

The following two articles, on Overcoming Performance Anxiety and Voice Impressions for the Debater, have been contributed by Ms Louisa Ong, a public speaking, speech and voice coach. Ms Ong's CV may be found at the end of the article for further reference.

Overcoming Performance Anxiety

The physiological effects of anxiety include breathing off the tops of your lungs which reduces the oxygen circulating in your system which leads to a build-up of carbon dioxide (as it's not being released through full exhaling). This then causes panic attacks or hyperventilation in some people.

The direct consequence of anxiety affects the quality of your voice leading to a loss of pitch control and vocal tone quality. Your voice will sound strained and you will experience a tightness of your throat, jaw, mouth and face.

Essential Tips for Overcoming Performance Anxiety **Before the event preparation:**

1. Find out as much as possible about this event – where it is to be held, when you are required to be there, how long it will be, what is your role in it, how long you are expected to speak for, the subject matter you are speaking on and any other relevant information pertaining to your participation in this.
2. Get an estimate of the expected size of the audience and who they are likely to be: male, female, mixed audience, old, young, mixed age range, are they a paying audience, important guest in the audience and if possible where that guest is expected to sit, and any other pertinent defining characteristics of the audience.
3. Make sure you WRITE IT ALL DOWN and put somewhere you know you'll not lose it: place, date, time, length of speech, subject, audience AND the name of your contact

person from the organization or group you're speaking for, plus their phone number.

4. Practice, practice, practice Prepare and be familiar with your speech thoroughly Rehearse your speech many times

5. Put yourself in control of everything that you possibly can control. Remember you do control many things.

6. Take an imaginary journey through your presentation from beginning to end and visualizing a positive outcome.

7. Avoid being rushed or distracted on the day of your performance. If possible do not book any appointments or important meetings for that day. Take it easy on yourself.

8. Wear clothing that is loose and does not restrict movement. Be comfortable in your outfit and shoes.

9. Practice your relaxation skills before the presentation.

10. Keep a relaxed and open posture, with your feet placed slightly apart when standing. This will help in your balance and breathing.

How to Alleviate Panic Attacks: How to Do Breathing Exercises

{youtube}15F9JQcM5Tk{/youtube}

Relaxation

The ability to relax is important in effectively managing preparation stress and overcoming performance anxiety. When you are under stress, your body reacts with what is called the "fight or flight" response. The muscles tense up. The heart and respiration rates increase and rapidly. Other physiological systems become taxed. Without the ability to relax, chronic stress or anxiety can lead to burnout and breakdowns. Therefore managing stress is very important.

Try these exercises below to assist you to calm yourself. It would be a good idea if these could be done daily and most importantly before any debating sessions.

With the breathing exercises, remember to breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. As you are exhaling, imagine releasing all the stress and negative thoughts/fears out through your mouth, expunging it from your body.

Relaxation exercises

The Rag Doll

One of the quickest ways to release tension is to stand with your feet slightly apart, then stretch out your arms and give a big loud yawn. Then roll your head slowly around and then gently flop down from your waist as though you are a rag doll and sway your upper torso like a clock pendulum. Then slowly raise your upper torso, imagining that you are building vertebrae by vertebrae of your spine to stand up straight again. Take your time in assuming the standing position.

Breathing Relaxation Exercise

{youtube}- [j5Z4E2wkh4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5Z4E2wkh4) {/youtube}

Vocal Warm Ups for Public Speaking : Relaxation Exercises: Massage Face & Wrinkle Nose

{youtube} [yclZQTos8LU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yclZQTos8LU) {/youtube}

Exercise Vocal Warm Ups for Public Speaking : Shoulder Shrug Relaxation

{youtube} [EQDGMwgzabQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQDGMwgzabQ) {/youtube}

Vocal Warm Ups for Public Speaking : Shoulder Rotation Relaxation Exercise

{youtube} [vJRIE4X9eJM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRIE4X9eJM) {/youtube}

VOICE IMPRESSIONS FOR THE DEBATER

The vocal quality of our voice is a very powerful tool in communication. Actors, broadcasters, television presenters, politicians, debaters, professional speakers depend on the impression their voice makes for success.

A Positive Voice Impression

It is a voice that people are attracted and love listening to. What are the qualities?

- It sounds natural, relaxed and free
- It is varied and flexible with appropriate pace, pitch and tone.
- The volume shifts organically without effort in response to what is being spoken.

A Negative Voice Impression

What are its qualities?

- Nasal
- Shrill with piercing tones
- Raspy
- Squeaky voice hitting the upper/high notes continually
- Sing-song with a up-down pitch range regardless of subject matter
- Monotonous with little variation of pace or pitch
- Hesitant
- Mumbled words and hard to understand
- Too fast or too slow.
- Booming voice. Too loud
- Too quiet or soft
- Constant rising inflection at the end of each sentence
- Heavy accent that it hinders clear communication
- Too many words in one breath
- Difficulty with some of the letter sounds. For example, 'S' or 'R' or any other single, double or multiple letter combination

So what is your Voice Impression?

The easiest and most effective way to do this is to record yourself.

Play back the clip and listen as objectively as possible to what you hear.

If you were somebody else, what would you think about the speaker?

What aspects of delivery do you need to focus on if you want a confident dynamic voice?

Voice Impression consists of proper breath control, articulation and modulation/vocal variety. A great voice is strong in all of them. The goal is to gain more power and control over your voice. You can learn to improve the quality of your voice giving it more weight and making it sound more appealing. This will have a positive effect on your listeners.

This is achieved through:

PROPER BREATHING TECHNIQUES

This is essential for flexible voice production and for vocal projection. If you are holding your breath or breathing from the top of your lungs the quality and volume of your voice will reflect that.

The skill involved with getting louder (or softer) is to maintain tone and pitch while altering the sound level. Many people lose them both, particularly when they get louder. Shouting may guarantee you get heard but it doesn't usually mean being "heard with pleasure". And the other down-side to shouting is straining your voice.

Good breath control is one of major steps to building up vocal volume while maintaining tone and pitch.

[Click here for Breathing exercises](#)

ARTICULATION

To refine and enhance speech, concentrate on strengthening the organs of articulation and improving the flexibility of the tongue before moving onto specific sounds. The result is speech that is focused and clear, resulting in a greater perfection in overall articulation and pronunciation.

[Click here for Articulation exercises](#)

MODULATION/VOCAL VARIETY

This is how you hold your listeners' attention. Your speech content may be excellent and matches your audience's needs very well, but unless you deliver it in an interesting manner, few people will be engaged sufficiently in your speech to listen actively.

A monotone voice is boring. It turns people off. However, a colourful, expressive and energized voice is able to keep an audience's attention. This is modulation or vocal variety.

The components of Modulation/Vocal variety are:

1. Pitch
2. Tone Quality of Voice
3. Volume
4. Rate/Pace of Speech
5. Inflection
6. Emphasis
7. Pause

Pitch

Pitch is like music. It has high and low notes as do people's voices. Everyone's voice has a natural pitch. Women's tend to be higher than men's. Everybody has a pitch range which is the number of notes we habitually use. When that range is small, the effect is monotonous.

[Click here for Pitch exercises](#)

Tone Quality of Voice

This refers to the emotional content carried by our voices. It is *not* the words themselves, but '*how*' we say them. It is sometimes referred to as the "emotion of our voice".

For example: a person who puts little life or energy into their speech, no matter how great in importance in what they are saying, is often described as being 'flat'. In contrast someone who enlivens their speech with vigor is described as being 'enthusiastic'.

[Click here for Tone Quality of Voice exercises](#)

Volume

This is how loudly or quietly you speak and how you control it based on the meaning and content of your speech. Some people are habitually loud others quiet and they fail to vary it accordingly.

[Click here for Volume exercises](#)

Rate/Pace of Speech

Speaking rate or pace matters because how fast or how slow you speak alters the listener's perception of your topic.

Generally a faster speaking speed signals urgency, excitement, passion or raw emotion. It can lead the audience to expect something thrilling is going to occur. In contrast a slower speaking rate signals importance, seriousness, or revealing significant ideas. The combination of slow, fast, slow, medium speed, etc. adds interest to your speech making it easier to listen to.

However, if you tend to speak too fast this speed can kill your speech. People do get tired of listening when you don't slow down sufficiently for them to comprehend and internalize what you are saying. When your speech stops being stimulating and the words sound garbled the audience switches off.

And exactly the same thing happens at the other end of the spectrum. Slow delivery of a word by word speech turns an audience off just as fast.

The answer to this *too fast-too slow* problem is *not* the middle ground. Rather it is *to vary our speaking rate* in direct response to our audience's need and the content of your speech.

[Click here for Rate/Pace of Speech exercises](#)

Inflection

This is when you inflect your voice upwards or downwards within a pitch range. For example you inflect upwards when asking a question, when you are happy or excited. You maintain your pitch in a flat manner if you are making a factual statement. You inflect downwards when demanding or commanding something or when you are feeling depressed. Inflection affects pitch and tone.

[Click here for Inflection exercises](#)

Emphasis

This is when you lean on a word in order to give it more importance in relation to the other words in the sentence. This is done by:

1) Stressing on the word

- You are **SO** smart.

2) Pausing before the word

- You are so (pause) smart.

3) Inflecting upwards on the word

- You are *SO* (inflect upwards on this word) smart.

Using the different types of emphasis changes the meaning of the same sentence accordingly.

[Click here for Emphasis exercises](#)

Pause

Pause is a powerful tool in communication as sometimes “Silence speaks louder than words”.

A pause in the right place at the right time gives **you**:

- **time** to breathe at punctuation points
- **time** to think what you're going to say next
- **time** to receive, and digest the feedback you're getting from your audience

A pause in the right place at the right time gives **your audience**:

- **time** to let think about what you've just said
- **time** to summarize what's been said
- **time** to prepare for what is coming next

Professional public speakers use **planned pauses**. Used with care, the silences of your speech not only add rhythm or beat but it gives a deeper meaning or dimension to your speech and presentation.

[Click here for Pause exercises](#)

EXERCISES

The objective for every speaker is to use their voice as a vocal instrument in order to find the most appropriate expression to match the content of the speech that will fully engage the audience to listen and enjoy.

Have fun with the exercises. Remember habitual speech patterning *IS* a challenge to change. It is regular effort and practice that succeeds.

For PROPER BREATHING TECHNIQUES:
Practice Breathing Using your Diaphragm:

Stand in front of a full length mirror. Make sure your feet are a comfortable shoulder width apart. Pull yourself up straight and let your head sit square on your neck. Place one hand on your stomach. Breathe in (inhale) through the nose. You should feel your stomach rising and moving outwards. Then breathe out (exhale). As you exhale, breathe out through the mouth and make this “shhh” sound. You should feel your stomach fall or move inwards as you exhale. Watch your shoulders. If they rise and fall noticeably you are most likely breathing off the top of your lungs. Keep trying until you can feel a definite rise and fall of your stomach. Keep relaxed. Once you have got the proper breathing technique, breathe just a few more times and then move on to the next breathing technique exercise.

Distancing Technique for Projection:

Stand in front of a full length mirror. Maintain the breathing technique outlined above while adding voice. Practice greeting a person about a foot away from the mirror and then increase the distance by taking two steps back. Repeat the greeting and movement away from the mirror until you are at the other far end of the room. All the time ensuring that the volume of voice remains the same or is increased without having to shout the greeting. If you feel *any* tension in your throat or chest from forcing the sound, *stop*.

Breathe and begin again.

It helps to imagine the sound arcing through the air, in a concentrated focused stream to reach its target. The further away you get the more control you need to have over the outflow of air carrying your words.

The greeting used can be a simple one like “*Hello there Peter*”.

For ARTICULATION:

For 'B' words:

Betty bought a bit of butter.

The bit of butter Betty bought was bitter

So Betty bought a bit of better butter and her batter was better.

For 'D' words:

Dinky Dan dabbles and draws dinosaurs.

Diction Exercises for 'F' words:

Fresh fried fish.

For 'V' words:

Vern vowed vengeance violently after vindication.

Diction Exercises for 'K' words:

Kiss Karen quick, kiss Kelly quicker and kiss Kitty quickest.

For 'Q' words:

My quest for quick, quicker, quickest.

Diction Exercises for 'G' words:

Get going good gorgeous Gabby.

Diction Exercises for 'J' words:

Jolly Jack jumped on a jalopy jeep.

For 'H' words try:

Hungry Harry howled and hurried home hastily.

Diction Exercises for 'L' words:

Lovely Lucy lights the lamp looking for lost letters.

Diction Exercise for 'N' sounds:

Nimble Nina never needs a nap.

Diction Exercise for 'M' sounds:

Must Mary's mother moan and mumble every Monday morning?

For 'R' words:

Ronnie ran round the rough rugged rocks to round up the rams.

For 'P' words:

Peter Piper picked a pack of pickled peppers.

Did Peter Piper pick a pack of pickled peppers?

If Peter Piper picked a pack of pickled peppers, vwhere's the pack of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked?

For 'S' words:

She is a thistle sifter.

She has a sieve of sifted thistles and a sieve of unsifted thistles which she sieves into the sieve of sifted thistles, because she is a thistle sifter.

She sells seashells on the seashore.

The shells she sells are seashells I'm sure.

For 'T' words:

Ten tipsy toads tiptoed into Tammy's tattered tote box.

Tongue exercises.

Red leather, yellow leather...

Red lorry, yellow lorry...

For PITCH:

Stock Market Up and Down:

Practice alternating your voice between your upper and lower range. Read aloud, using any piece of text from a newspaper, magazine or novel. The first sentence is with your upper range, the next is with your lower range. Continue this for at least a minute. Now make this work faster. Read the same passage but this time it is four words up and four words down. Play with the many variations!

(It will sound ridiculous but it doesn't matter. We're not going for meaning. This will work on pitch flexibility).

Pitch Experimentation (using your high, middle and low pitch range to reflect the emotions described):

Little Miss Muffet sat on her tuffet

Eating her curds and whey

Along came a spider

And sat down beside here

It frightened Miss Muffet away

Now say the above nursery rhyme :

Using high pitch

Using middle pitch

Using low pitch

Note the intensity and the way you perceive the emotional content of this nursery rhyme. There will be a distinct variation between each.

For TONE QUALITY OF VOICE:

Humming:

Hum Happy Birthday. Place your hand on your chest and feel the vibrations. If you don't feel it, go a pitch lower until you can feel it. Then place your hand lightly on your throat and feel the vibration. Lastly place your hand on the top of your head and feel the vibration.

Humming exercises helps to build resonance and enriches your voice.

The Meatball Spaghetti Exercise:

Repeat the words '*Meatball Spaghetti*' in as many varying ways as you can. Say it:

Angrily, Happily, Sadly, Nervously, Suspiciously, Lovingly, Despairingly, Jokingly, Importantly, Slyly, Shyly, Disgustedly, Contentedly, Congratulatory and Consoling manner.

Listen to Recordings of Novels, Short Stories, Autobiographies...

Many of these are read by highly skilled actors. You can find audio tapes or CD's at your local library or down-load from the internet.

For VOLUME:

Recite this poem below, adjusting the volume of your voice according to the size of the type-print. This will help in volume control and build up in your speech.

On the Ning Nang Nong

On the Ning Nang Nong
Where the Cows go Bong!
and the monkeys all say **BOO!**
There's a Nong Nang Ning
Where the trees go Ping!
And the tea pots jibber jabber joo.
On the Nong Ning Nang
All the mice go Clang
And you just can't catch 'em when they do!
So its Ning Nang Nong
Cows go **Bong!**
Nong Nang Ning
Trees go ping
Nong Ning Nang
The mice go Clang
What a noisy place to belong
is the Ning Nang Ning Nang Nong!!

By Spike Milligan

For RATE/PACE OF SPEECH

Pick an informative report from a newspaper or magazine. Go through it to familiarize yourself with the flow of material and then read aloud. Make a note of which passages need careful or slow reading and which can be taken at a faster rate. Re-read aloud until you feel you have the mix of speeds right. (You can highlight the different speeds: red for fast and blue for go slower). Read again incorporating your changes. Note what changes you made and hear the difference in your incorporating the different speeds into this report.

Listen to speakers you admire. They could be radio presenters, preachers...anybody accustomed to speaking in public. Note the different rates of speech they use over the course of their presentation and the effectiveness of them. Take note of their rate changes and experiment with them for yourself.

For INFLECTION

Say each sentence and then indicate whether it is an upward or downward inflection or there is no inflection at all.

Sentences:

1. I am so exhausted.

2. Come here now!
3. This is the most beautiful view I've ever seen.
4. The world is round.
5. I am certain that I told Harry what time to meet us.
6. Well, well, well, what have we here?
7. Where will we go now?
8. I can hardly wait! We're going to Disneyland!
9. Go away! I never want to see you again.
10. I know, you've only told me a million times.
11. Look out for that falling rock.
12. Be quiet and hide here.
13. We'll never make it.
14. I am so ashamed.
15. Do you want to hear a secret?

Answers:

1. Downward
2. Downward
3. Upward
4. Flat
5. Flat
6. Upward
7. Upward
8. Upward
9. Downward
10. Flat
11. Upward
12. Downward
13. Downward
14. Downward
15. Upward

For EMPHASIS:

Use the different ways (stress, pause or inflect) to emphasize various meanings or emotions of these sentences. Note the underlined words to be stressed on, paused before or inflected on.

Sentences:

1. I love Math.
2. She is such a sweet character.
3. That man is cranky.

For PAUSE:

Experiment by listening to yourself as you go through a sentence where you consciously pause to emphasize a word and where you just run on without pausing. There should be a big difference in the impact of the meaning of the sentence. With practice, you will 'sense' the need to pause and how long to make it.

Try this sentence for pauses:

I saw the most amazing and spectacular performance of Lion King last night. (no pause at all)

I saw the most (pause) amazing and spectacular performance of Lion King last night.

I saw the most (pause) amazing and (pause) spectacular performance of Lion King last night.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=... (The text is heavily obscured and appears to be a URL or a list of names.)