Short and Sweet: A Speech Apprehension Scale  
G.I.F.T.S. proposal, NCA  
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Goal:
To quickly determine, using a 1-10 scale, the speech apprehension experienced by students in the beginning college speech course and use the scale to alleviate the nervousness.

Rationale:
Many beginning communication course discuss the concept of speech apprehension using a quiz to determine the degree of apprehension a speaker will feel. This activity is much shorter than a quiz, and I’ve found it to be an effective way to begin a meaningful discussion of speech apprehension.

Directions/Explanation:
This is usually done on the first day of the semester. After going over the syllabus, I ask the students to take out a sheet of paper. On this paper I have them draw a number line from 1 – 10.

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Next, I ask them to consider how nervous they are about giving speeches during the semester. I (dramatically) explain that number 1 on the scale indicates very little apprehension, but moving up the scale the numbers designate more and more apprehension. As I move through the scale I will finally say, “Now if you circle the 10, it means you are wet-your-pants, want-to-die nervous!” The students enjoy teacher’s theatrics and proceed to circle one of the numbers. I do ask that they only circle a whole number.

I explain that I will average the numbers from each class and during the next class session I will give the results. I assure them that I will not reveal names, only numbers. Thus, in a very short time, and in a
non-threatening way, I’ve broached the subject of speech apprehension on the very first day of the semester.

During the next class period, I share the number results. I put the number line on the board with the number of students who circled each number. Typically, in a class of 25, I will have 1 or 2 on the extremes of the scale with the majority in the 4-7 range. When students see the class represented on the scale, I can feel the “I’m not alone” effect rippling through the class. My lecture on speech apprehension then begins with, “Wherever you are on the scale is just fine! Let’s accept it and go from there!” I continue with many of the tried and true methods of dealing with speech apprehension that can be found in communication texts. My favorite part of the lecture is when I ask the students if they have ever read *The Little Engine Who Could* and they smile as they recall the famous story. Of course, it was self-talk when the Engine said, “I think I can, I think I can.” As a visual aid, I have a plastic model of a little blue train engine!

**Typical Results:**

I have used this for several semesters at Minot State University. Students begin to recognize that speech apprehension is acceptable at any degree. It is controlling it through a variety of methods that becomes important. Students remember this lesson throughout the semester and often refer to “where they are on the scale” on presentations. I save the papers from day one and return them to the students following their final presentation. Most are pleasantly surprised to note that the number they’d circled on day one would not be the number they’d circle next time!

**References:**


Pearson, Nancy GIFTS proposal 2006