Nerves before a big moment

Interviews, presentations, exams and other times when it counts.

Nerves before something important are your body getting ready to perform. The pounding heart and the butterflies are the same adrenaline that sharpens your focus and gives you energy. The aim is to do the thing well while nervous. You do not need to feel calm first.

Three useful facts

- **You look calmer than you feel.** Nobody can see your heart rate. Most signs of nerves that feel huge from the inside are barely visible from the outside.
- **The audience is on your side.** Interviewers want to find a good candidate. Listeners want the talk to go well. Nobody is hoping you fail.
- **Nerves peak early.** The first two minutes are the hardest. After that, they nearly always ease.

In the run-up

Preparation that helps

- Practising out loud, not only in your head
- Knowing your opening lines well
- Preparing answers to the questions you dread most
- Checking the practical things: time, place, technology
- Keeping sleep, food and movement steady

Preparation that backfires

- Learning every word by heart
- Rehearsing late into the night
- Planning for every possible disaster
- Asking for reassurance again and again
- Cancelling or calling in sick

On the day

1. Arrive early enough not to rush.
2. Before you start: feet on the floor, and one slow breath out, longer than the breath in.
3. Put your attention on the task and the people, not on yourself. What are they asking? What do they need to hear?
4. If your mind goes blank, pause. Take a sip of water. Look at your notes. Say "Let me come back to that." A pause feels far longer to you than to anyone else.
5. Slow down. Nerves speed everyone up.

Afterwards

- Skip the post-mortem. Going over every moment makes the next time harder.
- Write down three things that went well enough, and one thing you would do differently.
- Give yourself credit for turning up.

> **Note**
> You do not have to get rid of the nerves. You can be nervous and still do it well.

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