

# Do you fear public speaking more than death?



By [John French](#)

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It was American comedian Jerry Seinfeld who observed: "According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that seem right? That means to the average person, if you have to go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than doing the eulogy."

It seems that Seinfeld's joke was based on a study from the 1977 "Book of Lists." Researchers analysed the 14 worst human fears and asked 3000 US inhabitants to name their greatest fears. The results reveal the percentage of people who had these fears:

1. Speaking before a group - 41 % of people fear this
2. Heights - 32%
3. Insects and bugs - 22%
4. Financial Problems - 22%
5. Deep water - 22%
6. Sickness - 19%
7. Death - 19%
8. Flying - 18%
9. Loneliness - 14%
10. Dogs - 11%

So according to research public speaking and is actually far scarier to most people than the thought of dying. It is no wonder then that so many business people go pale and break out in a cold sweat when asked to present in front of their peers and clients.

Having trained presentation skills for the last 20 years, I get to witness on a daily basis that the fear of public speaking (or [Glossophobia](#)), is merely a perception and a mind-set like all others that can be changed.

The complex fear of public speaking may originate from all or some of the following factors:

1. The horrific ordeal of orals and speeches at school level. What teachers put most children through is tantamount to child abuse.
2. No one really teaches us how to communicate effectively. Corporate communication is a complex combination of psychology and physiology. Once these heightened communication skills are learned, you can feel empowered and communicate effectively through any fear or situation.
3. A bad public speaking experience that has caused trauma and caused an emotional block against future public speaking engagements.
4. A general lack of self-confidence.
5. Not having learned effective public speaking skills.

The irony is that once you have conquered your fear of public speaking, like death it can become the most liberating, empowering and peaceful experience in the world.

In fact, the only other similarity between public speaking and death I can think of is that a poor public speaker has the ability to slowly kill off an audience. I have yet to see a corpse do that!

## ABOUT JOHN FRENCH

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