

Release work - Find a comfortable sitting position and loosen any clothing that feels constrictive. As you exhale, gently tense up the muscles in your feet and calves; release this tension as the breath comes back in. Repeat this process, gently tensing the muscles in these areas: knees and thighs, hips and buttocks, abdomen, upper back, arms and hands, neck and shoulders, face, and forehead (note that we are following the form of *Progressive Relaxation* but focusing on releasing on the inhalation instead of the exhalation.) Opening your ribs:

Opening your ribs - Lift your right arm up over your head and arch your upper body over to the left. Make sure you keep the weight evenly balanced on two feet or sitting bones (if you are in a chair) as you do this. Now place your right hand on the bottom half of your right rib cage with your fingers facing towards your back. Focus your breath in to your right hand apply a little pressure in and down as you continue arching to the left with your upper body. Come back to a neutral sitting position and take a moment to observe the difference in the movement of breath in the two sides of your body. Repeat the process on the left.

Reach both arms across your chest and give yourself a hug. Let your head drop forward and roll down through your spine so that you are hanging over from your hips. Release your arms, roll up, and take a moment to see if there is any difference in the movement of your back ribs as you breathe.

Releasing your shoulders and neck - Move your shoulders forward and then back. Lift your shoulders up towards your ears, move them slightly backward and with a sigh, let them drop. Repeat this several times while each time lifting your shoulders less and less. If you find your shoulders are quite tense then lift one shoulder up and with the opposite hand squeeze the top of your Trapezius muscle; rotate that shoulder while maintaining this hold on the top of the shoulder muscle; gently release the pressure of the squeeze and continue rotating this shoulder.

Let your head drop down on to your chest and clasp your hands behind your head. Don't pull down but simply release some of the weight of your arms as you exhale. Now roll up through your neck one vertebrae at a time. Think of energy traveling up and forward through your spine and don't move your shoulders back to bring your head up. Using both hands, pinch the back of your neck as close to the base of your skull as possible and do little yes and little no nods with your head then massage the base of your skull

Waking up your face, releasing your jaw, and opening your soft palate - Rub your hands together briskly until you feel your palms become warm and as you breathe in; lay your hands on your face and massage your facial and jaw muscles. Hum up and down in pitch while you massage to wake up the resonance and begin to warm up your voice. Open your soft palate by yawning and count to ten while maintaining this position.

Awareness of the floor - Warm up your feet by pressing the ball of one foot in to the floor and rotating at the ankle. Lift your foot up, shake it out and let the muscles soften. Lay your foot back on the ground while maintaining the feeling of softness. Repeat with the other foot. Next bring both hands on to your knees and move your knees in a circular motion to invite them to soften. Now move your hands on to your hips. Imagine that your pelvis is a bucket: swing the bottom of the bucket forward and back and then from side to side; now swing the bottom of the bucket in a circle.

Establishing ease and support - Purse your lips and then place your hand on your lower abdomen to feel the gentle engagement of support as you blow air out. Imagine that you have a candle flame flickering about six inches away from your mouth; the air that you release should be strong enough to make the flame move but not strong enough to blow it out. See how much you can allow gravity to help you with

your inhalation. If you are using your lower abdominal muscles to support the breath out, then simply releasing these muscles will create a vacuum that will bring the air back in. Breathing in should not be hard work!

Now follow the same process using a humming *M* sound. Gradually go from the *M* to a more open *MAH* sound and from there, move to a simple open *AH*. Make sure that you feel the sound resonating in your mouth and not in your throat, (cupping your hands over your mouth will help you feel the sound resonating inside your mouth).

Once you have completed any or all of these exercises, try standing with one leg slightly in front of the other and bring your weight slightly forward; think of pressing your front leg gently in to the floor. Imagine you are throwing a ball high in the air and the sound is following the ball across the ceiling to the back of the room. You may wish to start by seeing the ball going only into the first few rows and then building the distance with each throw until you reach the back of the space. This process may also be followed later using a simple count from one to ten using a line or two from your presentation.

Quick Articulation Warm-up - Purse your lips tightly, (as if you were drinking through a tiny straw). Hold your lips in this position and without moving them speak a line or two of text. Release your lips and speak the same text again, noting the difference. Repeat this process: curling the center of your upper lip up, (as in a sneer): holding your mouth in the position of an exaggerated smile: extending and holding your tongue out of your mouth, (this one may require that you use your fingers to hold your tongue for a while to get use to the feeling and to keep it from retracting too strongly).

If you still feel the need to develop your articulators further, play with some tongue twisters. Try and choose tongue twisters that allow you to focus on particular speech sounds that you may have trouble with in your everyday speech. Do not overwork your articulators to the point that they feel thick and heavy. If you are not making the sounds with ease then you are not making them as clearly as you can.

Tongue Twisters

- I am the very model of a modern Major-General,
I've information vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical,
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical

- A pale pink proud peacock pompously preened its pretty plumage
- The bottom of the butter bucket is the buttered bucket bottom
- She sells sea shells by the seashore; If she sells sea shells by the seashore, then I'm sure she sells seashore shells.
- Lovely lemon liniment.
- Five fat frogs fled from fifty fierce fishes
- Twelve twins twirled twelve twigs.
- Strange Strategic Statistics
- Round the rough and rugged rock the ragged rascal ran
- Girl Gargoyle, Guy Gargoyle
- Crisp crusts crackle crunchily.

Exercises for clarity and variety of speech:

- Lip Reading – mouth your text silently with enough movement so that your text can be understood. Try doing this exercise in front of a mirror.
- The Siren – go up and down from the top of your pitch range to the bottom as you speak your text.

Exercises for clarity of thought - Go through your prepared text and speak only the words that are absolutely necessary to get the meaning across. Identify which words in your text are the keywords (the words that carry the most meaning) and highlight, italicize, or capitalize these words. Read Dr Seuss or other children's books for examples of how to use these tools. If you are planning to read your lecture aloud, imagine you are speaking to a friend as you read. Try writing your speech in a conversational rather than formal style...people use contractions when they speak in conversation.

If possible, distill the thesis or objective of your presentation down to one repeatable phrase (make the phrase as short as possible). Repeat the phrase as many times as you need to until you feel a strong sense of clarity and commitment to your objective before beginning your presentation. Repeat the phrase as many times as you need while you are going through your presentation to keep yourself on track. This exercise may also be done silently.

Reminders:

- Keep your breath moving at all times.
- Engage your lower abdominal muscles to support your voice.
- Open your mouth and feel your voice resonating there.
- Use the final consonant of each word.

Tips for Controlling Stress in Performance Situations

Rehearsal – Nothing will raise your level of confidence more than knowing that you are well prepared. As part of that preparation I would recommend taking a bit of time for visualization. Find a place where you can be alone and are not likely to experience too many distractions. Start by taking a few minutes to slow down and release muscle tension. Observe your breath and when you feel that it is flowing easily and without effort you can begin the mental rehearsal process. As you go through your presentation, allow your breath to stay calm and enjoy the feeling of being centered and in control of the situation. This work can be done while you are traveling on a plane and might be especially valuable the night before a major presentation.

On the day – Be aware of your internal pace on the day of your presentation. Try and feel as though you are taking your time even if you are in a hurry. If you feel rushed and disconnected before you begin then this is the energy you are likely to carry with you into your performance. Slowing down your breath will help keep you on track so take some time to practice this.

If you can find the time and have access to the room where you are giving your presentation, try and get in there for a few minutes ahead of time. Get to know the space and make sure you are familiar with whatever audio-visual equipment you might be using.

When you get up to speak – If you are feeling comfortable before you begin then simply carry that comfort with you when you stand up to speak. If you are feeling a bit nervous before you speak, then you will need to find a way to get grounded. When nervous energy strikes, most people try to release this energy through some form of relaxation. This can be detrimental to the quality of your presentation as it can greatly decrease your energy level. This won't be a problem however, if you are clear about the difference between relaxation and releasing muscular tension. Imagine yourself as a professional athlete, a downhill ski racer preparing for a final run, or a high diver on the board preparing for a difficult dive.

How would you prepare yourself to succeed? Focusing too much on relaxation might get in your way; you would most likely want to harness all the energy you could while staying focused on the task at hand. Try feeling your feet underneath you; reviewing your objective, and breathing out as a preparation. As a rule, most of us prepare for things that we perceive to be psychologically difficult in the same way we prepare for tackling a hard physical task. But unlike a professional athlete, we tend to take a big breath in and hold it. We then sit on a big cushion of air and wonder why we can't breathe. Breathing out as you prepare to speak is a simple remedy for this problem. Practice letting out a slow easy breath as you are getting up to speak. Make sure that this release of air begins with a gentle engagement of your lower abdominal muscles and moves upward so that you feel yourself becoming taller. If you begin this breath out as a kind of sigh that involves a dropping in the chest and shoulders it will have a negative rather than positive effect.

While you are presenting - Give yourself the freedom to move and allow your movement to be definite. If you want to put your hands on the back of a chair, do so, even if in the next moment you feel that it is mildly inappropriate. It is better to follow through with an impulse that might not feel quite right, than to appear uncomfortable and indecisive.

Moving around the room is fine but make sure that you maintain eye contact with your audience if you are doing this. This will give the movement purpose and will prevent those watching you from letting their minds wander. It will also prevent them from possibly interpreting your movement as representing a lack of clarity or commitment to what you are saying

Take your time – Most people automatically begin to increase their pace when they are in front of an audience. They feel that in order to keep the audience's attention they need to rush. This inevitably has the opposite effect. If your audience has no time to process what you are saying, after a short while they will simply give up and think about something else. No matter what the content of your presentation is, always remember that you are telling a story. All stories have natural pauses to allow the hearer to catch up and to signal a major shift in focus. Look for these shifts in your presentation and take your time.

Make a personal connection to your audience – You must look at the people in front of you. If you make eye contact with people, you will be more likely to respond to their needs and make a deeper connection with them. You are also more likely to observe that they are friendly people who are interested in what you have to say.

If you see that your audience is bored, then you might need to change tactics. Try asking them some questions to get them engaged.

When you are done – Try and make some notes about your presentation as soon as possible after you are finished. What worked and what didn't? Give yourself some direction for the next time.

Recommended Reading –

[Your Voice And How To Use It](#) by Cicely Berry – ISBN: 0-86369-826-3

[The Right To Speak](#) by Patsy Rodenburg – ISBN: 0-413-66130-X

[The Relaxation Response](#) by Herbert Benson – ISBN: 0-380-00676-6

[Fearless Presenting](#) by Eric Maisel, Ph.D. – ISBN: 0-8230-8834-0

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