



Performance Stress?

We all know the feeling of sickness in our stomach before an important presentation or examination. We have all experienced the sweaty palms, the raised heart rate, and the sense of agitation that we feel as these events approach. We have probably all also experienced how much worse this becomes when things go wrong in the run up to an event.

As such, it is worth preparing a *Performance plan*. This is a pre-prepared plan that helps you to deal effectively with any problems or distractions that may occur, and perform in a positive and focused frame of mind.

To prepare your Performance Plan, begin by making a list all of the steps that you need to do from getting prepared for a performance through to its conclusion (i.e class presentation).

Start far enough in advance to sort out any equipment problems. List all of the physical and mental steps that you need to take, for example:

- Prepare and check your equipment (i.e. your laptop), and repair or replace if it does not work and you do not have any other options;
- Make travel arrangements if needed;

Next, work through each of these steps. Think though and write down:

- Everything that could reasonably go wrong at each step with equipment and arrangements; and paper work
- Any distractions and negative thinking that could undermine your confidence or stop you having a positive, focused frame of mind at the start of and during your performance.

Work through all of the things that could go wrong. Look at the likelihood of the problem occurring. Many of the things you have listed may be extremely unlikely. Where appropriate, strike these out and ignore them from your planning.

Look at each of the remaining contingencies. These will fall into three categories:

1. Things you can eliminate by appropriate preparation, including making back-up arrangements and acquiring appropriate additional or spare equipment;
2. Things you can manage by avoiding unnecessary risk; and
3. Things you can manage with a pre-prepared action or with an appropriate Stress management technique

For example, if you are depending on using a laptop or projector, you can arrange for a back up projector and laptop to be available, and/or print off paper copies of the

presentation in case all else fails. You can leave earlier than strictly necessary so that you have time for serious travel delays. If you are forced to wait before your event in an uncomfortable or unsuitably distracting place, prepare the relaxation techniques you can use to keep a calm, positive frame of mind.

Also, use thought awareness, rational thinking and positive thinking skills to prepare the positive thoughts that you will use to protect and build your confidence.

Managing stress gives you the confidence that comes from knowing you are as well prepared for an event as is practically possible to be. It also helps you to avoid the unpleasant stresses that come from poor preparation, meaning that you can deliver your performance in a relaxed, positive and focused frame of mind.