

# COPING WITH INTERVIEW ANXIETY

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## COPING WITH “STAGE FRIGHT” AND PROJECTING CONFIDENCE

If you experience some degree of "stage fright" or nervousness that actually affects your performance in an interview in some way, then congratulations, you are a normal human being! As you participate in more interviews, you will experience less anxiety, but if you are a novice, it may be helpful to know some ways to manage your fears.

**Why Stage Fright Occurs & How to Respond:** Even very gregarious, extroverted, confident individuals experience some degree of nervousness from time to time in interviews. This is because nervousness can be caused by several factors which are not necessarily remedied by “the gift of gab.” Fear of failure, self-evaluation resulting in failure, fear of the unknown, and a highly critical self-image are the most common reasons that individuals freeze-up, draw blanks, perspire, stammer, talk too quickly, or say things they didn't originally intend to say. The physical responses to psychological stimuli are usually involuntary, so the best way to tackle stage fright is to follow two important strategies: 1) reduce the likelihood of succumbing to one of the common psychological stimuli and 2) learn how to control the physical responses to stage fright if it occurs during an interview.

**Preventing the Psychological Stimuli the Cause Anxiety:** List your fears on paper, taking care to be as specific as possible. Realize that for each specific fear, there is a way of coping or managing. Next to each fear, list a positive counter statement. You will find that some fears are simply irrational ones – you should at least recognize them as such and replace them with positive beliefs.

The interview will be a failure unless the interviewer is enthusiastic and seems to be impressed by me.	Not all interviewers are pleasant and enthusiastic. Some are stone-faced and others are just exhausted. I will simply be myself and act warm and confident no matter what reaction I think I perceive from the interviewer.
I'm going to go blank.	I have practiced several times and rehearsed answers to the more difficult questions. I am prepared to give comprehensive answers and to ask good questions of the interviewer.
The interviewer will lose interest in me as soon as he or she finds out that I'm not in the top 20% of the class.	Law students and interviewed and hired for many different reasons other than grades. I have researched the employers with whom I am interviewing and have learned the ways that my strengths might be particularly useful to them. I am going to emphasize those strengths as much as I can. I have also thought about the impact of my GPA/class rank and have rehearsed ways to steer the conversation back to my strengths if the interviewer inquires about my grades.
I can't handle the tension of interviews!	Even though I feel nervous and uncomfortable, I am able to cope with this situation. I will not let this tension get the best of me.
The interviewer will ask me a question that exposes my ignorance.	I have conducted thorough research, and I have done a mock interview and reviewed my notes. I am prepared for any reasonable question.
I don't stand a chance because everyone else being interviewed is better than I am (better grades, moot court success, more leadership experience, etc.)	Comparing myself to other people is not constructive, nor is it realistic. I should concentrate on my own strengths, and I should focus on my interview, not on other people. I can't predict how they will perform in an interview, nor can I predict how the interviewer will react to me.
I'm afraid my hands will shake and my voice will crack.	My nervous energy will likely go away after the first few minutes of the interview. If it does not, I will simply bear with my body and focus instead on the interviewer and on the questions and answers.

**Re-conceptualize the Role of the Interviewer:** One very successful technique of controlling negative self-images is to re-conceptualize the role of the interviewer as an information-gatherer rather than as a critic. While it is true that interviewers must work within the hiring criteria of their firm, they are also acting as recruiting agents and are instructed to look for individuals who have strengths in particular areas needed by departments within the firm. If you are aware of the employer's needs and are conscious that you have strengths in those areas, you should think of the interview as an opportunity to provide information about your strengths to the interviewer. At all costs, do NOT think of the interviewer as someone who has X-ray vision and is able to see all your weaknesses at once. You are in control of the information you supply, and the way in which you supply that information.

**Build Your Confidence Through Preparation & Practice:** This is the number one way to ensure that you are able to realistically approach the interview. Take away some of the fear of the unknown and fear of failure by rehearsing answers to your questions with a friend or arrange to have a mock interview through Career Services. Do your research on the employer. We highly recommend that you take advantage of this service to get specific, individualized feedback on your particular interview style. You will gain valuable experience and confidence.

**Practice Positive Visualization:** If you ever participated as an athlete in either team sports or as an individual competitor, then you know that visualizing success and developing a positive psyche can often be instrumental in maximizing your physical performance. The concept is the same for interviewing. When preparing for the interview, do not let yourself think about or imagine failure. When you begin to have negative thoughts, replace them with a positive scenario such as the ones you have written above. Rehearse these positive scenarios in your mind several times a day, especially on the day of your interview. Imagine the interview scenario. Picture, instead of a scowling or bored interviewer, someone who is genuinely interested in learning about you and picture yourself giving the kinds of answers you want to deliver. Build into your scenarios contingency plans. Picture what you will do or how you will handle the situation if you do draw a blank or if you encounter a period of silence. Imagine how you will respond if the interviewer seems bored or even brusque or rude.

## **NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION & “STAGE FRIGHT”**

**Eye Contact:** Direct, sustained eye contact is very important. It conveys confidence, sincerity, truthfulness, and interest in the employer. Some job candidates manifest their anxiety by looking down at the ground or at their resume, around the room, at the interviewer's hands or paper, and generally avoid looking the interviewer in the eye. Make a conscious effort to maintain eye contact instead.

**Posture & Gestures:** Rest your hands lightly on the chair or on your resume folder, where the interviewer can see them. It does not really matter if you tremble or shake slightly – this will go away after the first rush of adrenalin subsides. However, you should make a deliberate effort to avoid playing with hair or jewelry – these are signs of nervousness that can actually be distracting to the interviewer and may also make you seem insecure. Additionally, avoid tapping your feet or shifting around in your chair too much.