



Surviving an Unexpected Speech

Liya Panayotova, Psychologist, [liyap.com](#) 7.9K reads

Preparing for public speaking is, as you know by now, an imperative. But life is full of surprises and one of them may come in the form of an unexpected public speech. Although this may be tricky, there are specific approaches you can take, to be successful, even when you have to speak in front of an audience without any notice of preparation.

Imagine the following scenario: it's a lovely day outside, and you have decided to walk to your destination, to enjoy some fresh air. Suddenly, a TV reporter approaches you, with a microphone, a camera, and a question. There is neither time to prepare, nor a chance to consider your reply, as you are required to think on your feet and provide an immediate response. Does it sound terrifying?

EXPLORABLE
Quiz Time!

Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz: Flags in Europe

[See all quizzes ⇒](#)

Does Unexpected Equal Disastrous?

Here's another possible scenario. You are sitting comfortably in the audience and listening to someone's speech. At some point, the presenter asks if there are any volunteers from the audience, who would like to join him or her on stage. There are no volunteers, so you are randomly selected, which means that you have to go up on stage and participate. The same goes for similar circumstances, such as being asked to give a toast on someone's special occasion, or having to explain something you understand, to a group of people at a gathering.

These situations may be an exception, but they are indeed possible. Can this ruin everything

you've done to overcome your fear of public speaking? You probably already know that the answer is – only if you let it.

What Can You Do?

If you find yourself in these or similar circumstances and are unsure what to do, you can choose one of the following courses of action:

Politely Refuse

This is the easiest solution. All you have to do is say that you can't speak right now. Although saying that may not be pleasant, you save yourself from potential embarrassment. However, there would be times when you won't be able to talk your way out of participating, for instance, if the bride and groom at a wedding ask you to give a toast, or if your teacher asks you a question during the class.

Even if you can refuse, remember that choosing to do so would only reinforce your anxiety. While your refusal to participate may provide the immediate relief of not having to do something difficult, it will only take away from your long-term effort and self-esteem.

Buy Some Time

If you find yourself in these situations, try to buy some time to come up with an answer. There are many ways to do that: ask for the question to be repeated, or say that you need some additional information; you will, therefore, receive some time to consider your response.

If your mind has gone blank, and all you can think of is how to get away, then say that you need a minute to think about what to say, rather than attempting to escape. Being open and honest about needing some extra time is not something to be worried about – you are entitled to that time and have every right to require it.

Acknowledge Your Surprise

If you find yourself in a situation where someone asks you to speak in front of an audience, without any prior preparation, there is no need to pretend that you feel completely comfortable with that, if you actually do not.

Instead, you can start by acknowledging your surprise, saying that you're not prepared and sharing how this type of situation is challenging for you. By doing so, you are freeing yourself of the subconscious desire to act against your impulses, which means that your anxiety decreases, and at the same time you become more likeable to the audience because you have shared something personal.

Therefore, it is more likely that the audience will be understanding and accepting, even if you do make mistakes. Besides, the fact that you are willing speaking in front of them, even though you are afraid and unprepared, says a lot about how courageous you are.

Improvise on the Spot

Imagine that someone has asked you a question in public, while others are watching and

listening. If you are afraid, you can try a challenging and brave tactic to counteract that fear – answer the question straight away.

Don't try to prepare or buy extra time, but rather say whatever comes to mind and is somehow related to the question. It might make you feel more comfortable to learn that your brain can perform this action on its own - while you feel stunned by the situation and sudden rush, your mind may come up with the answer for you, without your conscious effort. Although that will not happen every time, applying this bold solution is all about diving into exposure head-first.

You Rule Your Fear

Having to speak in the spur of the moment can be extremely challenging, especially if you feel nervous when faced with speaking in front of an audience. Although every fiber of your body might be telling you to run away, remember that only exposure can help you become more comfortable with speaking in public.

Unexpected events are not a disaster, but rather an excellent opportunity to practice exposure.

Remember, it's not the fear that would render you tongue-tight, it is how you perceive that fear and what you choose to do with it.

Source URL: <https://explorable.com/e/surviving-an-unexpected-speech>