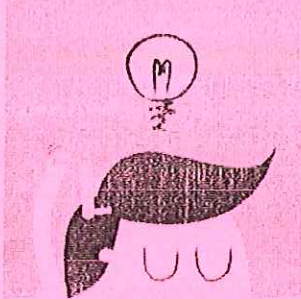


3 Sneaky Mind Tricks That Will Help You Ace the Interview

by [Mark Slack](#) January 21, 2014



You've done all the interview prep you can: You've read through every single page of the company's website, come up with a set of intelligent questions to ask your interviewers, and bored friends to tears with practice sessions of common interview questions.

But despite all of this, you still find yourself walking into the interview with your stomach in knots from nerves.

Unfortunately, it's the anxiety about messing up that can cause you to make the biggest mistakes of all—displaying shifty body language, sounding uncertain in your answers, and generally not appearing very confident or poised. All your qualifications can be easily overshadowed if all the interviewer remembers is how shaky you seemed.

I'm not saying this to make you panic more—just to remind you that it requires more than excellent interview prep to do well in an interview. Luckily, there are plenty of mental tricks you can use to combat your nerves. Try one of the tactics below to naturally induce calmness, increase confidence, and reduce panic when walking into an interview.

1. Don't Try to Calm Down

You heard me right—one of the worst things you can do in this situation is to try and force yourself to calm down. New research from Harvard University professor Alison Brooks suggests that a better way to deal with anxiety is to convince yourself that you're excited.

For her experiment, Brooks had her participants engage in high-stress activities like singing, test taking, and public speaking. Before performing, Brooks had one group of participants say, "I am calm," the second group say, "I am excited," and the third group say nothing. And she found that the group that said, "I am excited," reported feeling more confident and consistently performed the best out of all groups.

How is it that a simple sentence could have such a pronounced effect? Turns out, the feeling of anxiety is closely related to the feeling of excitement. They are both agitated states—meaning our bodies and minds are pumped up—but with different emotional perspectives. Anxiety is agitation that is draining, negative, and pessimistic, whereas excitement is agitation that is energizing, positive, and optimistic. Calmness, on the other hand, is on the opposite end of the spectrum from these two emotions—so **shifting from an agitated state to a serene state is about as realistic as folding yourself in half.**

But, **by reframing your nervous energy as excited energy, you can still feel amped up—just in a way that helps you perform better instead of a way that hinders you.** And, as Brooks proved, fooling yourself into believing this can be as simple as reminding yourself to get excited.

2. Consume the Right Stuff

You might think that your reading list is the last thing that should be on your mind before an interview, but with the right book, **a little light reading could really boost your confidence.**

A recent study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that consumers of literature begin to behave and think like the protagonists in the books they read. For instance, in one study, readers were assigned a book about a man who was disenfranchised from voting but successfully struggled and fought for his right to vote. Researchers found that the readers were then more likely to vote in elections as a result of having read the book.

Try this yourself: **Instead of spending your time pre-interview fretting about what's to come, spend a little time immersing yourself in a book or article written by successful, positive people who may have struggled with the same things that you do—and come out on top.** By identifying with their struggles, you can also absorb the self-assuredness and energy that allowed them to break through the barriers holding them back.

3. Stop Being So Self-Critical

Take a minute to read over your resume. Do so very deliberately, reading line by line. While you're doing this, try to keep track of the thoughts that you have while you're looking over it. Are they positive, negative, or neutral?

If you discover that you feel mostly negative about your resume, you should understand that this is a natural response—it's a way for us to anticipate criticism and respond to it and improve or explain away those areas that appear "weak." The **problem is that it's easy to get carried away with these negative thoughts,** to the point that they begin to affect your self-esteem. **By judging yourself too harshly, you can distort your own self-conception to a point that is irrational.**

So, how do you stop being excessively judgmental and walk into an interview with a realistic perception of yourself? The answer sounds simple: You just need to be aware of when you are judging yourself, and remind yourself that **it's OK to have weak spots**. In psychology terms, this is known as cognitive restructuring, and it's a bit harder in practice than in theory.

There are many exercises you can do to create a less distorted state of mind about yourself, but here's one to try before your next interview: Re-read through your resume from the perspective of an interviewer. When you find yourself having negative or judgmental thoughts, take note of them, remind yourself that it's OK, and continue on. After a few read-throughs, you may find that you've dissipated some of the emotional charge stored within these judgments—and that will do wonders for your confidence.

You'll still need to do all the necessary steps to prepare before an interview, but these tactics should help put your nerves at ease. Try one or all three—and get ready to confidently rock that interview!