



NAIL YOUR NERVES

SIMPLE TIPS TO HELP YOU
STAY CALM AND SPEAK WITH IMPACT

A Free eBook from



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INTRODUCTION

Picture this: you step onto a stage, all eyes on you. Your heart pounds, your hands feel clammy, and your mouth suddenly resembles the Sahara. Your brain, despite years of knowledge and preparation, chooses this moment to go blank.

Sound familiar? You're not alone.

This is your body's fight-or-flight response —a primal survival mechanism designed to protect you from danger.

Unfortunately, your nervous system doesn't differentiate between **"delivering a presentation"** and **"being chased by a lion."**

FACT CHECK

Imagine an impala in the African bush, suddenly aware that a predator is stalking the herd. What does it do? It braces – then runs!

That's the fight or flight instinct, an evolutionary survival mechanism controlled by the autonomic nervous system (ANS).



When the brain perceives a threat—whether it's a predator in the wild or an audience full of expectant faces—the amygdala, the brain's fear centre, signals the release of adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones prime the body for action: heart rate increases, muscles tense, and digestion slows to divert energy toward immediate survival.

For impalas, this instinct leads to a burst of physical movement—running or shaking off tension after the danger has passed. However, humans often suppress these natural responses in high-stakes situations like public speaking, leaving adrenaline trapped in the body. This can result in shaky hands, a dry mouth, brain fog, or the sensation of freezing in place.

I've been using my voice professionally for decades and yes - even I get nervous before a presentation. This manifests as rushing and rattling through my lines, as if getting the words out quickly will somehow make me feel better!

Actors will tell you that stage fright is normal. And it is. The difference between actors and everyone else is that stage fright is discussed openly. Actors aren't afraid to admit the impact of performance nerves, nor the techniques they use to channel the nerves into something more positive.

So here is my eBook gift to you: a range of techniques that I have used with clients (and on myself) to help with those dreaded nerves.

THIS EBOOK INCLUDES:

- ➔ Techniques to help you manage your nerves
- ➔ Case Studies of clients I've helped (names have been changed).
- ➔ Fact Checks – I believe it's important to know what I base my work on. I like to demonstrate that the science behind breathing techniques is sound, and I draw from an eclectic range of influences which makes my work unique – including theatrical notions of space, architectural theory, cross-cultural influences and leadership theory.
- ➔ Further resources if you are inspired to dig a little deeper.

So, let's get started

01 WHY AM I TERRIFIED OF SPEAKING?



When we perceive a threat, our body floods with adrenaline and cortisol—hormones that prepare us to fight or flee. This results in:

- ➔ **Increased heart rate** – More oxygen to muscles, just in case you need to run.

- **Dry mouth** – Saliva production slows down because digestion takes a back seat.
- **Shaky hands and legs** – Muscles primed for action.
- **Shallow breathing** – Quick oxygen intake to fuel the escape.
- **Brain fog or going blank** – The prefrontal cortex (responsible for thinking) is hijacked by the amygdala (responsible for survival).

I've worked with clients who experience symptoms that are the stuff of nightmares, like Steve below.

CASE STUDY:

Steve's experience of presentation anxiety tapped into arachnophobia. Not that he was particularly afraid of spiders in real life, but he described the feeling of stage fright 'like a spider is crawling all over my feet'. Pretty unpleasant!!

I asked him to give the spider an ordinary name. So the spider became 'Dylan'.

Now that the spider was safely anthropomorphised, Steve could ask Dylan to please sit in the corner while he got on with his presentation. We practised a little conversation he could have with Dylan.

"I know you'd like my attention, Dylan, but right now I'm busy. So go over there and wait until I've finished please".

"But I don't want to. I prefer to stay on your foot and annoy you."

"You can do that later. Right now, I need to focus, so please sit down and be quiet."

By the time 'later' came around, Steve had forgotten all about Dylan!

The Psychology of Stage Fright:

At its core, presentation anxiety often stems from the fear of being judged, exposed, or "not good enough."

- "What if they think I'm incompetent?"
- "What if I forget what to say?"
- "I don't belong here."

This is classic imposter syndrome, a condition where even highly competent individuals feel like frauds. The irony? Most people in your audience have experienced the same fears.

The “Spotlight Effect”

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Research shows that we overestimate how much people notice our mistakes.

This is called the spotlight effect—we believe the audience is scrutinising our every move, when in reality, they’re often

preoccupied with their own thoughts (or mobile phones!). With all those eyes looking at us, we feel like we've been thrown into the lion's den ... it's that prey and predator thing again!

Reframing Nervousness as Energy

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Instead of seeing nerves as a sign of failure, what if you viewed them as fuel?

- Actors expect stage fright and learn to work with it.
- Athletes channel pre-game jitters into performance energy.
- Speakers convert anxiety into presence and connection.

By shifting your mindset from “I’m nervous” to “I’m energised”, you engage the same physiological response—but through a positive lens.

The **Space** **Perspective Shift**

Instead of feeling small and scrutinised, this exercise helps you own the space by mentally transforming yourself into a source of light—growing, illuminating, and connecting.

- ➔ **Stand in the Space** – If possible, position yourself where you will be speaking.
- ➔ **Expand Your Awareness** – Take a deep breath and imagine turning on a lightbulb inside you.
- ➔ **Engage with the Space** – As you breathe, visualise the light expanding beyond your body, gradually filling the room.
- ➔ **Redefine the Audience** – See them not as observers, but as part of the environment that your light naturally reaches.
- ➔ **Become a Growing Lightbulb** – Each inhale brightens your presence. Let the light extend from your chest, filling the space without force—just like a room lights up when you switch on a lamp.
- ➔ **Speak in Expansion** – Practise saying a few words while maintaining this illuminated awareness, ensuring your voice carries through the space.



FACT CHECK

Michael Chekhov's concept of Radiation encourages speakers to expand their energy outward, engaging with both space and audience.

Similarly, in architectural spatial awareness, a room is not just a passive backdrop; it influences how we feel, move, and communicate.

Shifting perspective from "performing in a space" to "inhabiting space" fosters confidence and ease.

Your nervous system isn't broken!

It's simply misinterpreting public speaking as a life-or-death event.

By seeing space as your ally, you can start retraining your body and mind to feel safer and more confident in front of an audience.

In the next section, we'll dive into practical techniques — from breathing exercises to physical warm-ups — to help you prepare before stepping onto the stage.

Key Takeaway

**NERVOUSNESS ISN'T THE ENEMY -
IT'S ENERGY. YOUR JOB IS TO
REDIRECT IT, NOT ELIMINATE IT.**

02

PREPARATION TECHNIQUES

Setting the Stage for Confidence

Now that you understand why nerves show up, let's shift focus to how you can prepare yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally before stepping into the spotlight.

Preparation isn't just about scripting your talk—it's about training your body and mind to feel safe in the space so that confidence becomes second nature.

Breathing & Vocal Techniques for Grounding

One of the fastest ways to regulate your nervous system is through breath. The vagus nerve, your body's built-in calm button, responds to slow, intentional exhalations.

This helps override the fight-or-flight response and signals to your body that you are not in danger.



CASE STUDY:

Zara's performance anxiety was so severe she reported feeling the room spinning. Newly promoted to a position where she had to take on speaking assignments, she suffered imposter syndrome and a lack of confidence in her own (considerable) talents.

So we went back to the breath.

I asked Zara to stand at the imagined entrance of her speaking space and complete this sequence:

- Breathe in before entering.
- Exhale as she stepped into the space
- Walk slowly to the speaking spot.
- Pause, take another breath, and then imagine expanding her presence outwards.

Some clients prefer to do this process the other way round, by inhaling as they enter the space. Whatever floats your boat. For Zara, exhaling as she entered the space was more effective.

Try these calming breathing exercises below. It's advisable to start breath work well in advance of a presentation so that you can experience the effects and give yourself time to practice.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

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- Place one hand on your belly and the other on your chest.
- Inhale deeply through your nose, sending the breath down into your belly.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, feeling your belly contract.
- Repeat for 3-5 breaths, lengthening the exhale each time.

Hand Breathing Exercise (this is one of my favourites!)



- ➔ Hold one hand up in front of you, fingers spread wide.
- ➔ Use your other index finger to trace up one finger as you inhale.
- ➔ Trace down the other side as you exhale slowly.
- ➔ Repeat for each finger, making your exhale longer than your inhale.
- ➔ Repeat on the other hand.

This mimics the box breathing technique but adds a tactile, grounding element. You can hide your hands under a desk or trace your fingers imaginatively.



FACT CHECK

Did you notice that, in both of these exercises, the exhale is lengthened?

When we exhale slowly, we activate the parasympathetic nervous system—the body's natural relaxation response. This system is responsible for calming the heart rate, reducing blood pressure, and lowering cortisol levels (the stress hormone).

Lengthening the exhale also stimulates the vagus nerve, which

plays a key role in shifting the body out of the fight-or-flight state and into a more grounded, calm state. In short, the in-breath energises us, while the out-breath helps us release tension and regain control.

Physical Warm-Ups to Release Tension

When you feel nervous, your body tenses up—especially in the shoulders, neck, and jaw. These areas affect your breath and voice, so releasing tension before speaking is crucial.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- ➔ Start at your feet and tense each muscle group for 5 seconds, then release.
- ➔ Work your way up: calves, thighs, glutes, abdomen, shoulders, hands, jaw.
- ➔ Notice the difference between tension and relaxation—your body starts to soften. It's important to get used to feeling what 'relaxed' feels like!

Gentle Movement to Shake Off Adrenaline

- ➔ Shoulder rolls, neck stretches, and gentle torso twists can help release excess energy.
- ➔ A simple “shake it out” exercise: lightly shake your arms, legs, and shoulders for 10-15 seconds. Be an impala!

Mental Reframing & Visualisation



Your brain doesn't distinguish between real experiences and vividly imagined ones. By visualising yourself succeeding, you help reprogramme your nervous system to feel at ease.

CASE STUDY:

Not all techniques will work for everyone, which is why every single one of my clients receives 100% tailor-made attention. I worked through five or six exercises with Ishaan before we found the one that resonated with him the most.

Ishaan's presentation nerves were severely hampering his ability to present to his team. As a dyslexia sufferer, he had already developed a range of strategies that didn't depend on him reading from the PowerPoint slides, but the nerves still attacked. Ishaan described his mind going blank, which led to him losing his place. Not ideal when you're trying to look professional!

What worked for him in this scenario was Success Loop Visualisation.

I invited Ishaan to close his eyes and imagine stepping onto the stage with confidence, picturing the audience nodding, engaged, and responding positively. He imagined himself speaking with clarity and ease, and being congratulated at the end.

When I checked in with Ishaan after his presentation, he told me that this technique had been a 'game changer'. Wow. What more could I have hoped for?

Final Thoughts

Preparation isn't just about learning your speech—it's about training your nervous system to feel safe, strong, and expansive. When you warm up your breath, body, and mindset, you set yourself up for success before you even speak a word.

In the next chapter, we'll focus on real-time strategies—how to manage nerves in the moment, recover from mistakes, and hold your audience's attention with presence.

Key Takeaway

CONFIDENCE STARTS BEFORE YOU STEP ONTO THE STAGE. USE BREATH, MOVEMENT, AND MINDSET TECHNIQUES TO SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS.

03

PRACTICAL ON-THE-DAY STRATEGIES

Managing Nerves in the Moment

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Even with the best preparation, nerves can still show up. The key is not to eliminate them but to channel them into focus and energy. The following strategies will help you stay present, recover from stumbles, and maintain a strong, engaging presence.

The "5-4-3-2-1" Grounding Technique

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If you feel overwhelmed, this simple sensory-based exercise can bring you back to the present:

- ➔ Name five things you can see around you.
- ➔ Identify four things you can touch (e.g., the floor, your clothes).

- Recognise three things you can hear (e.g., murmurs, your breath).
- Note two things you can smell (or recall a scent you like).
- Acknowledge one thing you can taste (or press your tongue to the roof of your mouth).

This method shifts focus outward, reducing the internal spiral of nerves.

If this feels a bit time-consuming, you can shorten the process by identifying what you can hear closest to you (probably your breath) and what you can hear which is furthest away.

The **Space** "Holding Space" Method

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- Stand tall, feet firmly planted, and take a slow, deep breath.
- Imagine your presence expanding outward like a soft glow.
- Make eye contact with different areas of the audience (or foreheads if eye contact freaks you out).

- ➔ Instead of shrinking, allow yourself to take up space with ease.



FACT CHECK

Back to Michael Chekhov and Radiation, which teaches performers to extend their energy beyond themselves, creating a sense of presence and connection with an audience.

In spatial terms, a speaker isn't just occupying a spot—they are influencing and shaping the environment around them.

SpaceSHIFT's Holding Space method builds on this by encouraging speakers to expand their awareness, soften their focus, and project presence outward, rather than shrinking inward with nerves. This approach fosters confidence, engagement, and a commanding yet open presence.

How to Recover if You Stumble

- ➔ Pause and breathe—the audience won't notice small mistakes unless you react dramatically.
- ➔ Acknowledge and move on—if you forget a point, calmly reframe your words.
- ➔ Laugh if appropriate—humour can humanise you and put the audience at ease.

Body Language & Power Posing

Your body language dictates your confidence more than you realise. The way you hold yourself can enhance or undermine your delivery.

Open Postures vs. Closed Postures

Open Postures

Shoulders back, chest open, arms relaxed = confident and welcoming

Closed Postures

Arms crossed, slouched, fidgeting = nervous and uncertain.

Vocal Strategies for Clarity and Impact

The Power of Pause

- Silence can amplify your message.
- The Japanese concept of "Ma" (intentional space) can increase impact.
- Instead of filling pauses with "um" or "uh," embrace the space.

Pacing and Rhythm Control

- Slow down when making key points.
- Vary tone and tempo to maintain engagement.



FACT CHECK

The Power of the Pause should never be underestimated.

In Japanese aesthetics and philosophy, Ma (間) refers to the intentional space between objects, moments, or sounds. Rather than being seen as emptiness, Ma is a presence in itself—a pause that creates meaning.

In communication, the use of pauses and silence enhances clarity, impact, and authority. Rather than rushing to fill every gap with words, great speakers embrace Ma to allow their message to land, resonate, and invite engagement.

NEXT STEPS

Further Reading & Resources

Books:

- The Confident Speaker – Harrison Monarth & Larina Kase (Overcoming fear, reframing anxiety, and training presence in high-stakes environments)
- Freeing the Natural Voice – Kristin Linklater (Helps speakers connect voice with presence and reduce tension through breath and resonance)
- Presence – Amy Cuddy (Using body language and psychology to manage nerves and project confidence)
- Breathe – James Nestor (An investigation into breathing and how we've been doing it wrong)

Podcasts:

- Think Fast, Talk Smart – Stanford Business (Tackles anxiety around speaking in high-stakes corporate environments)
- Speaking with Confidence – from the BBC's I Can Do It Podcast (Tips from experts on managing nerves and controlling physical tension while speaking)

Invitation to Work with the Author

If you're ready to transform the way you communicate, present, and lead, my coaching and training programmes can provide the tools, insights, and support to help you step into your full presence with confidence.

Space Coaching

A highly personalised approach to developing your executive presence, vocal impact, and communication skills. Whether you're preparing for a high-stakes presentation, looking to refine your leadership presence, or communicate more effectively with others, my tailored coaching sessions will help you unlock your full potential.


Packages include:

- Bespoke Sessions – Every session is uniquely designed around your needs.
- WhatsApp Support – Guidance between sessions for ongoing momentum.
- Coaching Boosters – A 20-minute pre-event session to ensure you feel prepared and confident.
- Practical Resources & Exercises – Tools to strengthen your skills in-between sessions.

This is more than coaching—it's a deep dive into how you hold space, communicate, and connect with others.

Workshops & Training Opportunities



I run immersive workshops based on my **Space**  framework and **HEAR ME ROAR** - a powerful experience designed for women looking to reclaim their voice in leadership and professional settings.

- ➔ **Space**  Corporate Training – Elevating communication, presence, and impact in leadership.
- ➔ **HEAR ME ROAR**– A dynamic workshop for women ready to amplify their voices and step into authority.
- ➔ Regular Workshops in Dubai & beyond – engaging, high-impact training sessions for professionals at all levels.

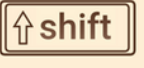
If you're looking to build confidence, speak with impact, and lead with presence, I'd love to work with you.


To Explore Coaching or Training Options. Get In Touch Today!



Josie Campbell is a professional actor, director, and coach specialising in communication, presence, and voice training for corporate and creative professionals. With a background in broadcasting, performance, and facilitation, she designs and delivers transformative training experiences that empower individuals to speak with confidence, authenticity, and impact

...● **Space** See Space Differently ●...

Josie is the creator of **Space**  , an innovative communications framework developed from her research on executive presence during her MA at the Royal Central School of Speech & Drama.

Space  redefines how professionals engage with others by integrating theatrical, somatic, architectural, and cultural perspectives on space.

This methodology has been transformative across industries—from from C-suite to Customer Services — equipping professionals with tools to command a room, navigate high-stakes conversations, and lead with clarity, confidence, and creativity. SPACE isn't just where we stand—it's how we lead, express ourselves, and connect across cultures.

Reclaiming the Power of Your Voice



Alongside SpaceSHIFT, Josie leads **HEAR ME ROAR**, a programme designed for:

- Women in leadership looking to amplify their voices
- Professionals who feel unheard in corporate settings
- Speakers seeking vocal freedom and presence

As a certified 200-hour yoga teacher, Josie frames her work with breath and embodied movement, guiding participants to bring voice and body into alignment. She believes that voice is more than sound—it is presence, space, and energy. Through a fusion of vocal techniques, creative exploration, and deeply personal way.

A core element of this work is the ‘who’ of your voice—its lineage, history, and sonic identity. Our voices carry generations of sound—accents, rhythms, inherited speech patterns, and the silences imposed upon us. With **HEAR ME ROAR**, Josie helps clients explore these influences, dismantle barriers, and reclaim the power of their unfiltered voice.

Corporate & Performance Experience

Josie began her career in broadcasting with the BBC and has worked across diverse industries, including finance, recruitment, banking, insurance, higher education, luxury goods, customer service, and law enforcement. Her expertise has been sought for UK police witness protection training, as well as leadership development programmes for senior executives.

As an actor, Josie’s performance credits include Panadol’s 2025 global advertising campaign and leading roles in award-winning films and stage productions, including Shakespeare’s Will (UK and Dubai tour). She regularly collaborates on Shakespearean film projects with Ellis Jones, former Vice Principal and Head of Acting at RADA.

WORK WITH JOSIE

Josie offers:

- 1:1 Coaching
- Corporate Workshops & Training
- Regular Workshops in Dubai & beyond

To Explore Coaching or Training Opportunities. Get in Touch Today.

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