

Overcoming Stage Fright

New teachers as well as seasoned veterans can get nervous or worried before getting up in front of a class. It could be the beginning of a new semester, and you are excited about starting up after break. It could be that you've had some rough times and you are worried this day might also be rough. Whatever the reason, it helps to have some techniques to help you relax.

Move, laugh, and breathe. Before class, release nervous energy by jumping up and down 15 times in the bathroom. It will make you laugh. Shake your limbs to release nervous tension. Breathe slowly and deeply from the belly with your hands on the back of your hips.

"Power pose" for two minutes. After leaping up 72 stairs in front of the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the film *Rocky*, Sly Stallone raises his fists in what Harvard professor Amy Cuddy calls the power pose. As HuffingtonPost.com explains: "Cuddy's research... has shown that adopting the body language associated with dominance for just 120 seconds is enough to create a 20 percent increase in testosterone and a 25 percent decrease in the stress hormone cortisol. In other words, adopting these postures makes a person feel more powerful."

Deposit Easter eggs into your curriculum. Dreading students' negative response to a lesson that is conceptually confusing? Plant some surprises in the lesson for you and the class to look forward to: a slide featuring Ryan Gosling, popcorn, an energizer, a short video, a Bob Dylan break, or a review game. Playfulness is confidence building and contagious.

Start the class off with a ritual. The first couple minutes of a new class can be the most intimidating. I begin all my classes with 60 seconds of good news. Students report birthdays, new cars, successful surgeries, or relatives returning from Afghanistan. Besides marinating everyone in warm connections, the spotlight is on students, not you.

Reinforce content. Bring ancillary materials: posters, handouts, advance organizers, or a PowerPoint presentation. Don't try to be as verbally gifted as Noam Chomsky—your materials will convey needed content.

Don't cede your center. Avoid interpreting blank student faces as uninterested or angry (see "critical-parent syndrome").

Commit to an emotion. Right before class begins, recall the last time you were happy and excited. When class starts, you'll feel more relaxed and animated.

Count chairs. Counting rhythmically will help keep your adrenaline more regulated.

It's not about you. Remember to concentrate on students learning instead of you performing perfectly.

Lastly, find inspiration in Eleanor Roosevelt's words: "You can gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to

say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'... You must do the thing you cannot do."

(edutopia stage fright)