

## Introduction

**C**ongratulations! You have just received an invitation to talk at an international conference next month at an exotic foreign destination.

Or maybe you've been asked to present your research data at an inter-departmental scientific meeting. Did you say you have to present a business case for your "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to your CEO?

*This is fantastic news – you should be really excited!*

Although you might be dreading the idea right now (you may well be tempted to simply decline the invitation politely), I don't think you should be quite so hasty.

➤ Whatever the scenario, the bottom line is that you have to stand up in front of a group of people, and perform some public speaking.

**Does that idea fill you with dread?** I know exactly what you're going through.

In fact, most people experience some nervousness before giving a presentation. You can't mistake the symptoms: a dry mouth, palpitations, sweaty palms, and a sense of impending doom and destruction! Upto a third of people admit that this fear is a big problem in their professional lives, and some studies have shown that one in every twenty people suffers so badly that it might actually be affecting their career progression.

### ***My own story***

I can remember being absolutely petrified of public speaking tasks during English lessons as a shy teenager at school. I was always the last one to "volunteer" to read aloud a passage from a book or give a speech.

When I left school at 18 and went to university to study medicine I thought that would be the end of public speaking for ever. Can you imagine my horror when I found out that as a medical student too I would be required to give talks and presentations?

One particular presentation stands out in my mind. In December 1995 I was half way through medical school. We were each required to select, research and present the case of an interesting patient that we had seen, to an audience of 30 of my fellow students and our tutors at one of our weekly seminars.

Naturally, I was in denial about this approaching event for several weeks. I stupidly kept putting off the preparation until it was almost too late. And then I found myself panicking and desperately struggling to meet the deadline.

After a few days and nights surviving on black coffee and chocolate, the day of the presentation finally dawned. At 6am I collapsed on my bed in a cold sweat, feeling sick, dizzy and having a racing heart. I somehow managed to calm down and carried myself and my OHP transparencies to the seminar room.