

Spontaneity and Improvisation

If you ever tried to learn about being a good public speaker, you've likely heard the advice to be spontaneous. Although it is a good tip, if you are struggling with anxiety or fear of public speaking, improvisation can add some extra pressure - not only do you have to stand up and speak, but you also have to somehow seem natural.

There are very few individuals who feel completely comfortable and relaxed, while speaking in front of an audience. That's why it's important to be well prepared - to minimize the chance of forgetting something important or mixing in facts that you didn't intend to present. Although speeches that sound natural are usually more captivating, anxiety and spontaneity rarely go hand in hand. So how is it possible to be comfortable with improvisation, when frightened?



The banner features the Explorable logo at the top center, with the text "Quiz Time!" below it. Below the logo are three quiz cards: "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2" (with a pair of red roller skates), "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2" (with a fan of colored pencils), and "Quiz: Flags in Europe" (with a Ferris wheel). A link "See all quizzes =>" is located at the bottom right of the banner.

Spontaneity and Nervousness

As you know by now, your public speech doesn't have to be perfect. As soon as you realize and accept that fact, you can survive making a mistake or two, because the pressure will decrease. Even if you have planned your presentation very meticulously, that doesn't mean that you can't be spontaneous. If you feel comfortable enough to make a joke about the weather, or about something everybody is familiar with - do it. Don't let fear convince you that you can't be spontaneous, despite of your nervousness. It's certainly challenging, but far from impossible.

It's All in Your Eyes

Most importantly, remember that even if your spontaneity doesn't lead to the outcomes you

were hoping for, for instance if the audience doesn't laugh at your joke at much as you had hoped, it's not the actual situation that matters, but rather how you perceive it. Therefore, you can either choose to appraise yourself for the brave decision, or beat yourself up unnecessarily, for not having a perfect result.

Plan Your Humor

If you don't feel ready to improvise just yet, but would still like to have a more interactive presentation, you can plan to include certain jokes or puns into your speech. They can serve as icebreakers and help you to connect with your audience. Although it is fine to plan them ahead of time, try to make sure that they don't sound too rehearsed and fake. If deviating from the topic you will talk about feels overwhelming to you, don't do it for now. There's no universally accepted rule that you have to be spontaneous for your public performance to be successful. Your speech can go well without it.

How Can Spontaneity Help?

Let's see how improvisation and spontaneity can be beneficial to you and your public speaking abilities.

Eliciting Aspects of Your Presentation

Improvisation can help you explain some points of your presentation more profoundly, while spontaneity makes everything look and sound more lifelike. Incorporating them into your presentation will likely leave your audience with the impression that you are speaking with ease and understand the topic well enough to explain it in your own words.

People Enjoy Spontaneity

In almost every context, including public speaking. Explaining some theoretical perspective with the examples everyone can relate to or, at least find somewhat amusing, is going to leave everyone with a better impression of the presentation, as your audience would likely feel refreshed. However, that doesn't mean you can't plan such details in advance. Just make sure they sound natural.

Spontaneous People Seem More Confident

That's why the audience might show greater interest in their speech. It is a normal human reaction to focus your attention on what a relaxed, engaging speaker has to say. Also, if you notice that they start to yawn or get distracted, you can improvise on the spot, but only if you are at least slightly comfortable with it. Remember, improvising can both increase and decrease your anxiety – the key is in how you perceive the situation.

Why Can Spontaneity Be Challenging?

For someone dealing with anxiety, improvisation and spontaneity can be hard.

If Rehearsed, It Can Sound Fake

If you worked hard on your “spontaneity” (which is the opposite of being spontaneous), your speech could sound unnatural and a bit robotic. Also, if you are not very familiar with the subject you are speaking about, improvisation may be more of a challenge. Don’t give your audience speculative information in an attempt to improvise. If you are incredibly uncomfortable with improvisation, it is alright for now to stick to what you’ve prepared, and gradually try to work improvisation into your presentations.

Improvisation Might Increase Anxiety, If Perceived Negatively

Don’t let your attempt to sound amusing and spontaneous increase your fear and anxiety. One of the biggest concerns of people struggling with public speaking anxiety is that their mind will go blank, and they’ll forget what to say next. If this happens (the odds are really small, but let’s consider it), you can improvise or try to talk your way out of the situation, by focusing on something else. In such cases, improvisation and spontaneity can save the day. However, if you are not yet comfortable with public speaking, don’t rely entirely on improvisation. Instead, what would more likely alleviate your anxiety, is to have a feasible plan. Besides, always remember that your perceptions are what increased or decreases anxiety and be mindful of that, regarding improvisation.

Rehearse in Front of an Audience

In order to make sure your presentation sounds authentic and reliable, get properly prepared. If you still want to be spontaneous while speaking in public, then plan and rehearse your entire speech with an actual audience - your friends, family, or colleagues. Ask them for constructive feedback on your presentation and then consider if you might be able to use any of it, to improve your speech so that your audience is more entertained and captivated by it.

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