

Karen Kangas Dwyer

CONQUER YOUR SPEECH FRIGHT

LEARN
HOW TO
OVERCOME
THE NERVOUSNESS
OF PUBLIC SPEAKING



CONQUER YOUR SPEECH FRIGHT

**LEARN HOW TO OVERCOME THE
NERVOUSNESS OF PUBLIC
SPEAKING**

Karen Kangas Dwyer



Harcourt Brace College Publishers

Fort Worth Philadelphia San Diego New York Orlando Austin San Antonio

Toronto Montreal London Sydney Tokyo

Publisher	Earl McPeck
Acquisitions Editor	Carol Wada
Product Manager	Julie McBurney
Developmental Editor	Eric Carlson
Project Editor	Tamara Neff Vardy
Production Manager	Serena B. Manning
Art Director	Don Fujimoto

ISBN: 0-15-508177-2

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 97-74863

Copyright © 1998 by Harcourt Brace & Company

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Although for mechanical reasons all pages of this publication are perforated, only those pages imprinted with Harcourt Brace & Company are intended for removal.

Requests for permission to make copies of any part of the work should be mailed to: Permissions Department, Harcourt Brace & Company, 6277 Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando, Florida 32887-6777.

Address orders to:

Harcourt Brace & Company
6277 Sea Harbor Drive
Orlando, FL 32887-6777
1-800-782-4479

Address editorial correspondence to:

Harcourt Brace College Publishers
301 Commerce Street, Suite 3700
Fort Worth, TX 76102

Web site address:

<http://www.hbcollege.com>

Harcourt Brace may provide complimentary instructional aids and supplements or supplement packages to those adopters qualified under our adoption policy. Please contact your sales representative for more information. If as an adopter or potential user you receive supplements you do not need, please return them to your sales representative or send them to: Attn: Returns Department, Troy Warehouse, 465 South Lincoln Drive, Troy, MO 63379.

Printed in the United States of America

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 066 9 8 7 6 5

CONQUER YOUR SPEECHFRIGHT

**LEARN HOW TO OVERCOME THE
NERVOUSNESS OF PUBLIC
SPEAKING**

PREFACE

Conquer Your Speechfright is written especially for college students and anyone else who wants to overcome the fear and anxiety of public speaking. For eleven years, I have researched communication anxiety, taught university students how to overcome their excessive nervousness about speaking in public, and developed “Speaking Confidently” workshops and classes. This textbook is the result of those efforts.

This book is unique in that it presents a combination of the research-based techniques for overcoming speechfright in a user-friendly program. Several years of communication research will attest to the workable success of the combinational approach to overcoming speechfright presented here. In addition, countless numbers of my students can testify that this multidimensional program has given them (and will give you) a new confidence to speak in public situations and a changed life as a result of loosening the albatross of speechfright.

This book is written to complement a public speaking textbook **or** to be the primary textbook for a class or workshop developed specifically to help people overcome speechfright and communication anxiety. It is designed to help students reduce their speechfright and excessive nervousness about public communication so they are free to learn and polish public speaking skills. It is **not** meant to replace a public speaking textbook, as it does **not** cover public speaking skills in detail. If in fact you are reading this book on your own, as soon as you are finished, you should try to enroll in a public speaking course or other communication class where you can learn and practice public speaking skills. The confidence in public speaking that you are seeking will be acquired by using the speechfright-reduction techniques presented here in concert with practicing public speaking skills under the instruction of a communication teacher or coach.

The contents of this book are divided into three parts and twelve chapters. Part 1, “Understanding Speechfright,” focuses on helping you understand your speechfright including the definition, possible causes, and impact it has on your life. Chapter One, “Speechfright and You,” points out that speechfright is a common fear, and it takes commitment to conquer it. You will assess your commitment to overcoming it and write a pledge to yourself summarizing your willingness to practice the anxiety-reduction techniques.

Chapter Two, “Definitions and Assessments,” discusses communication apprehension, one of the academic terms for speech anxiety. It explains the four types of communication apprehension and guides you in assessing your level and type of communication anxiety.

Chapter Three, “Causes of Speechfright,” outlines several causes of communication anxiety in order to help you gain understanding about your experience. You will assess the cause(s) of your speechfright. However, you will also learn that it does not matter how or when you acquired your fear of public communication. The techniques presented in this text will help you overcome it.

Chapter Four, “Excessive Activation and the Fight or Flight Response,” explains the fight or flight response, the source of your aggravating physical sensations associated with the nervousness of public speaking. You will assess your symptoms of excessive activation and learn how to stop the fight or flight response that triggers the sensations.

Part 2, “Treating Speechfright,” presents an overview of the multidimensional approach to alleviating speechfright, as well as how to apply each of the speechfright-reduction techniques. Chapter Five, “Overview of Approaches and Techniques,” explains the techniques and treatments in the combinational and multidimensional program, based on the acronym “BASIC ID.” It stresses the importance of learning several techniques and then pinpointing the source of your speechfright as the place to begin treatment.

Chapter Six, “Deep Breathing,” presents deep breathing exercises in order to induce relaxation and reduce stress. The three-minute, deep abdominal breathing exercise provides a quick-fix that brings on relaxation and is an essential part of other speechfright-reduction techniques. It targets the affect and sensation personality dimensions. You will evaluate your own breathing and then practice deep breathing exercises.

Chapter Seven, “Cognitive Restructuring,” explains the four steps in this rational technique to disengage your irrational, fearful beliefs about public speaking. It targets your cognitive personality dimension. You will make a list of your fears about public speaking, identify the irrational fears and distortions, create a new list of positive coping statements, and then practice, using your coping statements to replace your old, fearful beliefs.

Chapter Eight, “Systematic Desensitization,” presents the three steps in this technique that help alleviate a learned fear response to speaking in public. This technique targets the affect, sensation, and imagery personality dimensions. You will develop a hierarchy about feared events in public speaking, learn progressive muscle relaxation, and then condition relaxation in association with the events on your hierarchy.

Chapter Nine, “Mental Rehearsal (Visualization),” teaches you how to rehearse a successful speech in your mind before you present it. It targets the cognitive and imagery personality dimensions and thus helps reduce anxiety by preparing your mind for a positive communication experience. You will practice mental rehearsal to prepare for a speech just as many athletes do to prepare for a sporting event.

Chapter Ten, “Physical Exercise, Interpersonal Support, and Skills Training,” discusses the importance of incorporating regular exercise, supportive friends, and public speaking skills training into your personal plan to reduce speechfright. Physical exercise targets the drugs/biological personality dimension and helps reduce tension in general, as well as public speaking anxiety. Social support from friends targets the interpersonal relationships personality dimension, by helping buffer the impact of stress, and helping you stay committed to the important goal of conquering speechfright. Public speaking skills training targets the behavior personality dimension and helps build confidence and competence in public speaking. In this chapter, you will learn a warm-up exercise and complete a public speaking skills checklist.

Part 3, “Developing a Personal Plan for Conquering Speechfright,” explains how to pinpoint the personality dimension where your speechfright originates and then how to match techniques to your personality dimensions in order to create a personal action plan. Chapter Eleven, “A Multidimensional Approach,” summarizes the personality dimensions effected by speechfright using BASIC ID. You will determine the firing order of your personality dimensions involved in speechfright as well the root of your anxiety. Then you will learn to match techniques to your personality dimensions.

Chapter Twelve, “An Action Plan,” summarizes the plan you will follow to conquer your speechfright. You need to commit yourself to the goal of conquering speechfright, actively learn the techniques, practice the techniques, and participate in public communication in order to develop and use your skills. You will develop a practice schedule for your action plan.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

In addition to the text, a 100-minute “*Conquering Speechfright*” audio tape is available to help you learn and practice the speechfright-reduction techniques. The tape was specifically developed for college students who are enrolled in or are about to enroll in a public speaking, basic communication, or business and professional speaking course.

The tape explains the state-of-the-art, research-proven techniques for overcoming speechfright. The techniques are described in detail so you can learn them by diligent practice with the tape, during a time that is most convenient for you. The speechfright alleviation techniques on the tape include cognitive restructuring, systematic desensitization (with deep muscle relaxation), mental rehearsal (also called visualization), deep abdominal breathing and physical exercises. The situations targeted on the tape involve those encountered when delivering a graded speech to a classroom of students.

An Instructor’s Manual, written by the author, is also available for instructors. The manual includes unit and course outlines, lesson plans, exercises, assignments, and suggested readings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe special gratitude to my husband Larry for his loving support and editorial advice. I also want to thank a special group of friends for their continued support throughout this project: Arlene Christofferson, Cheryl Wild, Dee Golda, Willyne Dickey, Suella Stalder, Diane White, Gwen Schuman, Jetta Skinner, Pat Stover, Brenda Chauvin Scott, Chris Phillips, Mary Kay Selden, Rachel Cortese, Kate Brennan, Martie Jaworski, and Michaelaileen Boulay. In addition, I am grateful for the encouragement from my forever friend Michelle Tilts and my parents Lyle and Fern Miller.

I would like to thank the following reviewers for their comments:

Vincent Bloom, California State University, Fresno
 E. Sam Cox, Central Missouri State University
 Cynthia Finch, Pennsylvania State University
 Tim Hopf, Washington State University
 Joanna Pucel, St. Cloud State University
 David Waddle, Miami-Dade Community College, Wolfson

I am also grateful to Steven Booth-Butterfield, West Virginia University, for his advice and instruction that helped me immensely in developing my first special section of a public speaking course for students experiencing excessive fear of public communication.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the students who have attended my “Speaking Confidently” and public speaking classes over the years, especially Allen and Linda Minnig,

Kim Brett, Karma Camphor, Rebecca Ruetsch, Brett Franksman, Ken Estee, Suzanne Kirk, Ed Hibberd, Yvette Osby, Joni Dick, and Irina Gotcu Mulvey I dedicate this book to them.

Karen Kangas Dwyer, Ph.D.

Public Speaking Fundamentals Course Coordinator/Director

Department of Communication

University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1998


**HARCOURT
BRACE**

is

 **Harcourt
College Publishers**

A Harcourt Higher Learning Company

**Now you will find Harcourt Brace's
distinguished innovation, leadership, and
support under a different name . . . a new
brand that continues our unsurpassed
quality, service, and commitment to
education.**

**We are combining the strengths of our
college imprints into one worldwide
brand:  Harcourt**

**Our mission is to make learning
accessible to anyone, anywhere,
anytime—reinforcing our commitment
to lifelong learning.**

**We are now Harcourt College Publishers.
Ask for us by name.**

**One Company
"Where Learning
Comes to Life."**

www.harcourtcollege.com

www.harcourt.com

CONTENTS

Part 1: UNDERSTANDING SPEECHFRIGHT 1

chapter one Speechfright and You 3

- 1.1 A Common Fear 3
- 1.2 A Good First Step 4
- 1.3 The Keys to Success 4
 - Exercise 1.3 Your Commitment 5
- CHAPTER SUMMARY 7
- REVIEW QUESTIONS 7

chapter two Definitions and Assessments 9

- 2.1 The Academic Definition: Communication Apprehension (CA) 9
- 2.2 Four Types of Communication Apprehension (CA) 10
- 2.3 Assessment of Communication Apprehension (CA) 12
 - Exercise 2.3 Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) 13
- 2.4 Research in Communication Apprehension 17
 - Exercise 2.4 Evaluating Your Goals 19
- CHAPTER SUMMARY 21
- REVIEW QUESTIONS 21

chapter three Causes of Speechfright 22

- 3.1 Learned Responses 22
- 3.2 Worrisome Thoughts 23
- 3.3 Performance Orientation 24
- 3.4 Perceived Lack of Public Speaking Skills 25
- 3.5 Excessive Activation or Body Chemistry 25
- 3.6 Situational Aspects 26
 - Exercise 3.6 Assessing the Causes of Your Speechfright 27
- CHAPTER SUMMARY 29
- REVIEW QUESTIONS 29

chapter four Excessive Activation and the Fight or Flight Response 30

- 4.1 Responding to a Perceived Threat 30
- 4.2 Triggering Nervous Sensations 30
- 4.3 Halting the Fight or Flight Response 32
 - Exercise 4.3 Assessing Activation Sensations 33
- CHAPTER SUMMARY 35
- REVIEW QUESTIONS 35

Part 2 TREATING SPEECHFRIGHT 37

chapter five Overview of Approaches and Techniques 39

5.1 Techniques and Treatments in the Combinational Approach 39

5.2 The Seven Dimensions in the Multidimensional Approach 41

CHAPTER SUMMARY 42

REVIEW QUESTIONS 42

chapter six Deep Breathing Exercises 43

6.1 Deep Breathing Induces Relaxation 43

Exercise 6.1 Your Breathing Evaluation 45

6.2 Deep Abdominal Breathing 47

6.3 The Calming Sigh 47

CHAPTER SUMMARY 47

REVIEW QUESTIONS 48

Exercise 6.2 Deep Abdominal Breathing Exercise 49

Exercise 6.3 The Calming Sigh Exercise 51

chapter seven Cognitive Restructuring 53

7.1 The First Step: Creating Your Ultimate Fears List 53

7.2 Step Two: Identifying Irrational Beliefs and Distortions
on Your List 54

Exercise 7.1 Your Ultimate Fears List 55

Exercise 7.2a Must Thoughts (Unrealistic Demands) List 58

Exercise 7.2b Irrational Conclusions about Public Speaking 60

Exercise 7.2c Cognitive Distortions List 61

7.3 Step Three: Developing a List of Positive Coping Statements 64

Exercise 7.3a A List of Positive Coping Statements 65

Exercise 7.3b Your Coping Statements List 67

7.4 Step Four: Practicing Your Coping Statements 71

CHAPTER SUMMARY 72

REVIEW QUESTIONS 72

chapter eight Systematic Desensitization 73

8.1 Step One: Create a Hierarchy of Feared Events 74

Exercise 8.1a A Hierarchy of Feared Events in
Public Speaking 75

Exercise 8.1b Your Hierarchy of Feared Events in
Public Speaking 76

8.2 Step Two: Train Your Body in Progressive Muscle Relaxation 77

Exercise 8.2 Script for Learning Progressive
Muscle Relaxation 79

8.3 Step Three: Condition Relaxation by Adding Mental
Pictures from the Hierarchy 83

CHAPTER SUMMARY 85

REVIEW QUESTIONS 86

chapter nine	Mental Rehearsal (Visualization) 87
	9.1 The Cognitive Psychology of Positive Mental Imagery 87
	9.2 Mental Imagery and Athletic Success 87
	9.3 Mental Rehearsal and Speech Anxiety 88
	Exercise 9.3 Sample Script for the Mental Rehearsal Technique 89
	9.4 Mental Rehearsal and the Day of Your Speech 91
	9.5 Mental Rehearsal and Behavioral Practice are Both Important 91
	CHAPTER SUMMARY 92
	REVIEW QUESTIONS 92
chapter ten	Physical Exercises, Interpersonal Support, and Skills Training 93
	10.1 Physical Exercise Reduces Stress and Public Speaking Anxiety 93
	Exercise 10.1 The Windmill Warm-Up Exercise 95
	10.2 Interpersonal Support Builds Confidence and Reduces Stress 97
	10.3 Skills Training Builds Skills and Reduces Fear 97
	Exercise 10.3 Public Speaking Skills Checklist 99
	CHAPTER SUMMARY 101
	REVIEW QUESTIONS 101
 Part 3 DEVELOPING A PERSONAL PLAN FOR CONQUERING SPEECHFRIGHT 103	
chapter eleven	A Multidimensional Approach 105
	11.1 The Basic Dimensions of Personality Affected by Anxiety 105
	Exercise 11.1 Assessing Your BASIC ID Personality Dimensions 107
	11.2 Tracking the Firing Order: Getting to the Root of Your Fear 109
	Exercise 11.2 Tracking Your Firing Order 111
	11.3 Matching Treatment to Personality Dimensions 113
	Exercise 11.3 Matching Techniques to Your Personality Dimensions 115
	CHAPTER SUMMARY 117
	REVIEW QUESTIONS 117
chapter twelve	An Action Plan 119
	12.1 Commit Yourself to Your Goal 119
	12.2 Actively Learn the Techniques 120
	12.3 Practice the Techniques Following a Schedule 120
	Exercise 12.3 Developing a Three-Week Practice Schedule 121
	12.4 Participate in Public Communication 124
	CHAPTER SUMMARY 124
	REVIEW QUESTIONS 125

Part 1



Understanding Speechfright

CHAPTER ONE

SPEECHFRIGHT AND YOU

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINITIONS AND ASSESSMENTS


CHAPTER THREE

CAUSES OF SPEECHFRIGHT

CHAPTER FOUR

EXCESSIVE ACTIVATION AND THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

SPEECHFRIGHT AND YOU



Congratulations! You have just made one of the best decisions of your life. You have *decided* to take action to conquer your speechfright. *Deciding* to take action is the first step in overcoming a fear or anxiety about public speaking. The next step is to acquire the necessary skills and tools to help you reach that goal. This handbook will give you those tools and set you in the right direction to achieve your goal. **YOU CAN CONQUER SPEECHFRIGHT.**

1.1 A COMMON FEAR

You may think you are alone in your fear of public speaking. The truth is **YOU HAVE A LOT OF COMPANY.** In fact, recent surveys involving thousands of college students and adults indicate that between 70 to 75 percent of our population reports a fear of public speaking (McCroskey, 1993; Richmond & McCroskey, 1995). In other words, almost three out of every four people around you would say they are anxious or nervous when it comes to giving a speech.



Christy, age 18, said: "I thought I was the only one who ever dreaded giving a speech. In fact, I thought my fear, nervousness, and trembling at the thought of giving a speech was a problem that no one else had ever experienced. . . . What a relief to know that many people have had this same fear and have been able to conquer it."



The Book of Lists ranks the fear of public speaking as the number one "common fear" in America, even above the fear of dying (Wallechinsky, Wallace, and Wallace, 1977). In fact, when Americans were asked to rank their greatest fears, 41 percent listed the fear of giving a speech, while only 19 percent listed the fear of death (Bruskin Report, 1973). Consequently, if you thought you were alone in your fear about public speaking, now you know that a majority of those around you experience a similar anxiety. However, you are different from this majority. You have made a decision to take the important steps to conquer your fear.

1.2 A GOOD FIRST STEP

In the past, you may have hoped your fear and excessive nervousness about public speaking would miraculously disappear. When it didn't, you may have felt your speechfright was hopeless and you should simply try to avoid public speaking. However, you soon discovered you couldn't avoid public communication and still accomplish your personal goals. Consequently, you acquired this book in an effort to help you conquer the problem.

Actively reading this handbook, completing the exercises, and practicing the techniques **WILL HELP YOU**. No matter how long you have had a fear of public speaking, no matter how intense your nervousness has become, and no matter where your public speaking anxiety originated, **YOU CAN OVERCOME IT**. The techniques presented in this book are supported by more than fifty years of communication research involving numerous communication scholars, educators, and counselors. They have helped thousands of students and adults of all ages manage their anxiety and nervousness about public speaking. So be assured you have taken the first step toward conquering your fear.



Trevor, age 21, had tried everything he could to avoid speaking in public. He said: "I've even offered to write a 25-page paper in lieu of giving a speech for a class assignment. . . . Although I was able to avoid public speaking in high school, in college it became increasingly difficult to avoid it. It was starting to affect my grades. . . . Finally, I decided to conquer this fear. . . . It's one of the best things I've ever done. The speechfright-reduction techniques really work."



1.3 THE KEYS TO SUCCESS

Learning to overcome speechfright is like learning a new sport or new language. There are important keys to success including:

1. commitment,
2. active learning,
3. practice, and
4. participation.

For example, consider an athletic sport that you enjoy and have learned to do well. At first, you probably watched the game and made a *commitment* to learn as much as you could about the sport. You probably employed *active learning* by reading books and magazine articles about the game. At the same time, you became actively involved in learning the sport with other players, as well as with a coach who could guide you in improving your skills. Then you made a commitment to *practice*. You probably planned a practice schedule. Then you practiced a lot. Finally, you *participated* in the game at every opportunity so you could use your new skills and become an even better player.

Using the same keys that helped you learn a new sport or language, you can learn to overcome your fear of public speaking. You will need to make a *commitment* to work (put

Exercise 1.3 Your Commitment

Before you read any further, please get a pencil and write out answers to the following questions:

1. Have you ever accomplished something in your life that took a lot of time and practice?

Was your accomplishment worth your effort?

2. Are you willing to diligently practice the techniques necessary to conquer your speechfright, since practicing the techniques is essential to reducing your fear?
3. How much time and effort are you willing to spend to overcome your speechfright (e.g., one hour per day, three hours per week)?
4. Based on your answers to these three questions, please write a pledge to yourself that summarizes your commitment to conquering speechfright and your willingness to practice the techniques presented in this handbook. Then **sign and date this contract** with yourself.

DATE _____ TIME _____ SIGNATURE _____

Now, tear out this page and post it in a place where you can see it often to remind yourself of your pledge and commitment.