

CHEAT SHEET

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How to Calm Your Nerves before Speaking

We all admire people who can perform at peak efficiency—what some people call being in The Zone. That can sometimes be a tall order in speeches and presentations, when we're often self-conscious and nervous. Here's a way to reach a "productive level of relaxation" when you're about to speak. Best of all, you can achieve this desirable state if you only have 5 minutes to spare:

- 1. Find a quiet and solitary place.** (A hotel room, toilet stall, or even your car parked outside your speaking venue will do.) Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor.
- 2. Close your eyes.**
- 3. "Listen" to your breath for the first minute,** paying attention to what happens when you breathe slowly and calmly. Experience the sensations with your body, not your mind. Feel the breath in your throat, your lungs, and then bringing life-giving oxygen to every cell in your body.
- 4. Now, focus your awareness on a visual image you'll "see" in your mind.** Choose a neutral color and shape: a green circle, a yellow square, a blue triangle.
- 5. See that object in as close to crystal clarity as you can manage.** As you do, adopt a passive attitude toward any other mental activity. Thoughts will emerge in your consciousness. Simply notice them then let them go on their way. Stay focused on your image. Do nothing; just let your awareness be.
- 6. Your breathing will become slower and deeper.** That's what you're aiming for. After 5 minutes, open your eyes and slowly stand. Now try to maintain this level of calmness and relaxed breathing as you go about your daily tasks. And of course, bring it into your speaking situations.

This simple, brief exercise allows you to calm yourself and focus your attention — two critical attributes of a good speech or presentation. Practice it until you can do it easily at a moment's notice, because that's when you'll need it most!

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