

Winter 2004

Getting Beyond the Fear of Public Speaking

By Dr. Maureen Archer

Did you know that many people fear speaking in public more than they fear death? Although that is a bit extreme, most people experience some degree of stage fright before uttering their first words in front of a group. Often their adrenaline increases, palms sweat, mouths dry up, hearts race, and minds go blank.

If these symptoms happen to you, don't worry; you are having a normal reaction to this high-stress situation. Your body is trying to flee the focus and scrutiny of your audience. In nature, it is safer to stay with the pack; to be the center of attention has been a historically dangerous position. Unfortunately, our bodies still prepare for flight, even as our minds struggle to deliver a polished and pleasant presentation.

Thankfully, reducing stage fright is possible. Here are a few ways to reduce your anxiety and thus make the experience more enjoyable for all:

Prepare materially.

Gather and organize your information several days before your speech. Practice saying your speech aloud several times so you will be comfortable with the material, especially if you are using visuals. If possible, give your speech in front of a friend or two who will give you honest, constructive feedback. Be sure to time your practice performance so you can adjust the amount of material accordingly. Also, practice answering possible audience questions.

By practicing your speech aloud and responding to questions, you will have the confidence that comes from knowing you are ready to perform.

Prepare mentally.

Think positive thoughts. Erase any negative messages that may creep into your consciousness. Say instead: "I can do this! I have practiced, and I am ready." Remember that your listeners want to hear your information. They know that public speaking is difficult, so they admire you for your efforts.

E-mail Etiquette: Writing Professional Messages

Professional English is offering two e-mail workshops during the first week of March. Topics will include:

- **Understanding readers' needs**
- **Using the right tone**
- **Creating good subject lines**
- **Organizing information well**
- **Inspiring readers to action**
- **Proofreading strategies**

Participants will discuss many sample messages and receive a multi-paged packet during this lively workshop.

Peninsula Location:

Wednesday, March 3, 9:00 – Noon

Virginia Peninsula Chamber of Commerce
1919 Commerce Drive, Suite 320, Hampton
(Call 262-2000 for directions)

Southside Location:

Friday, March 5, 9:00 – Noon

Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce,
Chesapeake Division, 400 Volvo Parkway
(Call 622-2312 for directions)

The cost is \$75 per person.

Please **register by March 1** by calling Michelle at 873-0116 or sending an e-mail to michelle@allenglishtraining.com. VISA/MasterCard accepted.

Many people (myself included) assume the role of a teacher when giving presentations. This allows us to focus on the material as we continually help our “students” understand it. If this is a comfortable role for you, you might try emulating a favorite trainer, professor, or speaker. Smile, speak loudly, and teach your “students” the information you have for them.

Prepare physically.

Warm up your mouth so that you can articulate well. I like to do my warm-up exercises as I drive to an event. I like to say “supercalifragilisticexpialidoshus” several times, plus I repeat these key sounds: t, d, l, k, p, s, th, ing, l, and er. Stretch your mouth open and sideways, warm up your tongue, and get your vocal cords vibrating. Practice any tongue twisters you like: Peter Piper, She sells seashells, etc.

Also, be sure to breathe deeply. I take three long, deep breaths right before it is my turn to speak; the breathing motion relaxes me and the oxygen enhances my thinking. Some people channel their nervous energy by tensing and relaxing leg muscles while waiting, but I have found deep breathing works best for me.

After speaking to groups for fifteen years, I can verify that audiences are filled with kind, appreciative listeners. Find a few smiling audience members, speak to them during your speech, and you will do fine.



Introducing Alison Schoew

Professional English is pleased to announce that Alison Schoew (pronounced “shay”) has joined our staff as the Marketing and Special Projects Coordinator.

Alison, who holds a Master’s degree in Applied Linguistics, has been part of our training staff since Fall 2002. She has conducted workshops in effective presentation skills and business writing. She is currently providing English as a second language (ESL), public speaking, and writing coaching to our corporate and private clients.

A free-lance writer with 20 years of experience in local media, Alison worked for fifteen years in local radio and five years as the voice of The Pilot’s INFOLINE. In fact, her voice is heard on on-hold messages across the East Coast.

Alison, the former Director of Communications at Virginia Wesleyan College and at the American Red Cross (Tidewater Chapter), is eager to expand Professional English’s services to an even wider market, both locally and nationally.

Dear Dr. A:



When should I use **that** and when should I use **which**? Also, please explain the comma rules for these.

Myung B.
York County, VA

Dear Myung:

That is a good question, which I will now answer. **That** and **which** act as relative pronouns to introduce relative clauses, which attach to nouns. These relative clauses give additional information about the noun. Here are some examples:

- 1) The report, **which** was mailed yesterday, will arrive soon.
- 2) The report **that** was mailed yesterday will arrive soon.

Basically, if the reader knows which report you mean, then you simply add the extra information (“which was mailed yesterday”) into the sentence with a comma, which + the information, followed by a comma. Extra information inserted into a sentence should always be surrounded by commas.

If, however, you are giving information that needs to be included (i.e., essential information), begin the clause with **that**. In 2) above, the clause “that was mailed yesterday” is needed to distinguish the report from another report. For example,

The report **that** was mailed yesterday will arrive soon.
The report **that** was mailed last week was lost in the mail.

The reader needs the information about the mailing time to know which report you have in mind.

Essentially, if you need to answer “Which one?” use **that** with no commas.

Please send your communication questions to Dr. Maureen Archer (archer@allenglishtraining.com).
