University Counselling

Presentation Jitters

Most students get anxious when they have to talk in front of others, so here are a few tips to help you cope better with anxiety around presentations.

Before the presentation

• Prepare the content early and make sure you know it well. The more confident you are with your material the less anxiety you will experience.
• Practice giving your presentation in front of supportive family and friends, or the mirror. The more you practice, the more confident you will be. The more confident you are, the less anxiety.

On the day of the presentation

• Accept your anxious thoughts and feelings. The more you worry about these feelings the worse they will become.
• Tell yourself "I'll be OK" and "I can do it".
• You can reduce the intensity of your anxiety by slowing down your breathing. Count slowly to five as you breathe in and then count to five as you exhale.
• Relax your muscles as much as possible. Try progressive muscle relaxation or other techniques.

During your presentation

• Accept your anxious feelings and thoughts, they may be uncomfortable but they will pass. You can control what you say and how you say it even though anxiety may be present.
• Concentrate on the content of the material you are presenting.
• Increase the normal volume of your voice and speak clearly.
• Make an effort to speak more slowly (anxiety can cause you to rush your words). This will also assist you to slow down your breathing. If you think you will rush, take a three second break between each slide, or mark this break on your cards as a prompt.
• Maintain an upright sitting or standing posture. You can relax a bit by occasionally moving your body rather than standing or sitting too rigidly.
• Make eye contact with your fellow students. You will realise that the vast majority are supportive. Remember that they too have been, or will be in the same situation. If you struggle with this then pick a spot beside them in line with their eyes and focus on that.

Avoid post mortems after your presentation as it is very easy to only focus on negatives and then blow them out of proportion.

Remember that most people get nervous before giving a presentation or talk. This nervousness will not prevent you from getting through the presentation, it may even help you to stay alert and get through the task. Remember to tell yourself, "even though it may not feel like it, this presentation is only a snapshot in time of my entire life, I accept that I may not enjoy public speaking and I will get through this!"

For help with presentation jitters or other skills training contact University Counselling.

Online resources

Online Counselling
Tip Sheets
Mindfulness
Meditation
Relaxation and Breathing
Grounding techniques