

Communicating Without Apprehension

Communication apprehension (CA) for students is normal. It may stem from a lack of experience in the type of communication you're using or a lack of knowledge going into a presentation. Symptoms may include a fast heartbeat, dry mouth, general feeling of anxiety, or negative thoughts.

There are varied techniques that may help alleviate a student's negative experiences. CA relief techniques do not have a one-size-fits-all approach. Those utilizing the techniques need to decide first how they experience anxiety, try techniques often and repeatedly, and utilize more than one technique. Examples of techniques include skill training and leadership assistance; diaphragmatic breathing (outlined below); systematic desensitization; muscle relaxation techniques such as pilates or yoga; cognitive restructuring (outlined below); positive visualization; and distress mechanisms. Visit or refer students to the UNO Speech Center for more in-depth training and support on these CA issues.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Known as "belly breathing", this technique uses the diaphragm, a muscle that can be trained to more effectively open our lungs.

Diaphragmatic breathing is essential for engaging in meditation, reducing stress levels, lowering blood pressure, and regulating bodily processes.

1

Get comfy! You can sit, stand, or lie down.

2

Relax your shoulders, roll them away from your ears.

3

Place hands on your chest and stomach.

4

Breathe in until you can't take in more air.

5

Imagine blowing through a straw as you slowly exhale.

6

Relax and repeat.

Cognitive Restructuring and Imagery

- Turn those self-degrading comments into positive affirmations. For example, "I'm going to sound stupid." can become "I put in the work and know the material."
- Identify irrational fears (if I mess up, I will fail) AND rationalize that anxiety!
- To boost confidence, imagine your speech or speaking event/conversation going the way you intend it to with a positive response from the audience!

References:

- Dwyer, K. K. (2000). The Multidimensional Model: Teaching Students to Self-manage High Communication Apprehension by Self-selecting Treatments. *Communication Education*.
- Fremouw, W. J., & Scott, M. D. (1979). Cognitive Restructuring: An Alternative Method for Treatment of Communication Apprehension. *Communication Education*.
- Additional references available upon request.



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