

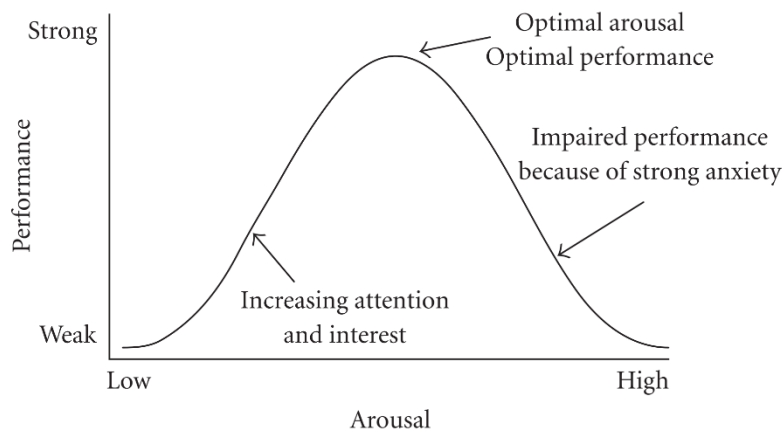
## Dealing with performance anxiety: Just the right amount of nervous

As Mark Twain states: “There are only two types of speakers in the world, the nervous, and the liars”. Knowing it is normal to feel nervous before giving a speech, the question how to deal with it remains.

In short, there are two things you need to know about how to deal with performance anxiety:

### 1. Know that nervousness itself is not a bad thing

In contrary to what you may think, one should not be as relaxed as possible before performing in public. In fact, Yerkes and Dodson, two psychologists, found that individuals reach the optimal performance with a medium level of arousal. Too little arousal led to poor performance, what you might have experienced when not taking something seriously. On the other hand, an overly high level of arousal impairs your performance because it shifts into panic.



From: Diamond, D. M., Campbell, A. M., Park, C. R., Halonen, J., & Zoladz, P. R. (2007). The temporal dynamics model of emotional memory processing: a synthesis on the neurobiological basis of stress-induced amnesia, flashbulb and traumatic memories, and the Yerkes-Dodson law. *Neural plasticity*, 2007.

Notice how I used the word “arousal”, which is a quite neutral, psychological term, instead of nervousness or anxiety. This bodily sensation is what the scientists examined, without interpreting the arousal itself as a good or a bad thing. In fact, you experience the same physiological sensations when you are anxious and stressed as you do when you are very excited or in love. It might help you to reframe these feelings as energy you can channel to make the best of your performance instead of something you need to get rid of. In fact, you want to keep some of it to reach the optimal level of arousal.

### 2. Know how to calm down to the right amount of nervous

If you know your level of arousal is usually way too high and negatively affecting your performance, there are different methods to lower it and use the energy. You could try breathing exercises, meditation or a short unit of movement, like turning on your favorite song and do a dance session.