

OVERCOMING SPEECH ANXIETY

Students often experience some form of speech anxiety. It is the *public* in public speaking that intimidates so many people. Most of us have had little experience in public speaking through our high school years, yet it is a crucial professional skill. Increasingly, college faculty members are assigning public presentation of projects as required components of advanced courses. If you become nervous about making a formal presentation in class, the following strategies can help:

BEFORE THE EVENT

- Finish appropriate, timely, comprehensive content preparation.
- Use rational and helpful self-talk such as *I'll be fine—I'm the only person who knows how nervous I am*, or *I'll just laugh if I mess up*.
- Practice or rehearse your performance.
- Get enough sleep, exercise, and good nutrition.



DURING THE EVENT

- Make careful and deliberate use of your time.
- Refocus on the task using appropriate self-talk, and breathe deeply if you feel yourself becoming tense. Think, *I know more about this topic than anyone else in the room*, or *Just a few more minutes and I'll be finished*.
- Use rational and helpful self-talk throughout your presentation.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- Adapt your vocabulary and examples to your audience.
- Grab the audience's attention by using audiovisual aids (pass out any handouts at the end).
- Make eye contact with individuals.
- Speak loudly enough for people in the back row to hear.
- Use accurate information.
- Place a watch on the lectern to monitor your use of time.
- Deliver an effective, structured, and upbeat conclusion. A short summary of your main points will help the listener (Rowh, 1989).