Preface

If you’ve ever felt nervous, doubtful, or insecure about giving presentations or speeches, this pocket book is for you. It provides you with easy-to-use techniques for managing presentation anxiety, whether your audience is composed of coworkers, prospective clients, fellow students, or family and friends.

This book was born out of frustration. For decades, psychologists, biologists, and communication researchers have documented and detailed strategies and techniques for addressing speaking anxiety. However, much of this work remains locked away in academic journals. Further, techniques that do escape to a wider audience via public speaking or business communication textbooks are often vague and insufficient. These texts present what I refer to as the “PB & J” approach to speaking anxiety management: “Practice, Breathe, and Just do it.” Although these suggestions have some validity, speaking anxiety involves a complicated mix of physiological and psychological factors. Simplistic “PB & J” advice is not likely to help. Worse, it could even increase anxiety if the suggestions are attempted without immediately successful results.

I hope to remedy this lack of useful information by providing 50 tried and tested anxiety management techniques that you can easily put into practice. Most of the techniques detailed here are based on academic research, and all have been shown to be effective. As you read this book, you will learn several techniques that will help you feel more confident about yourself and your presentations. Your goal: Speaking up without freaking out!
How to Use This Book

I applaud you for taking the first steps to becoming a more confident, calm, and competent presenter! This book will equip you with techniques that you can use to manage your speaking anxiety and enhance your confidence.

This book is divided into six chapters: Chapter 1 describes speaking anxiety, how it shows itself, its negative effects, and how you can appear less nervous. Chapter 2 describes the main theories about why people feel anxious when speaking and, importantly, offers you several specific techniques to reduce speaking anxiety and bolster your confidence. Chapter 3 explores how focusing on your audience’s needs and connecting your content to them can reduce your anxiety and make your presentations more compelling. Next, Chapter 4 provides techniques and guidance on how to better remember your presentation content. Chapter 5 teaches how to resist and stop some self-defeating beliefs and behaviors that perpetuate anxiety. Finally, Chapter 6 addresses how to put all this information to work for you by creating your own anxiety management plan.

A glossary is included that will explain the more technical, scientific terms found in the book (these terms appear in *italics*), along with five appendixes. Appendix A suggests techniques for managing anxiety that comes from audiences not immediately present for your speech (e.g., conference calls, web presentations). Appendix B gives additional suggestions for those who are not native English speakers. Appendix C provides two effective techniques for reducing verbal disfluencies, such as “um’s” and “uh’s.” Appendix D addresses how to feel confident during a question and answer session. Finally, Appendix E summarizes the anxiety management techniques presented (these techniques appear in **bold** throughout the book).

As you read, you will come across several “**Try this**” opportunities designed to help you put the techniques into practice. Many of the techniques ask you to reflect and then act on the suggestions made. Take your time and determine what works for you. Some of these techniques need to be used over an extended period to be effective and for you to be comfortable with them.

Last, each chapter ends with a summary of **Key Take Aways** along with an **Activity** designed to help you put chapter concepts into practice.
Please be warned that some of the techniques presented in this book seem to contradict each other. For example, one technique for reducing speaking anxiety suggests that you think optimistically about exciting events or activities after your presentation, while another one asks that you focus solely on the present moment. Ultimately, you will choose the techniques that work best for you, and you will figure out how to implement them in a way that is meaningful and helpful to you.