

Approaching Difficult Situations

Liya Panayotova, Psychologist, [liyap.com](#) 3.4K reads

As you already know, you cannot control everything that may happen during your speech. Although you have now learned how to prepare for the unexpected, you may also find it useful to consider those scenarios, which you are afraid of, because you don't know how to approach them.

The list of components, which might contribute to your anxiety, while speaking in front of an audience, can be quite long. Perhaps some of the items are related to cognitive distortions, but there are also realistic negative circumstances that can occur. However, you shouldn't let that overpower you. Instead, prepare and include everything you already know about your plan. Below you will find a list of the most common, realistic scenarios, which you can prepare for. Feel free to add to it and come up with other solutions as well.

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The Audience Is Passive

You have manufactured an excellent presentation and have rehearsed it enough to create an interesting and smooth speech. Then, you planned in advance and thought about how you would interact with the audience. Although it all seemed perfect, during your rehearsal, in reality, the audience refuses to remain silent and listen attentively. Nobody is responding to your questions and attempts to interact. Naturally, in reality, the chances of this happening are very slim, but let's just consider it for a moment.

What can you do?

First of all, you have to assess, during the preoperational phase, the characteristics of your audience. Would they be your fellow academics, within the field of your study, or perhaps people who know nothing about the topic? Try to predict how your audience might respond to different approaches, and create a corresponding plan. Even if your audience is inattentive, despite your efforts, make sure not to panic. Instead, try to make a joke about their attitude, or simply acknowledge they are not very responsive, smile and answer your question.

You Forgot Something Important

Your presentation is full of information you want to share with your audience. While you speak, you suddenly remember that you switched to the next slide too quickly, and forgot to say something important, which was a part of your plan. Remember that this can happen to everyone, even if they are well prepared, and it certainly won't ruin your performance. You can always go back, saying that you forgot to mention something important, then do it, and move on. Don't interrupt yourself in the middle of a section you are talking about. Instead, finish it and then go back to what you've missed, or try to incorporate that information into your next slide.

You Don't Know the Answer to a Question

Although you've already learned what to do if this happens, a brief reminder might be useful. Remember to remain calm, as not knowing the answer to a question won't turn a good presentation into a disaster. Be honest with your audience – nobody knows everything.

You Start Stuttering, Blushing, or Get Confused

In this scenario, no matter how much you've tried to handle your anxiety, its effects are still interfering with your presentation. Remember that if you haven't been working on your anxiety for a long time, it is perfectly normal to experience some, every now and again. You will gradually learn how to cope it, through exposure.

For now, in case you get confused or embarrassed by a sudden stutter, make a brief pause, take a few deep, slow breaths, have a sip of water, and move on. If you are worried that the audience might have noticed your nervousness, you can say something like, "I have so much exciting information to share with you today, that my mind is a bit overwhelmed" and make sure you smile. In this way, you would maintain your confidence and show your audience that you cannot be phased by some small incident.

If you start blushing, just keep talking and focus on what you're saying. You can't control your bloodstream, so don't waste your time trying to do impossible, as the only likely outcome of that is an even redder face. Blushing is perfectly fine, as long as you don't create a huge ordeal out of it.

You Feel Like You Are Going to Faint

This scenario may seem extreme, but nausea is a common physical symptom of anxiety. As you begin your presentation, your level of anxiety skyrockets, and the nervousness doesn't seem to be settling, as you progress. As a result, you might start to believe that you won't make it to the end of the presentation, without fainting or embarrassing yourself. Focusing on how overwhelmed by anxiety you are, certainly, won't help. In fact, it is safe to assume that the opposite effect could be expected, and you might become even more anxious.

Is there a way out?

Of course, there is. Remember that you now know how to notice and accept your feelings. Anxiety, by itself, won't make you more anxious, but what you do with the anxiety can make all the difference. Instead, observe your inner world and then shift your focus onto what you are saying. If it's too late and you are already confused, ask your audience to give you a minute, take a deep breath or a sip of water if you have it with you, and then continue presenting. If you managed to stay somewhat focused, try to ask your audience a question, and while someone is providing an answer, use the time to calm yourself.

Keep in mind that this situation doesn't mean that you are weak or incompetent; it happens to a lot of people, and you are capable of coping with it.

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