In surveys of people’s fears, DEATH often ranks Number 2.

Guess what often ranks Number 1?

Yes, public speaking…

What are people afraid of?

Well, basically, embarrassment…

- which could be either physical or mental…
Reducing the Odds of Being Embarrassed

- **Physical**: Have a checklist and be methodical about it.
  - Use the restroom beforehand, have a water bottle with you, check your hair, … whatever.

- **Mental**: Prepare prepare prepare! It’s work!
  - Some preparation tips…
Basic Goals for Any Talk

- You want to appear:
  - Competent
    - You have to do your homework, know related background, organize your material so that it is understandable, spend time practicing (particularly for important talks like job talks).
  - Calm
    - You want to deal with questions without panicking. Also, try to avoid nervous habits and filler words (like “like”). Videotaping yourself can help a lot!
  - Gracious
    - Appear grateful for the opportunity to speak (but don’t gush).
Talk Preparation

Begin by asking yourself:

- What am I trying to accomplish (or teach my audience)?
  - Three major points is about all people can take.
- Who is my audience?
  - This may impact the background you present and how you present the details.

Then create an outline.

- A good talk has good “flow.”
- An old adage:
  - Tell ‘em what you’re gonna tell ‘em.
  - Tell ‘em.
  - Tell ‘em what you told ‘em.
Talk Flow

A typical talk outline for me:

1. Set the stage, i.e., provide context.
2. State a dilemma or driving problem to motivate the work.
3. Provide a broad overview of the solution.
4. Dive into some of the details.
   - Another old adage: A good job talk should lose anyone who’s not an expert in the middle. *I totally disagree with this!*
   - Dr. Brooks: “Speak to *inform*, not to *impress*. If you really inform, that will impress.”
   - Craft good visuals and examples to get across complex ideas without overwhelming.
5. Return to the dilemma or driving problem and provide evidence that my solution is really a solution.
Dealing with Questions

First, realize that anyone can be tripped up.

- If you mess up an answer, don’t worry about it… we’ve all been there!

Some tips:

- **Slow down**, parse the question, think, *then* speak.
- It’s OK to say “I don’t know” (being gracious here can help).
- Offline: In preparing, try to anticipate questions. Put yourself in the audience’s shoes. Think about leaving “holes” in your talk that will almost certainly create questions (that you know how to answer!).
- Offline: Practice in front of a real audience, especially for important talks (like job talks).
Don’t be Boring

- Try to project confidence and enthusiasm (even if you’re not feeling it).
- Vary your speaking pitch, tempo, and rhythm.
  - Make sure you appropriately project your voice!
  - Talks that are too long lead to speaking that is too fast! Finishing a bit early is better than going long!
- Move around.
- Use humor now and then if your personality allows.
  - Avoid canned jokes.
  - Self-deprecating humor works best.
Project Your Voice

- Speak to the people on the back row, not the people on the front row.
- If you’re offered a mic, use it. If it’s a clip-on, clip it on high near your face.
- Look at the audience, not the screen.
  - If your head is turned to the side looking at the screen, the mic may not pick you up.
  - Turning your head back and forth taking peaks at the screen can make your voice go in and out of the mic.
Jim’s Theory of...

... diminishing nervousness.
Disclaimer

- In constructing these notes, I was mainly thinking about conference talks and job talks.

- Some of this advice applies to teaching, but in that context, you have limited preparation time.
  - E.g., you’re probably not going to videotape yourself and practice every time you teach a class!