distance rules vary from one culture to another. Some people want to be within inches of each other when they speak, whereas others need much more space. Be aware of where you are and what is expected.

Stand Erect

Good posture gives the impression of authority. You can correct poor posture without difficulty by standing against a wall and pressing your spine flat against it. While you are making your presentation, make a conscious effort **not to fold your arms**. Folded arms seem to encourage slouching, and it certainly sends a message of defending or protecting yourself.

There is a difference between good posture and stiffness, however. If you march briskly to the front of the room and do not move for the rest of the presentation, you signal rigidity more than authority.

Consider Your Appearance

Psychologists have found that attractive people are more persuasive than unattractive people. They are not referring to a person's appearance. Anyone can **cultivate attractiveness** through good grooming and clean, neat, professional dress. A presentation is not the place to make a statement with your clothes – flashy clothes

can divert attention from your argument. Be professional and choose clothes that suit you. Although standards in non-traditional organizations may be more lenient, in general, it is safer to stay on the conservative side. Anything too far from the norm will cause the audience to fix on the distracting feature rather than your argument.

Move About and Use Gestures

A presenter who stays glued to the overhead projector, the lectern, or any other one position is terrified, and everyone soon knows it. To give the impression of **self-confidence**, move about the room and use your hands. You may even convince yourself that all is well.

Take advantage of your **natural gestures**, but avoid using one over and over, and try not to be conducting an orchestra. Some presenters, when told that they need to add movement, adopt one gesture (raising an arm, for example) and use it repeatedly. At worst, such programmed gestures send the audience into a hypnotic state; at best, they are distracting.

Tailor your gestures to reinforce your point. For instance, by bringing your hands together, you can assure your audience that your proposal "brings it all together." Similarly, you can refer to the ramifications of a problem by tracing ever-widening circles in the air.

Because many presentations involve visual aids, you can add movement by simply pointing out the most important features on the visual. **Moving** around the room is helpful if it does not deteriorate into the measured pacing of a caged tiger. By **pausing** completely, you emphasize to your listeners the importance of what you are saying.

Control Your Facial Expressions and Mannerisms

Although we all know people who say, "If you cut off my hands, I would not be able to talk," very few people actually overdo **gestures**. **Facial expressions**, on the other hand, are difficult to control and often give an embarrassingly accurate clue as to how you really feel. Beyond checking yourself on videotape, the best way to control facial expressions is to make sure you are comfortable with your material and prepared to respond honestly and openly to any questions.

Try to maintain an **accessible, open presence**. Remember that a **smile** breaks down barriers. When you smile at someone, they generally smile back. Also, as you talk, show interest in what you are saying. If you are not interested, how can your audience be?

Maintain Eye Contact

You will lose support faster by staring at your notes, looking only at the visual, or focusing on a spot high on the back wall than by any mistakes you may make in the content of your presentation. Similarly, if you direct yourself exclusively to the key decision maker in your audience, they will feel more uneasy than flattered, and others in the room will feel unimportant.

Try, at some point in the presentation, to look at each participant with the goal of giving each, in turn, the brief message, "I can see that you grasp what I am saying." Then, for your own comfort, focus on people who respond with a nod or smile rather than on people who seem bored or hostile.

Using Notes

It is hard to imagine anyone trying to memorize a presentation word-for-word. Recall takes so much energy that you would have little left for relating to the audience. Do not ever consider memorizing. Instead, learn to use notes **unobtrusively** and **effectively**.

Many presenters use their **visuals** as notes. If your visuals are not sufficient to remind you of the details, you can construct notes in several forms. However you do it, your notes should be easy to use. In terms of **content**, you should include your opening remarks as well as your ending remarks and any statistical information that is too difficult to remember and will not appear on your visuals.

For **long presentations**, your notes may go into more detail than is necessary for short ones. If you plan to use extensive notes, underline key points or use a highlighter. In either case, however, never use full sentences because you may lapse into reading them and thus destroy your phrasing.

Two popular note-taking devices are to write simple key words or phrases on index cards or on the frames of your PowerPoint notes.

Index Cards

Never walk around holding your index cards or notes. Let them remain on the lectern or the table so that you are free to make assertive gestures without waving your notes around.

PowerPoint Notes

Simply add notes in the provided area when creating your slides, and then print them off to use during your presentation.

When you are using PowerPoint, try not to be mesmerized by the words and graphics on your screen. Also, do not read from the slides – use them to illustrate your points and keep you on track.

Managing the Question and Answer Period

Just as you sometimes encourage questions during your presentation, be sure to **invite participation when you are finished**. Say something simple like, "I will be glad to answer any questions you have." In some cases, you may want to ask people you know to pose one or two questions just to get the discussion going.

Regard this portion of the presentation as a chance to:

- Gather new information
- Stress your main point
- Get commitment to your plan of action

No matter how well you have prepared, someone in this group may have information you do not, or may contribute something you have not thought of. Your **ultimate goal** is to contribute to the success of your organization. Questions, comments, and discussion serve that goal very well. The more people who participate and the more questions they ask, the more effective you are likely to be.

The first step in **responding to questions** is to listen very carefully. Nod to show that you are paying attention.

Do not be surprised if the question has to do with a point you are sure you covered in your presentation. You may not have put your point across as clearly as you thought. Other members of the audience invariably identify with the questioner, not the speaker. To say, "Well, I thought I covered that in my remarks," or to sigh resignedly and roll your eyes, cuts off discussion and damages your credibility with the audience.

The following **guidelines** should also help.

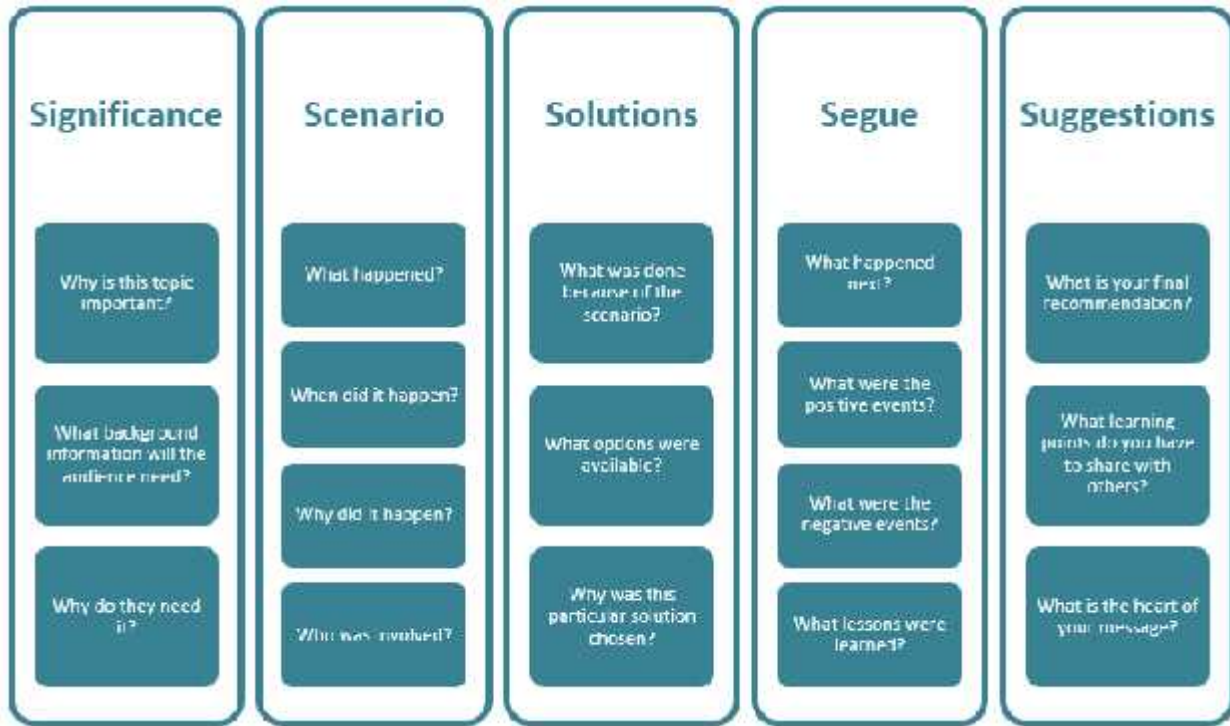
- Establish ground rules
- Let people finish
- Respond to everything, even statements
- Restate the question
- Stay on track
- Admit you do not know the answer
- Control the discussion
- Move toward action

The Five S's

Five Points for Any Presentation

It can be hard to remember to cover all of the bases for any presentation, particularly if you are put on the spot. The five S approach will work for any size presentation. If you are put on the spot in the lunchroom, you can use this approach to provide a quick, complete answer. If you are giving a large presentation at a conference, you can use this approach as a framework. Either way, it will ensure that you tell the audience what they want to know and what they need to know.

The framework looks like this:



Example

I was drowning in clutter: too many clothes in my closet, too many books on my bookshelves, and too many pieces of furniture in my house. I did not have time for a yard sale. Besides, we live on a pretty quiet street without much traffic. However, I needed to get rid of things and I could not bring myself to throw them out. So I bagged and boxed all the items I no longer wanted and I called a local charity. They came by with a truck and took everything away. They made money, I felt good, and my house was de-cluttered. If your possessions are starting to take over your life, I recommend calling This Charity at 000-0000.

Preparing With the Five-S Pattern

You find yourself on an elevator with your target audience, such as your boss or your client. In less than two minutes, you are to introduce yourself or offer an update on a project. In both cases, you have been hoping for this opportunity and you have already prepared.

Apply the five S pattern and prepare a short presentation for this situation.

INTRODUCTIONS

Your introduction should:

- Grab their attention
- State your purpose
- Explain your agenda
- Show personal and specific benefits

Other ways to begin your presentations include:

- A question asking about the audience's concerns. This can be an effective beginning in a small group. The drawback to this approach is that it commits you to considering all the topics your listeners may bring up. In other words, use this technique only when you know the issues the audience will raise and are prepared to discuss them all.
- A rhetorical question, such as: "Can you teach people to be creative?" A rhetorical question is meant to be thought-provoking. It must be carefully crafted for this purpose. In doing this, ensure you do not inadvertently make a snide suggestion that you know something the audience does not – not a good way to build rapport.
- A statement of your qualifications. If no one has presented your qualifications, and especially if the group is hostile, this approach can help you establish rapport.

Have you decided how you will open your presentation?

FOLLOWING THE OPENING STATEMENT

If, in your opening statement, you have not told the audience what the presentation is about and why it is important, do so next. Keep in mind that an audience will remember best what you say first and what you say last. Do not waste the first few moments.

Beginnings and **endings** are critical because audiences are most alert during the first minutes and final minutes of a presentation.

Your beginning must tell:

- **What** the presentation is about.
- **Why** the subject is important.
- **How** you will develop the argument.

If you have chosen not to share criteria important to the audience in the body of the presentation, you must deal with them in the beginning.

Transitioning To the Body

If you are concerned about your rapport with members of the audience, work to build their confidence by stating your criteria or responding to theirs.

You can make a natural transition into the body of the presentation by concluding the beginning with guidelines for how you will proceed. These are called **signposts**. They make your thoughts an easy trail to follow.

Example

Is there anyone in this room who would not like to earn more money? **(This is my attention grabber!)**

Tonight I am going to bring you three easy, sure-fire strategies for being more successful at your job. None of them are difficult. I have used all of them and I can tell you from personal experience that they work. In fact, I went from working as a \$14 an hour call-center operator to a six-figure salary in just two years using the techniques I will describe to you tonight.

Furthermore, I will give you specific, step-by-step instructions for using each strategy. You can take your own notes if you wish, but some of us are not that great at note-taking, so I have included every word in this CD that you can buy at the end of the program for just \$7.98. **(This is your beginning.)**

My first strategy is to get very comfortable speaking in public. **(I have given you a signpost. This is my first point. Now I am ready to launch into the body of my speech.)**

ENHANCING YOUR PRESENTATION WITH STORIES, NUMBERS, AND EXAMPLES

No matter how brilliantly you speak, your audience will remember your points better when they are supported with appropriate pictures and stories.

However, while most people agree that stories and examples are one of the most effective devices in a memorable presentation, they can also be the most difficult for speakers who struggle with spontaneity. If you have done a bit of preparation and you have some examples, it will help you add this punch without worrying about being creative on the spot. This is another place where your audience analysis will really pay off.

ENDINGS

An effective ending repeats the recommendation (or in this case, the strategies that were presented) and reinforces the need for action.

Continuing with the **previous example**, my ending would summarize these points:

- Become more comfortable speaking in public. Take a course, join Toastmasters International, or just offer to speak at every service club in your area, free of charge. I do not care what you have to do. Get out there and make yourself known.

- Spend some money on a fashion consultant so you look good. That will not mean spending tons of money on clothes but it will mean spending your money on clothes that flatter you, not clothes that are necessarily trendy.
- Create a website that establishes you as a speaker. Use your own name and choose a small list of topics that you are knowledgeable about.

Then, you want to **end on a strong point**: something that will keep them thinking and propel them to act. Closer for this example: Get out there and earn YOUR money!

Think fast!

Choose one of these topics.

- How to train your puppy
- Why we should all take vitamin supplements
- Where to go for a great vacation
- What to do when you are feeling stressed
- Who is your hero

Create an attention-grabbing opening sentence.

Create an introduction that tells the audience the what, why, and how of your presentation.

List the three points you want to make.

Wrap everything up with a conclusion or ending.

Evaluation Form

Speaker:	Topic:	
Speaker's Target Audience:		
Content	Good!	Needs Work
Relevant material for audience's knowledge level		
Sufficient depth in support material		
Interesting examples for audience and situation		
Organization		
Grabs audience's attention		
States clear agenda		
Includes benefit in introduction		
Summarizes essence of main points		

Asks for clear action in conclusion		
Closes with strong final statement		
Would you hire this person/buy this product/support this proposal?	Yes	No

Audience Profile

As a presenter, you might be thinking solely of your intention. What do I want to say? What do I need them to know? These questions focus on you and your agenda. We want you to think about what the audience needs, expects, and wants. Consider their agenda rather than yours, and make sure your presentation meets theirs first. Some questions that you will want to answer include:

- Who are the decision makers?
- How much do the decision makers know about the situation?
- How do the decision makers view the situation?
- How will the decision maker react to the proposal?
- Who else will attend the presentation?
- What are their views of the presentation or proposal?
- Who else will be affected by this presentation?
- What is the next step?
- What is my revised objective or fallback position?

Your Speaking Voice

Parts of Your Message

Tone

Tone refers to the way that you distinguish or inflect your words. We use tone to express emotion, emphasis, contrast, and other features of our speech. Your tone tells your audience **how you are feeling about the words you say**. Good intonation lets others see your attitude and your enthusiasm for your subject, and demonstrates that they are consistent.

Which do you prefer: monotonous or melodious? Do your words come out pleasant and energetic, or lifeless and wooden? Think in terms of friendliness and a desire to communicate with others and develop the best intonation that you can to captivate listeners to what you have to say.

Pitch

This refers to how high or low your voice is. In most cases a **low-pitched** voice is considered an asset. Men and women who have lower voices are considered more exciting, more credible, more sociable, and more relaxed. They are also generally easier to hear when you are in the audience. If you have a **high-pitched** voice, be aware of it and consider how you can best deliver your message. If you have a high voice and will speak frequently, working with a vocal coach can be an excellent idea.

Pacing

This refers not just to the speed at which you speak, but also the length of the pauses in your speech. The ability to pace your speech and use your voice to create impact is the single most important skill you need. For example, **which pace is more effective?**

- Bad management costs jobs.
- Bad...management...costs...jobs.

Emphasis

You can dramatically change the **significance of what you say** in a presentation by stressing words which would normally be unstressed or contracted. As an example, change the meaning of the simple question “Who am I?” by stressing a different word each time you say it.

Which is more dramatic?

- “It is not cost-effective.”
- “It is NOT cost-effective.”

You can also make your statement more **persuasive** by using simple intensifiers (such as “just”) to emphasize your points. As an example, “I am afraid it just is not good enough. We need the entire system overhauled.”

Facial Expressions

Our face is an **extremely expressive part of our body**. The facial expressions you use when you talk are important because they create a distinct impression about you. If you have too much tension in your facial muscles you may appear to be angry or uptight. Keep your eyes open, your brow unfurrowed, and an alert and animated look on your face if you want others to perceive you positively.

Eye Contact

Most people do not realize what a negative and alienating effect poor eye contact can have on their total image. Good eye contact does not mean staring into another person’s eyes and not breaking contact. This can make people feel as uncomfortable as not looking at them at all. Good eye contact means looking in the **general vicinity** of the person’s eyes, watching the whole face, and occasionally making direct eye contact. It is about making that person feel like he is the only person in the room. When you are making a presentation, do not look

over people's heads to the back of the room. Rather, look at individuals around the room, spending five to 10 seconds with each of them.

Posture

Your posture is one of the first things people look at, and they do use it when they make judgments. Your posture is the key to communicating your image. You do not want to come across as either too stiff or too sloppy. Stand straight, as though you are an important person. Hold your head high.

Body Language

Body language is a broad subject, incorporating eye contact and the range of non-verbal cues. However, here is a summary of some common body language that can send negative or positive messages.

Positives	Negatives
Open body language	Tapping your fingers or feet
Sweeping gestures	Arms crossed
Palms up	Glancing at watch
Leaning forward	Leaning back
Natural, smooth hand gestures	Tense body

VOCAL VARIETY

Below are some well-known sayings. Go around the room so everyone has an opportunity to try saying one of the phrases with as much vocal variety as possible.

- Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.
- The easier it is to do, the harder it is to change.
- Teamwork gives you twice the results for half the effort.
- Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can.
- Humor is always the shortest distance between two people.
- Anyone can make a mistake, but to really mess things up requires a computer.
- People always have two reasons for doing things: a good reason and the real reason.
- People who think they know it all are a pain in the neck to those of us who really do.

- An expert is someone who knows more and more about less and less until he knows everything about nothing.

Intonation is a good indicator of how you feel about what you are saying. Look at the following contrasts. Notice how your voice tends to rise when you make a positive point and fall when you make a negative one.

- We are doing well in Europe, but not in the Middle East.
- Turnover is down, but productivity is up, and for the second year running.
- In Mexico we are number one, in Argentina we are number one, in Chile we are number one, but in Brazil we are nowhere.

Some things to do on your own:

- Keep a list of the 10 longest or most difficult words you use in your line of work or field of interest. Mark the stress for each word so you know exactly how to say it.
- Get used to editing your presentations to eliminate filler words, non-words, jargon, acronyms, sexist language, and hidden messages.
- Rehearse!

Mastering Your Material

Rehearsals allow you to feel comfortable with your presentation material. If you are rehearsing by yourself, play the devil's advocate and **ask yourself hard questions**. Imagine what you would say if you were in the audience. Ask someone to role play what the decision maker might ask. If you find yourself stumbling at any point in the presentation, it may be that you do not truly believe your argument or that you missed some flaw in the logic when you organized the presentation. Go back to your presentation plan and check.

Your **choice of words** also reveals your mastery of the material. Rehearsals will give you the confidence to choose the strongest appropriate words. You will not be afraid to express yourself, for example, in clear, direct terms such as, "Continuing on this course will be destructive," rather than, "This course of action may present problems."

Your delivery will have much more meaning and power if you use **precise, strong language**. Once you have used a good, powerful word, though, do not get stuck on it. Calling three concepts "pivotal" in the same presentation dissipates the force of the word, and thus your argument. **Do not exaggerate**, either. Even one exaggerated statement makes a group suspicious, and a stream of overdone claims will undermine your whole argument.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Berkley, Susan. Speak to Influence. Campbell Hall Press, 2004.*
- ✓ *Boothman, Nicholas. How to Make People Like You in 90 Seconds or Less. Workman Publishing Company, 2000.*
- ✓ *Carnegie, Dale. How to Win Friends and Influence People. Pocket Books, 1998 (Reprint*