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).