

## The fear of speaking in public

**Level:** Intermediate

**Time:** 90 minutes

**Summary:** This lesson is about public speaking. In this lesson, students:

1. read the advice of two experts, who discuss useful tips and offer practical advice for when someone has to give a speech or talk;
2. complete some public speaking tips;
3. talk about their own experiences of speaking in public;
4. prepare and give a short talk, trying out the experts' tips.

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student

**Group size:** Any

4. *evaluated*
5. *rationale*
6. *draft*
7. *choreographing*
8. *spontaneous*
9. *mindset*
10. *booster*
11. *judged*
12. *reveal*

### Understanding the article

Students answer the questions about Toastmasters with information from the article. Ask them how they think joining a local Toastmasters group could help them with their next presentation.

**Key:**

1. *to practise public speaking in a safe environment with a group of people who have the same aims and worries*
2. *It is an international club that helps people become better public speakers. It was founded in the US in the 1920s and has since been established all over the world. It has clubs in over 140 countries and has more than 350,000 members. Meetings usually take place twice a month.*
3. *The meetings have three parts: first, members give prepared speeches; then, members give short impromptu speeches; finally, members evaluate and give each other feedback on their speeches. Members also study manuals and watch educational videos that accompany the educational programme (Pathway) that best suits their needs. The Pathways can be found here: [www.toastmasters.org/pathways-overview](http://www.toastmasters.org/pathways-overview).*

### Expressions

Students find expressions in the article. Then, after they have checked their answers, students use some of the expressions in sentences of their own.

**Key:**

1. *suit your needs*
2. *put (something) into practice*
3. *keep (somebody) on track*
4. *plant your feet firmly*
5. *learn (something) by heart*
6. *wish (someone) well*
7. *grab (someone's) attention*

**Note:** This lesson plan is for both pre-experience and in-work business students based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 3/2019.

### Warmer

Students read the saying, explain what it means (looking it up if necessary) and say whether there's a similar saying in their language. They then scan the text for another five-word saying and do the same as above.

**Key:**

- a. *used for saying that repeating an activity or doing it regularly makes you very good at it*
- b. *proper preparation prevents poor performance*

### Key words

Students match the key words with the definitions and then find the words in the article before reading through the article and noticing how they are used in context. The words in the task are in the order that they appear in the article.

**Key:**

1. *impromptu*
2. *froze*
3. *prepared*

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### Public speaking tips

Students work in pairs to complete the tips from the article. Find out if there are any other tips they would like to add before moving on to the next task.

**Key:**

**Preparation**

1. draft
2. bullet points
3. real time
4. audio, speed, language
5. foreign language
6. movements, left, right

**Before you start speaking and at the beginning of your talk**

7. eyes, breaths
8. positive, mantra
9. eye contact
10. before
11. personal

### Discussion

Students discuss the questions in small groups, then give feedback to the whole class.

### Giving a talk

If you have more than eight students in the class, divide them into groups of approximately four to eight students. The students choose one of the topics from the list – it doesn't matter if two or more of them choose the same topic as the content will differ – and make notes about what they want to include. As the experts suggest, they should write out their opening sentences to increase their confidence at the beginning of their talk.

When they hold their mini-talks (either to the whole class or to the others in their group), they should try to include some of the experts' tips (see task 5).

At the end of each short talk the student audience should provide the speaker with positive and helpful feedback, and the speaker should say how they felt and whether any of the tips helped their confidence or delivery.

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### 1 Warmer

Practice makes perfect.

- a. Have you ever heard this saying before? Explain what it means. Is there a similar saying in your language?
- b. Find a five-word saying in the text and write it below. Every word begins with p.

p\_\_\_\_\_ p\_\_\_\_\_ p\_\_\_\_\_ p\_\_\_\_\_ p\_\_\_\_\_

### 2 Key words

Match the key words to the definitions below. Find and underline them in the article, then read the article and note how they are used in context.

booster      choreographing      draft      evaluated      froze      impromptu  
judged      mindset      prepared      rationale      reveal      spontaneous

- 1. not planned or prepared \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. stopped moving or doing something \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. done or made earlier \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. thought about carefully before a judgment is made about its quality  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5. the set of reasons that something such as a plan, scheme or programme is based on  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6. something such as a plan, report or speech that may have changes made to it before it is finished  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 7. planning what movements should be made and when \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. used in a positive way about someone who often behaves in a natural and friendly way, without worrying about what they say or do \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. a way of thinking about things \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. something that makes you feel more confident, more healthy, etc  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 11. formed a negative opinion about someone \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. let something become known, for example a secret or information that was previously not known  
\_\_\_\_\_

## The fear of speaking in public

### The fear of speaking in public

by Ken Taylor

Ken Taylor gives expert advice on how to improve your skills in everyday business interactions. Here, he interviews a woman who works for an organization that helps its members feel less nervous about public speaking.



Ken Taylor



Moira O'Brien

**1 Moira O'Brien:** Most people join a Toastmasters club either because they have a specific speech to make or because they are just terrified of speaking in public.

**Ken Taylor:** So, why did you join?

**2 O'Brien:** I was a presenter and producer for Irish Radio International. When I had a script to follow, I had no problems, but as soon as I had to be impromptu, my brain froze. I knew what I wanted to say, but the words wouldn't come out in the right way. So I joined a local Toastmasters club.

**Taylor:** I know that Toastmasters is an international organization aimed at helping people to become better public speakers.

**3 O'Brien:** Yes. It was founded in the US in the 1920s and has spread all over the world. It's now in over 140 countries with more than 350,000 individual members.

**Taylor:** And how often does a typical club have meetings?

**4 O'Brien:** Usually around twice a month.

**Taylor:** And what happens at a meeting?

**5 O'Brien:** There are usually three parts to a meeting. In the first part, members give prepared speeches as part of one of eight educational programmes called Pathways. You choose a programme that suits your needs, and you study a manual and

watch educational videos. In the first part of the meeting, you put that study into practice with prepared speeches.

**Taylor:** And do you get feedback on how well you performed?

**O'Brien:** That's the third part of the meeting. Every speech is evaluated in front of the whole group. **6**

**Taylor:** When I run presentation skills courses, this personal feedback is the key learning experience. And not just for the person being evaluated. The other participants learn from their colleagues' performances.

**O'Brien:** That's the rationale for doing it in the whole group in our meetings. **7**

**Taylor:** What's the second part of the meeting?

**O'Brien:** That's the impromptu part. You are given a subject and have to speak on it for two minutes. These impromptu talks are sometimes also evaluated. **8**

**Taylor:** Most of the students I work with have English as a second or third language. This puts added pressure on people. Often they feel very nervous before giving a presentation.

**O'Brien:** I can imagine! But good preparation can help with that. **9**

**Taylor:** I agree. There is a saying that "proper preparation prevents poor performance". The better prepared you are, the less nervous you will feel.

**O'Brien:** If I have an important speech to make, I think it over in my mind for a few days. Then I write a first draft. I estimate that I speak at about 120 words a minute but plan on the basis of 100 words a minute. **10**

**Taylor:** That's about the speed of speakers of a foreign language. Do you record yourself at all?

**O'Brien:** Yes, I do. I listen carefully to the audio of my voice, my choice of words, for variety in tone and speed. **11**

**Taylor:** And seeing yourself on a video recording allows you to check your body language – especially where you put your hands and when and where you should move.

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### The fear of speaking in public

by Ken Naylor

**12** **O'Brien:** At Toastmasters, I've learned a lot about choreographing my moves. One simple example: if you talk about the past, you should move to your audience's left.

**Taylor:** It's like starting a timeline. So you move to their right if you are describing the future.

**13** **O'Brien:** That's right. Finally, I make notes in the form of bullet points, which allows me to be spontaneous but keeps me on track.

**Taylor:** Unless you are very practised at it, reading aloud from a complete text is really boring. But when speaking in a foreign language, many people find taking the step to bullet-point notes rather unnerving.

**14** **O'Brien:** Practice makes perfect: practise using your notes by speaking aloud and in real time.

**Taylor:** What do you do to get into the right mindset just before you get up to speak?

**15** **O'Brien:** I close my eyes and take several deep breaths to fill my lungs with oxygen.

**Taylor:** I have a little mantra I use. I tell myself: "I've done this before. It was good. This will be even better!" It's a positive confidence booster. Then I get up. I go to the spot where I need to stand. I plant my feet firmly and stop before I start. In other words, I pause to allow the audience to focus on me and to allow me to make eye contact with the audience.

**16** **O'Brien:** I do the same. I look at every part of the audience before I open my mouth.

**Taylor:** For anyone speaking in a foreign language, I suggest they learn the first five or six sentences of their presentation by heart. Then they don't have to worry about choosing the right grammar or vocabulary. They can concentrate on how to say it rather than on what to say.

**17** **O'Brien:** Having a good opening really lowers your nervousness. You can see from the reaction of your audience that they are interested in what you are saying.

**Taylor:** Audiences in general have a positive feeling about presenters. They wish the presenter well.

**18** **O'Brien:** But presenters often feel they are being judged and, because of that, they avoid making a connection with their audience.

**Taylor:** The best way to make a connection is to reveal something personal.

**19** **O'Brien:** You can do that through storytelling. You can tell a story about yourself.

**Taylor:** I've found the best stories to be about having a problem or making a mistake and then finding a solution to the situation.

**20** **O'Brien:** Stories grab an audience's attention and connect you with each other in a powerful way.

**Taylor:** Making that positive connection is the key to making an excellent presentation.

KEN TAYLOR is a communication consultant, personal coach and author of *50 Ways to Improve Your Business English* (Summertown Publishing).

MOIRA O'BRIEN lives near Cork in the Republic of Ireland. She is a serial entrepreneur and has been involved in starting up seven or eight businesses, including an accountancy firm, Irish Radio International and a professional photography company. At the moment, she is working with Toastmasters International ([www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)) and runs a B&B.

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## The fear of speaking in public

### 3 Understanding the article

Answer these questions about Toastmasters using information from the article.

1. Why do people join Toastmasters?

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2. What do you know about the organization?

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3. What happens at a Toastmasters meeting?

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### 4 Expressions

a. Find the following expressions in the article. The section numbers are given to help you.

1. provides you with everything that you need (section 5)

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2. apply the information and tips you have learnt (section 5)

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3. make you feel you are in control and know what to do (section 13)

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4. stand tall and look confident (section 15)

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5. know something so well you can remember it without any help (section 16)

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6. hope good things will happen to someone (section 17)

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7. make someone notice something (section 20)

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b. Use some of the expressions in sentences of your own.

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### 5 Public speaking tips

Complete the tips from the article.

#### Preparation

1. Think about your speech for a while, then write a first \_\_\_\_\_ .
2. Make notes in the form of \_\_\_\_\_ .
3. Practise by using your notes and speaking in \_\_\_\_\_ .
4. Make a video or \_\_\_\_\_ recording of yourself to check your voice, words, tone, \_\_\_\_\_ and body \_\_\_\_\_ .
5. Learn the first five or six lines of your speech off by heart, especially if you are speaking in a \_\_\_\_\_ .
6. Think about the \_\_\_\_\_ you will make while you speak. For example, plan to move to the audience's \_\_\_\_\_ when you talk about the past and to their \_\_\_\_\_ when you talk about the future.

#### Before you start speaking and at the beginning of your talk

7. Close your \_\_\_\_\_ and take several deep \_\_\_\_\_ .
8. Repeat your own \_\_\_\_\_ confidence booster, or little \_\_\_\_\_ , to yourself.
9. Plant your feet firmly on the ground, pause and make \_\_\_\_\_ with the audience.
10. Look at everyone in the audience \_\_\_\_\_ you start speaking.
11. Connect with the audience by telling them something \_\_\_\_\_ about yourself.

### 6 Discussion

- **When did you last have to speak to a group of people, either at work or a social occasion like a wedding or party?**
  - How did you prepare? How did you feel before you spoke, and how did you feel afterwards?
- **Have you ever had to speak in public in a foreign language?**

## The fear of speaking in public

- Does the thought of having to speak in public worry you?
- Have you attended any courses or classes that teach public speaking and presentation skills?
  - If so, what did you learn there?
  - If not, would you be interested in attending a course in the future?

### 7 Giving a talk

a. Your task is to talk about one of the following topics for one to two minutes. Take three minutes to prepare your notes and to write out your opening sentence.

- My first job
- My first boss
- An unusual job or task I once did
- My commute to work
- A great training course I once attended
- An interesting business trip I once took
- My current work project
- My workstation/desk
- My professional goals and how I plan to achieve them
- What I'd like to do when I retire

b. Read the tips in task 5 again, and remember some of them when you talk.

c. Give your talk. After you have listened to your classmates' talks, give them constructive feedback.