
Public Speaking Fundamentals

A 3-Week Comprehensive Unit

UNIT OVERVIEW

Grade Level: 5–10

Duration: 3 Weeks (15 Lesson Plans)

Focus Areas: Speech Anxiety, Eye Contact, Vocal Variety, Body Language, Speech Structure

Speech Types: Informative, Persuasive, Demonstration

Included Resources: Peer Coaching Protocol, Assignment Briefs, Feedback Forms, Self-Assessment, Anchor Chart, Rubric

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Speech Anxiety Management Guide

Glossophobia, or the fear of public speaking, affects approximately 75% of the population. For students in grades 5–10, this anxiety can be a significant barrier to academic success and personal growth. This guide provides educators with evidence-based strategies to help students understand, manage, and overcome their speech anxiety.

Understanding the Physiology of Anxiety

When students feel threatened by an audience, their amygdala triggers the 'fight or flight' response. This causes physical symptoms: increased heart rate, shallow breathing, sweaty palms, and a shaky voice. Normalizing this physiological response is the first step in helping students. Teach them that these feelings are not a sign of failure, but a sign that their body is preparing to perform.

Strategy 1: Cognitive Reframing

Classroom Activity: The Reframing Wheel

Identify the Fear: Have students write down their specific fears (e.g., 'I will forget everything').

Challenge the Thought: Ask, 'What is the evidence for this?' and 'What is the worst that can realistically happen?'

Reframe the Narrative: Shift from 'I have to do this' to 'I get to share something important.' Shift from 'stress' to 'excitement.'

Strategy 2: Physiological Regulation (The 4-7-8 Method)

Deep breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, counteracting the fight-or-flight response. Teach the 4-7-8 method before any speaking event:

The 4-7-8 Breathing Technique

Inhale quietly through the nose for **4 seconds**.

Hold the breath for **7 seconds**.

Exhale completely through the mouth, making a whoosh sound, for **8 seconds**.

Repeat this cycle 3–4 times immediately prior to stepping up to speak.

Strategy 3: Systematic Desensitization (Gradual Exposure)

Do not force highly anxious students to deliver a full speech to the whole class on day one. Use a gradual release approach:

The Anxiety Ladder

Step 1: Speak to a mirror.

Step 2: Speak to a single trusted peer.

Step 3: Speak to a small group of 3–4 peers.

Step 4: Speak to half the class.

Step 5: Speak to the entire class.

Strategy 4: Power Posing & Grounding

Body language affects how we feel about ourselves. Have students practice 'Wonder Woman' or 'Superman' poses for two minutes in the hallway before presenting. Additionally, teach them grounding techniques while speaking: feeling their feet firmly planted on the floor and gripping the podium slightly to redirect nervous energy.

Delivery Skills Anchor Chart

Display this anchor chart in your classroom as a continuous reference for students during preparation and rehearsals.

THE VOICE	THE BODY	THE EYES
Volume: Speak loudly enough for the back row to hear clearly. Pace: Avoid rushing. Use varied speed for emphasis. Slow down for key points. Pitch: Vary your tone to show enthusiasm and avoid a monotone delivery. Pause: Use 2-3 second pauses before important words or after asking a question.	Posture: Stand tall, shoulders back, weight evenly distributed. Gestures: Use purposeful hand movements. Avoid fidgeting or hands in pockets. Movement: Move with intention. Take 1-2 steps during transitions, then plant your feet. Face: Match your facial expressions to your message. Smile when appropriate.	Scanning: Look at all sections of the audience (left, center, right). Duration: Hold eye contact with one person for 3-5 seconds (one complete thought). Connection: Look at individuals, not just the back wall. Notes: Glance at notes; do not read from them continuously.

Week 1: Foundations & Informative Speaking

Week 1 establishes a safe environment for public speaking, introduces the core delivery skills, and guides students through their first structured speech: the Informative Speech.

Lesson 1: Confronting the Jitters & Intro to Public Speaking

Objective: Students will identify physiological symptoms of speech anxiety and practice two management techniques (4-7-8 breathing and cognitive reframing).

Time: 50 min
Materials: Speech Anxiety Management Guide, Sticky notes

Warm-Up: On a sticky note, write your biggest fear about public speaking. Place it on the board anonymously. Read a few aloud to normalize the feelings.

Direct Instruction: Introduce Glossophobia. Explain the 'fight or flight' response using the Anxiety Management Guide. Teach the 4-7-8 Breathing Technique. Demonstrate how to reframe 'I'm scared' to 'I'm excited to share.'

Guided Practice: Students pair up. Partner A shares a 30-second summary of their favorite movie while applying the 4-7-8 breathing beforehand. Partner B provides positive feedback on what they did well. Switch roles.

Closure: Exit Ticket: Write down one positive reframe for the fear you wrote on your sticky note at the beginning of class.

Lesson 2: The Power of the Voice (Vocal Variety)

Objective: Students will demonstrate the ability to modulate volume, pitch, pace, and pause to enhance message delivery.

Time: 50 min
Materials: Delivery Skills Anchor Chart, Short poem or tongue twister handout

Warm-Up: Vocal warm-up: Students practice tongue twisters together, starting slowly and increasing speed. Emphasize opening the mouth and articulating clearly.

Direct Instruction: Review the 'THE VOICE' section of the Anchor Chart. Explain Volume, Pitch, Pace, and Pause. Model a sentence (e.g., 'I did not steal the cookie') with 4 different meanings by changing emphasis and pauses.

Teacher Observation Rubric

Use this rubric to evaluate student speeches during live performances. Scores range from 1 (Beginning) to 4 (Mastery). Calculate the total score out of 20 points.

Criteria	4 - Mastery	3 - Proficient	2 - Developing	1 - Beginning
Speech Structure (Intro, Body, Conclusion)	Compelling hook; clear thesis; exceptionally organized body with smooth transitions; strong, memorable conclusion.	Clear hook and thesis; organized body; appropriate transitions; clear conclusion.	Weak or missing hook/thesis; body lacks clear organization; abrupt or missing conclusion.	No clear introduction or conclusion; disorganized; difficult to follow the main points.
Vocal Delivery (Volume, Pace, Variety)	Excellent volume; highly effective vocal variety (pitch, pace); purposeful pauses used for emphasis.	Adequate volume; some vocal variety; generally good pace with minor pauses.	Inconsistent volume; monotone delivery or speaks too fast/slow; lacks pauses.	Inaudible; entirely monotone; rushed or so slow it loses audience attention.
Physical Delivery (Body, Eyes, Poise)	Consistent, engaging eye contact; purposeful gestures; confident, grounded posture; no fidgeting.	Frequent eye contact; natural gestures; mostly stable posture; minor fidgeting.	Inconsistent eye contact (mostly reading notes); limited or distracting gestures; swaying or slouching.	No eye contact; hands in pockets or excessive fidgeting; visibly anxious posture.
Content & Purpose (Inform, Persuade, Demo)	Deeply fulfills speech type (e.g., robust counterargument for Persuasive; flawless step-by-step for Demo). Highly engaging.	Fulfills speech type adequately; clear main points; appropriate topic choice.	Partially fulfills speech type (e.g., missing counterargument, vague demo steps); off-topic moments.	Does not meet the requirements of the assigned speech type; lacks preparation or coherence.
Anxiety Management (Preparation, Poise)	Appears highly confident; uses breathing/grounding techniques effectively; recovers from mistakes seamlessly.	Appears prepared; minor nervousness that does not distract from the speech; recovers from mistakes.	Noticeable anxiety that distracts from the message; struggles to recover from errors.	Overwhelmed by anxiety; unable to continue or complete the speech; lacks preparation.

Student Name: _____

Total Score: _____ / 20

Teacher Comments (Glows & Grows):

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