

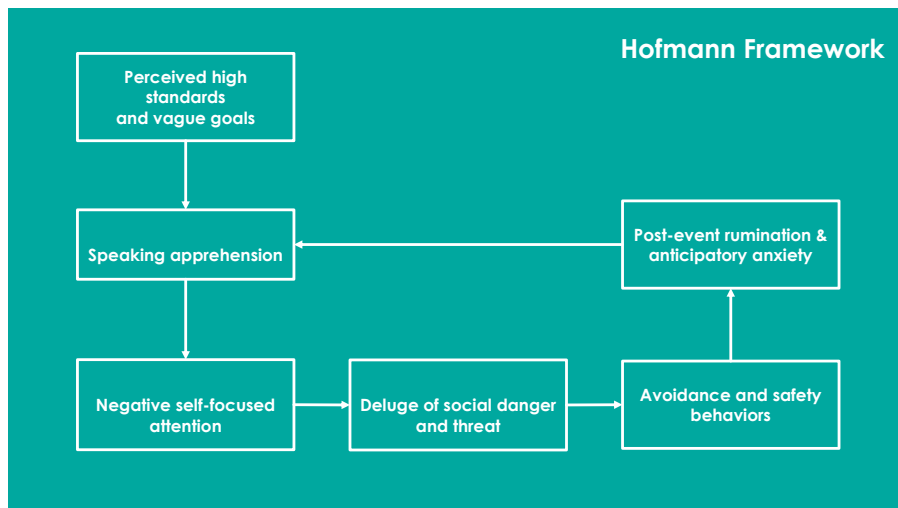
Public Speaking Anxiety Cheat Sheet

Framework and Key Concepts by Dr. Cheryl Mathews

Practice is not gritting your teeth and enduring the pain. It's going into the practice situation with new coping strategies. Review these new coping strategies below as often as possible and get them firmly embedded in your mind!

The Hofmann Framework

Study and memorize this process! Study each box and think of ways to reverse each of the events. The more you reverse, the more you reduce your anxiety. The framework is based on research with thousands of people with social/public speaking anxiety.



What are the TWO THINGS that kick-start this whole painful, self-defeating process?

1. **Perfectionistic standards.** Work on letting go of unrealistic standards. This shift doesn't happen overnight – the idea is to become aware of your perfectionistic standards and begin to make mental shifts. Ultimately, **don't expect perfection from yourself.** Do the best you can and then give yourself permission to be human and make some mistakes. If you think you have to be

calm and confident at all times (perfectionistic standard), reframe that belief to “I don’t need to be perfectly calm and confident all the time to be happy and successful in life. Anxiety is like cold, hunger and fatigue – they are inconvenient and annoying bodily sensations that I can’t completely eradicate but I can manage and function with them. I can have a happy, successful life full of loving relationships and have some anxiety.”

2. **Unclear goals.** Instead of going into the public speaking situation with the goal “I want the audience to like me,” go in with the goal “I need to make 3 key points” or “I am successful if I communicate my message and if the audience understands what I’m trying to say. I will focus on speaking clearly and speak at an appropriate speed so my audience understands my message.” You may want to pause to give your audience time to absorb what you’re trying to say. You may also want to check in with your audience at times and ask if they are following and understand what you’re saying.

What is happening during self-focused attention?

- **You are continually scanning your body for symptoms.** This creates “cognitive overload” and doesn’t allow you to focus on the task at hand (speaking). This is one of the reasons your mind goes blank. Speaking is challenging enough and continual scanning takes your attention away from speaking. **Before speaking, take a moment to center your mind and focus on your message** - this will take your mind off your symptoms. Also, remind yourself that some anxiety symptoms will happen (first fear) and they are normal.
- **You are continually scanning your performance and negatively evaluating yourself.** Yep...more cognitive overload! This also causes a deluge of social threat and danger. This deluge of social threat releases more adrenaline in your body which creates more symptoms which then sets off more alarms which creates more adrenaline and more intense symptoms...it’s a self-perpetuating cycle. Ultimately, fear spirals into panic. How can you change this horrible cycle? When you **become aware that you are negatively evaluating yourself,**

reframe that self-talk with kind and compassionate words for yourself. Treat yourself like a vulnerable child who needs help – reach out to yourself gently and kindly. Work on becoming comfortable with the way you are - including your imperfections in performance situations.

Look for places to jump in and begin to make small shifts throughout this process. Ponder this! Find ways to reverse every step in this process.

Key points:

- You are more critical toward yourself than other people are toward you. Therefore, it is important that you become comfortable with the way you are - including your imperfections in performance situations.
- You won't succeed at perfection. You'll be a lot happier in life if you expect and accept imperfection and mistakes.
- People do not expect as much from you as you think they do.
- Define clear goals for yourself during a speaking situation, e.g. "I want to communicate my message clearly". Did you achieve your goal? Use this to determine whether the situation was successful.
- Understand, but do not engage in, anxious feelings and thoughts. Instead, direct your attention toward your message in order to successfully complete the speaking task.
- Major social mishaps with serious consequences are rare. Minor social mishaps are normal and happen all the time. Even if a social encounter objectively did not go well, it just doesn't matter that much.
- You have more control over your anxious feelings than you think. Your feeling of anxiety is a very private experience; other people typically cannot see the extent of your racing heart, your sweaty palms, or your shaky knees. You will realize that you overestimate how much other people can see what's going on in your body.
- Your actual speaking performance is not nearly as bad as you think it is.

- Using avoidance strategies (either active avoidance or more subtle safety behaviors) is part of the reason why anxiety is so persistent and tends to spread to other social/speaking situations.
- Ruminating about past situations does no one any good. What happened, happened! Ruminating only makes it worse and makes it harder to feel comfortable in future speaking situations.
- This cycle causes anticipatory anxiety which “primes the pump” and elevates your anxiety the next time you speak. **If you want to reduce your anticipatory anxiety, start by reversing each of the events in this cycle.**

Core Concepts

Anxiety is not bad

The wrong way to think about anxiety	The right way to think about anxiety
Any anxiety is bad	Some anxiety is normal and fine. Anxiety is like cold and hunger – it can be an inconvenient and uncomfortable bodily sensation but you can function with it.
Any symptoms are bad	Symptoms are normal and fine – I just need to practice to bring the symptoms into a manageable range.
Zero anxiety is my goal	I can function with some anxiety and I expect some anxiety. Success is not how much anxiety I have. I’m successful if I meet my goals.

Anxiety exists on a continuum

Anxiety is not all or nothing – it’s not “on” or “off.” A good way to think of it is on a continuum from 0-10 where zero means no anxiety and 10 means the highest anxiety you can imagine. Your goal should not be to have zero anxiety (“off”). Your goal should be to have manageable anxiety (0-7). **Anxiety is similar to cold, hunger and fatigue.**

They are inconvenient bodily sensations, but they are part of life. You aren't going to get rid of them. Cold, hunger and fatigue also happen on a continuum, and yet you've learned to live with, and manage, those bodily sensations. You can do the same with anxiety. Expect, accept and allow anxiety to happen. You can function within manageable levels.

Anxiety goes up and down in predictable ways.

Anxiety goes up when we allow ourselves to think fearful self-talk. It goes down when we reframe our self-talk to be more realistic and logical. For example, changing our belief from "Others are better than me" to something more realistic and logical such as "Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. I have skills that are stronger than many people. There is always going to be someone that is stronger in a specific area than me and some that are weaker. That's OK! It all evens out. We all bring our specific strengths to the table. I don't have to be better at everything to be a valuable human being."

#3 Anxiety goes up and down in predictable ways. It depends what you're paying attention to!

See Participant Guide:
Core Beliefs and Automatic Thoughts
Page 20-21

The diagram illustrates the relationship between self-talk and fear levels during a speech. On the left, a man stands at a podium, with a thought bubble above him that says "I'll make a fool of myself." To his right is a line graph. The y-axis is labeled "Fear Level" with "High" at the top and "Low" at the bottom. The x-axis is labeled "During your speech". The graph shows a line that starts at a low point, rises to a peak, falls to a trough, rises to a second peak, and then falls to a second trough. This represents the fluctuating nature of anxiety during a speech.

Look at the negative core beliefs and automatic thoughts below. Which ones do you have? How can you reframe them to be more realistic and logical?

Negative core beliefs about yourself and others (page 20)

Social standards are excessively high:

- I must never show signs of anxiety or weakness
- If I show signs of anxiety, I'm incompetent
- I must be calm, cool, and collected at all times
- I must be flawless and perfect
- If I make a mistake, I'm an idiot
- I need to be funny, witty and charming
- I need to be the life of the party, and if I'm not, something's wrong with me
- I must be confident and sharp at all times

if you perform in a certain way = bad things happen:

- Feeling anxious = looking anxious
- Looking nervous = looking foolish
- If I speak, I will look foolish
- Blushing = looking stupid
- Being rejected = being alone forever
- If I express my opinion, I will be rejected
- Not getting this job = never getting a good job
- If I go on a date, I will be disliked

General negative beliefs about yourself:

- Other people are better than me
- I'm unlikable
- I'm a failure
- I'm an idiot
- Something is wrong with me
- I'm not good enough

Goal: Spot self-defeating beliefs that get in the way of your goals and dispute them

Negative automatic thoughts when speaking

- "I should not be feeling any fear. I should have zero fear in speaking situations"
- "Fear symptoms are bad - if my heart beats faster or if I blush, something is wrong. People will notice and think less of me"
- "Uh oh, I'm going to make a fool of myself"
- "Something horrible is going to happen"
- "People won't like me"
- "If I make a mistake, people will laugh at me"
- "If I can't do this perfectly, I'm a failure"
- "I should know the answer to everything. If I don't know the answer, [this bad thing] will happen"

Goal: Spot self-defeating thoughts that get in the way of your goals and dispute them

First fear and second fear

First fear is that first wave of adrenaline that gets released into your body. This is normal and to be expected. It's a small dose and you can handle it. You can function with this level of adrenaline.

Your nervous system wants to go back to homeostasis (balance) as quickly as possible which means that first fear adrenaline will dissipate from your body within seconds if

you don't get in it's way. Expect, accept, and allow first fear to happen. Don't fight first fear because fighting it is what makes it escalate.

First fear is not what you should be fearing! Second fear is what causes problems for us and makes anxiety escalate out of the manageable levels. **Second fear is that additional adrenaline that piles on top of first fear.** It's caused by fighting first fear (thinking "OMG first fear is bad and I shouldn't be having ANY fear") and by focusing on **horrible imaginary scenarios that could happen** ("OMG what if I panic, what if I make a fool of myself, I'm about to be horribly humiliated in public"). Second fear is frightening and causes more adrenaline to be released in your body, which causes more alarms to go off and more adrenaline is released. It's a self-perpetuating cycle and quickly spirals out of control.

First fear is like a fun ride over a small wave! The birds are singing, the skies are blue, the sun is shining! You can turn first fear into excitement and fun. Once second fear starts, the speaking experience becomes horrible and painful.

6 Ingredients for managing fear (Dr. Zane)

- EXPECT, ALLOW, AND ACCEPT THAT FIRST FEAR WILL ARISE
- WHEN FIRST FEAR COMES, STOP, WAIT, AND LET IT BE
- FOCUS ON YOUR GOAL AND YOUR MESSAGE. DO MANAGEABLE THINGS IN THE PRESENT
- LABEL YOUR LEVEL OF FEAR FROM 0 - 10. WATCH IT GO UP AND DOWN AND ANALYZE IT
- FUNCTION WITH FEAR. APPRECIATE YOUR ACHIEVEMENT
- EXPECT, ALLOW, AND ACCEPT THAT FIRST FEAR WILL REAPPEAR

Don't fight first fear. Do the opposite!

Fighting first fear is what makes fear escalate. Do the opposite of fighting. Let the symptoms happen. Expect, accept and allow the symptoms to happen. First fear is a little wave - it will pass quickly if you focus on your message instead of focusing on imaginary scenarios.

Avoidance is like pouring fuel on the fire

Avoidance is what keeps your anxiety alive. The key to overcoming public speaking anxiety is gradual desensitization where you are facing your fear and learning that it is not dangerous (and can be fun). The key is not overwhelming yourself but exposing yourself to fearful situations in a step-by-step fashion.

Safety behaviors

Safety behaviors are subtle avoidance behaviors. The goal of practice is to teach your brain that there is true safety in social and speaking situations period! Subtle avoidance teaches your brain the wrong thing, and keeps you stuck in the fear in the long-term. Right now you think that speaking situations are survivable only with the right combination of luck and avoidance. During practice sessions you want your brain to learn that the situation is unconditionally safe, period. Your brain also has to believe that you did it without any help from outside forces.

It's easy to confuse baby steps with safety behaviors. **Do** use gradual baby steps to desensitize. But while you are desensitizing, **don't** distract yourself from the anxiety – feel the anxiety and watch it go down on its own. Don't rely long-term on "outside props" like medication, alcohol or drugs as this will teach you that you can't do it on your own.

Right before you practice, center your mind

Practice is not gritting your teeth and enduring the pain. It's going into the practice situation with new coping strategies and this new "tool belt."

Start with the key "building blocks" in this cheat sheet. Once you understand the framework and key concepts, you can begin to add other anxiety management techniques such as meditation, breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, turning anxiety into excitement. I've read forums where someone asks "how do I overcome public speaking anxiety" and someone will answer "meditate" or "breathe" or "take beta blockers." These things on their own won't make the transformative change you're looking for. The building blocks above will make the transformative change. Once you have those firmly in place, you can add meditation, breathing and other techniques.

These are the beneficial signposts of change that you should be looking for as you go through the LAB:

- You'll have a chance to get more comfortable with anxiety so that you don't define anxiety as a disaster in and of itself
- You'll learn that it's possible to achieve your goals even when you feel anxiety
- You'll experience how it feels to speak when you don't use anxiety as a measure of your performance
- You'll begin to redefine the experience of anxiety itself – from the idea that anxiety is bad and that having it means you're a failure to the idea that anxiety is simply an unpleasant and inconvenient symptom that doesn't need to define you or be self-defeating.

The science behind transformative change

- **The Law of Habituation (exposures).** The more you do something, the less you fear it. Imagine having to introduce yourself to a group. This is a

situation that scares many people with public speaking anxiety. Now imagine introducing yourself several times a day. That experience would become repetitious and boring and your anxiety would go down. This is the idea with the LAB and joining public speaking practice clubs (Toastmasters, SpeakMeister). Habituation happens when you speak in front of others frequently.

- **Extinction.** Your brain makes an association between two things. For example, public speaking and danger/pain. Your brain also associates bodily symptoms with danger/pain. Reverse this process using “extinction” where repeated exposures to public speaking show you through personal experience that public speaking is not dangerous. This allows your brain to create a new association “public speaking does not equal danger/pain”. Old learning is overwritten by new learning.
- **Self-Efficacy.** By facing your fears, you learn to replace “I can’t” with “I can.” When you face a fear without avoiding or retreating, you start to realize that you are stronger, more capable, and more resilient than you thought you were.
- **New Perspectives.** People with excessive fears tend to make faulty interpretations. For example, someone might view getting embarrassed or nervous as a sign of personal failure. When we learn new ways of thinking and face our fears, we learn a different way of interpreting things. Our successful experiences correct our faulty way of thinking and serve as a basis for creating new meanings and interpretations. For example the realization that public speaking can actually be rewarding and pleasant, and that some feelings of embarrassment and anxiety are not the end of the world.

As you go through this workshop you’ll find yourself getting used to situations (habituation), overwriting previously learned associations (extinction), feeling more confident in your abilities (self-efficacy), and creating new interpretations and meanings of things that were once frightening (new perspectives).

Key Success Factors for Exposures

- Frequency
- Duration
- Variety of situations
- Ideal if anxiety in the 4-6 range. Experience first fear going down naturally and quickly