

Learning to Relax

Many people experience anxiety before a performance or presentation. Practicing relaxation techniques can help you manage your anxiety. Two of the most convenient techniques are *muscular relaxation* and *relaxation imagery*. Both initially require a quiet place and a time when you will not be interrupted.

Go through the following steps, in order:

1. Lower or turn off bright lights.
2. Take a few slow, deep breaths.
3. With your eyes closed, tense and then relax your muscles in this order:

Face

Neck and shoulders

Biceps and triceps

Forearms

Wrists and hands

Chest

Abdomen

Buttocks/hamstrings

Quadriceps

Calves

Ankles and feet



When you tense your muscles, inhale. When you relax them, exhale.

4. Once your muscles are relaxed, imagine a peaceful setting in which you feel calm. Learn to hold this image for as long as you can.
5. Imagine the space where you will give your performance or presentation. If you feel any sign of anxiety, return to the preceding image.
6. Continue to imagine the space, and then add yourself to the picture. See yourself calmly seated, enjoying listening to others speak.
7. See yourself writing down the requirements of an assigned performance or presentation. See yourself involved with the various stages of preparation, including seeing yourself practice.
8. See yourself waiting to be called on, alert but not anxious.
9. See yourself speaking energetically, gesturing and using your eyes, face and voice.
10. See your peers and your instructor listening attentively.
11. See yourself concluding and your audience responding with genuine applause.

Practice this series of steps at least twice a week for between 15 and 25 minutes each time. Remember that any time you begin to feel anxious during this exercise, replace whatever image you're holding with a pleasant and relaxing one.