



# STAGE FRIGHT

## HOW TO OVERCOME YOUR FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

# STAGE- FRIGHT IS A BIGGIE. AND IT EVEN HAS ITS OWN NAME:

GLOSSOPHOBIA.

But the term “public speaking” no longer refers to just talking in front of a physical audience. It can also mean presenting to a virtual audience through online events, meetings, conferences.

In this short paper, Daniel Waas, Director of Product Marketing, Communications Cloud, looks at how you can overcome your fear of public speaking.



I hate speaking in front of large groups of people, yet I love picturing the standing ovation after delivering a great speech (you have to dream big, right?).

And if you've ever seen a documentary about people with phobias, they're always told to face their fears. So after trying to think of anything other than doing just that, I challenged myself to go and speak at large events in order to overcome my fear of public speaking.

I know – why would someone do that?

But it worked. Here are a few things I learnt on my quest for presentation zen.

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON FEARS WHEN IT COMES TO PUBLIC SPEAKING?

- ① Looking like a fool
- ② Boring the audience
- ③ Being lost for words
- ④ People noticing your nervousness
- ⑤ People hating the presentation or, worse, getting up to leave

Now all of these are valid concerns, but what if I told you that there's a way to avoid them? Nothing will happen to you if you follow my four-step plan to public-speaking invincibility.

# STEP #1:

## PREPARE YOUR ENVIRONMENT IN ADVANCE SO YOU CAN CONCENTRATE ON DELIVERY

Ultimately, you want to calm your nerves. Knowing that you've spent the necessary amount of time preparing not only your presentation but also your environment will ease that nervous feeling.

Here are a few things to check before the big day:



## WHAT EXACTLY WILL BE AVAILABLE TO YOU?

- ▶ Laptop/tablet (do you need to bring your own?)
- ▶ Microphone
- ▶ Projector or display
- ▶ Presentation clicker
- ▶ Lectern
- ▶ Power socket to plug in your laptop

## FOR ONLINE PRESENTATIONS

- ▶ Will you present from your machine or control the presentation via someone else's computer?
- ▶ Will you need a webcam?
- ▶ Have you got a headset with a built-in microphone?
- ▶ If no headset, have you got a telephone with loudspeaker capability so your hands will be free to control the presentation?
- ▶ Have you got the log-in details?

## REHEARSAL TIME

- ▶ Have you set up a rehearsal beforehand so you can become familiar with your technology and surroundings?

- ▶ Have you got the presentation saved in more than one place? For example, try multiple memory sticks in case one doesn't work. You can also email the presentation to yourself or save it to a cloud storage service so you can find it quickly if you're in a rush.

## POWER

- ▶ Is your laptop fully charged and have you got the power cable?


## SLIDES AND NOTES

- ▶ Have you printed out your slides and notes in case of some sort of technical failure? In the worse case scenario, you will still be able to present, even if people can't see your presentation.

Now that you've got the external factors under control, it's time to talk topic.

## STEP #2: DON'T ALLOW THE TOPIC TO PETRIFY YOU

The one thing you'll need most when speaking publicly is confidence. And nothing undermines your confidence more than being absolutely clueless about the topic you're supposed to present on.



There are two ways to avoid getting rattled:

1. Pick a topic you're an expert on.
2. If that is not an option and you're stuck with a topic you know zilch about, cram as much knowledge as possible into your brain before the speech. Ideally, even get some hands-on experience with whatever it is you'll need to talk about.

Phew! Now that you know your stuff and you're more prepared, the likelihood of looking like an utter fool has just decreased tenfold.

### **STEP #3: HAVE A STUNNING PRESENTATION READY**

Before you even open your mouth, your audience will form an impression of you just by looking at your slides. So it's imperative that you spend time crafting a stunning presentation — it's just as important as the speech you give.

Here are some tips that work for me:

### Use one idea per slide

Keep to one idea per slide. Ideally, summarise the idea in fewer than five words. Three if you feel up to it. One if you like a challenge. Or if you're feeling really brave, use no words at all. Add a new slide for each idea you have until you're out of ideas.

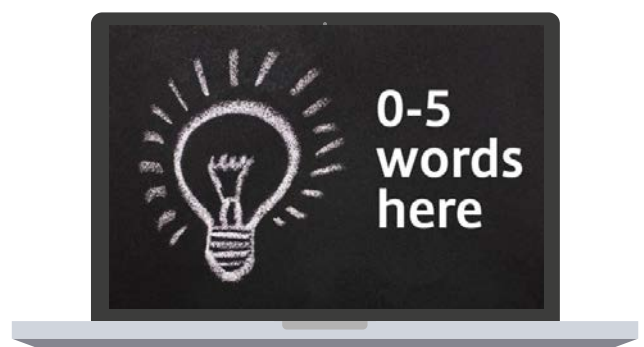
### Conjure up a matching image for each idea

If you're looking for pictures, there is a great blog post here with over [15 image sources for your next presentation](#).

For each idea, take your matching image and make it fill your whole slide. Then add the words (if any) in big bold letters (30+ font size). This

can be really effective: having just a few words on your slides will enable your audience to focus on what you're saying, rather than trying to read and listen at the same time.

### Arrange your ideas into a story arc



A story arc is a way of telling a story over various chapters or episodes. It can be particularly effective in public speaking. Here are three examples from my own speeches:

- ▶ In a speech about lead management, I used the circle of life as an analogy, telling the life story of a lead from conception to birth, to death and finally to resurrection.

- ▶ Talking about a website relaunch, I used a photo of myself stretching for an unattainable goal pictured as a castle in the sky. I then told the story of how we put that goal within reach and ended with another photo: the castle in the sky firmly in my grip.
- ▶ In a speech about flexible working, I told micro stories about how workshifting has impacted my daily life.

The benefit: you'll have a much easier time memorising your speech and remembering what's next. Presenting all of it as part of an overarching story will also help hold everybody's attention, so boredom will be less likely.

And if that wasn't reason enough to try stories, your heroic presentation will make a great impression on your audience, and you'll be on

your way to winning them over.

## **STEP #4: PRACTICE AS IF YOUR LIFE WERE AT STAKE**

When I prepped for my first big speech, I read up on presenting. I was blown away when I learned Steve Jobs rehearsed his presentations weeks in advance and two days straight leading up to the event.





If Steve Jobs managed to get that into his undoubtedly super-busy schedule, what was my excuse for not being able to?

*Works every time!*

Ever since then, I've rehearsed my presentations at least five times out loud, sometimes coercing my wife or colleagues to listen and provide feedback. Then I spend extra time on polishing the opening and closing sequences and rearranging words and sentences until they feel just right.

It all ties back to confidence. If you've rehearsed well, your confidence is high and that shows when you present. A smooth opening. No awkward pauses.

Best of all, feeling secure about the opening line takes away much of the nervousness immediately before you go on stage. And once you're past your first sentence, you're in the flow.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Waas is Director of Product Marketing for the Communications Cloud. He's a geek at heart who loves LEGO, sci-fi and the occasional video game if time permits. Despite these severe dating handicaps, he was lucky enough to get married and even luckier to have a son. You can connect with Daniel on [Google+](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#).



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