

# **Countdown to That Important Presentation**

## **Easy Habits that Ensure Confidence**

By Ruth Bonetti

You have a big date looming and you want to shine. The following simple, holistic, self-help tips will help you focus and poise in the days, hours and minutes before you walk onto the platform.

### **Easy Habit #1: Program your success**

Create a self-fulfilling prophecy by visualising your success. Overcome potential self-sabotage of negative “what-if’s” with mental preparation.

See yourself, calm and poised, walking onto the platform, opening your mouth to speak. Hear the vibrant tone that flows out, resonating to the back of the hall. Out of the corner of your eye, see those fear-gremlins skulk away into the shadows, while you are encompassed in the warm, flattering and protective stage light.

And do you see those faces in the audience responding, smiling up at you? Hear the applause of their standing ovation? See yourself backstage with diary open, wondering where you can find time for a further presentation.

### **Easy Habits for the days before**

Actors and singers know to “save themselves” as well as their voices on the day of a performance. They talk less, eat less, pamper themselves a little, and don’t rush around. They retreat into themselves, focus on their part or persona, and especially avoid arguments or upsets. Similarly, you can plan the lead-up days, to reschedule where possible any draining commitments.

Maintain a balanced, healthy diet. Curb caffeine, alcohol and nicotine. Double your water intake, for stress dehydrates. As all messages from the brain are carried in fluid, water is essential for optimal functioning on all levels. It is especially important for speakers to maintain hydration as their vocal folds need fluid to vibrate and project with ease.

### **The hours before**

A few hours before your presentation eat a light meal of sustained release carbohydrate such as rice, pasta or bread. Rest, meditate or pray and mentally prepare. Repeat positive affirmations.

Tension is blocked energy. Release it whichever way works best for you. Go for a run, or to the gym, or walk around the block. A soak in the bath is wonderfully relaxing, especially with herbal oils or mineral salts. Water is a well-known therapy proved from Roman times.

### **Warm your voice while driving to the venue**

Humming to the radio as you drive in the privacy of your car is the best vocal warm-up -- and listening to composers such as Mozart, Bach and Vivaldi enhances brain function. Make rolled “r r r” sounds to loosen your tongue and improve diction. While waiting for red lights to change, yawn and stretch to relax jaw tension and induce deep breathing.

Buzz your lips to relax tension – but check the traffic in the next lane before making loud “vroom vroom” noises. A road-raged bikie in the next lane is hardly confidence building.

Plan to arrive at the venue well before hand. Own your space. Look round the auditorium, feel comfortable with it, check possible distractions. Check for potential problems, such as a loose electrical cable that might set your entrance off to a flying start. Check that tapes and videos are wound ready at the correct point. Test data projectors, overhead projection, video and sound systems, microphones and sound levels. How close should you stand to the microphone so all “p” sounds don’t explode like popcorn cooking? Will your voice fade if you move to the side of the lectern? If you walk around the stage with a radio microphone, do some areas attract reverberations or feedback? (Given that conference halls are constantly in use, it is even better to arrive in town the day before, or early that morning, to could book time in the venue. Make allowance that an empty hall is more resonant than one filled with people.)

Are the audiences’ seats so distant you must roar? If so, ask to move the podium or the chairs closer. Is the lectern so high that you would peer over it like Humpty Dumpty? Ask for whatever you need. Better lighting? A jug of water? (Remember that stress dehydrates.) But tip out those ice-cubes, for cold water constricts the throat and thus, your voice projection.

### **Easy Habits to Channel Adrenaline into Energy**

Seasoned presenters have learned to go with the adrenaline rush, even to welcome it as a source of energy and vitality. Yet this is also the province of the “fight or flight” response triggered by the primitive brain stem when in pressured situations. It is the very breeding ground of those unsettling physical symptoms like dry mouth, queasy stomach and shaky hands – which even experienced speakers may occasionally experience. The solution is to channel and focus this adrenaline by accessing the sophisticated part of the brain, the cerebral cortex. Then unwelcome symptoms of nerves fall over like a pack of cards. A simple way to defuse the negative responses of the brain stem and to access your brain’s frontal lobes is to sit quietly backstage, breathing slow and deep, with a hand on your forehead. Holding these forehead pressure points, called the “positive points” by Brain-Gym exponents Paul and Gail Dennison, has a bonus effect of also calming an unsettled stomach. You can adapt this simple technique on the platform if you begin to “lose the plot” mid-presentation. Say: “Turn to the person next to you and discuss XYZ for a minute.” With your listeners’ attention elsewhere, use the time for some slow breathing and a subtle hand on your forehead, and you will soon be back on target.

### **Easy Habits to Ease Physical Symptoms of Nerves**

Travel motion remedies often include ginger, and similarly, this can ease presenters’ queasy stomachs. Drink lemon and ginger tea or simply infuse grated fresh ginger in hot water.

Another travel nausea remedy is to wear acupressure magnets on elastic wristbands. Simply massage or press on this point on your inner wrist. This can also ease shortness of breath, insomnia and feelings of anxiety. Massage the adrenal points around your navel to relieve emotional stress and nausea.

A few drops of homoeopathic Rescue Remedy under your tongue aid centring and focus, alleviate panic, exhaustion, tiredness and fear. Dry mouth, that bane of presenters, is exacerbated by throat tension. To relieve it, press the tip of your tongue on the hard palate near the teeth ridge. Subtle sucking movements and simulated yawns promote saliva.

### **The half-hour before**

Check you have removed anything can avoid distraction or embarrassment, such as jangly jewellery, keys, coins. Turn off your cell phone!

Don't try to curb that instinctive tendency to pace the floor. Walking is a natural, easy form of "cross-crawl," – which, by crossing the centre-line between right and left brain hemispheres, accesses whole brain expression. Movement stimulates blood flow and circulates oxygen to your brain, switching on your mental power. Curb fidgets by steeping your hands with fingers pressed together - a technique which also connects the brain hemispheres.

### **The minutes before**

Back-stage, your launch-pad check list may include:

- Sit quietly and visualise transferring all your nervous energy away from that tense jaw down into your toes. Think "toes, toes, toes," and your jaw relaxes.
- Repeat whichever affirmations work for you. Assume a confident, smiling celebrity mood.
- Turn down the volume of negative voices in your head.
- Think through the content you will present, especially the crucial first sentence.
- Offload tension with a laugh – which will open your throat and ensure positive resonance.
- Yawn. Stretch. Breathe.
- Check your posture is upright by standing up against a wall.
- Bend your knees to unlock tension.
- Sip some water or rinse your mouth.
- Slow down.
- Breathe.

It's time. You are focussed, poised, primed for confident delivery.

Enjoy your time in the spotlight – and you will shine!

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[ruth@ruthbonetti.com](mailto:ruth@ruthbonetti.com)

[www.ruthbonetti.com](http://www.ruthbonetti.com)

(61 7) 3300 2268 or 0411 782 404

fax: 61 7 3300 5786  
Address: PO Box 422  
The Gap  
Qld. 4061 Australia

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