



Beating Nerves: A 7-Day Performance Plan.

For students who feel shaky before they speak, and parents who want to help. A week of short daily steps plus a warm-up routine for tournament morning. These are everyday coaching tools, not medical advice.

Nerves are normal

Racing heart, dry mouth and shaky hands are the body getting ready for something that matters. The goal is not to erase nerves but to channel them. Some speakers find that reframing the feeling as 'excited' rather than 'scared' helps.

A note for families

If anxiety is intense, constant or affects sleep, school or daily life, talk with your pediatrician or a licensed professional. This guide covers ordinary performance jitters.

The 7-day plan

Start seven days before your event. Each step takes about 10 to 15 minutes.

DAY	TASK	WHY IT HELPS
7	Run the speech to a mirror or a stuffed animal	Low-stakes first audience
6	Run it for one family member; ask for one thing they liked	Builds confidence from real feedback
5	Practice a recovery line and a slip on purpose	Mistakes feel less scary once rehearsed
4	Record a run and watch once, noticing strengths first	Replaces guesses with facts
3	Perform in the real clothes, standing, with a timer	Rehearse conditions
2	Run for two or three people, light feedback only	Practice with a small crowd
1	One calm run, pack bag, early bedtime	Protect rest

Warm-up routine (8 minutes)

- Breathe (1 minute).** Inhale through the nose for four counts, exhale slowly for six. Repeat.
- Release (1 minute).** Roll shoulders, shake out hands, gently stretch neck.
- Voice (2 minutes).** Hum, then do lip trills, then say a tongue twister such as 'red leather, yellow leather' slowly then fast. Stop if anything feels strained or uncomfortable.
- Open (1 minute).** Stand tall and take up space; relax the jaw.
- Speak (2 minutes).** Say your opening lines at full volume, quietly if you must in the hall.
- Anchor (1 minute).** Say one sentence: 'I know this speech and I have something to share.'

In the room

- ♦ Take one slow breath before you start. A pause looks confident.
- ♦ Plant your feet. Movement should be a choice.
- ♦ Find one friendly face and begin with them.
- ♦ If you blank, pause, breathe, repeat your last phrase.
- ♦ Keep going after a mistake. Judges hear the whole speech, not one word.
- ♦ Finish strong and hold the last pose for a beat.

PROBLEM	TRY THIS
Shaky hands	Plant them at your sides or use a deliberate gesture
Fast speech	Mark pauses in the script and plan a breath after each paragraph
Dry mouth	Sip water beforehand
Mind goes blank	Know your section headings so you can jump in
Negative self-talk	Replace with one neutral fact: 'I practiced this'

After the round

Parents: start with 'I loved watching you,' not a critique. Ask what felt good, then what the student wants to change. Review ballots later, together, looking for patterns across rounds rather than one comment.

- ☐ Slept well the night before
- ☐ Ate a real breakfast
- ☐ Copy of speech and water in the bag
- ☐ Warm-up done
- ☐ Reminder of the one thing to focus on

Want a performance plan for your speaker? Book a free consultation at the link below.

Built from public guidance: Cambridge University Hospitals NHS lip trill exercise leaflet · NSDA Speech and Debate Glossary. Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

Want a plan built around **your** debater?

Book a free consultation. The short intake takes about a minute and opens right away.

BOOK NOW →