

MANAGING STAGE FRIGHT  
*Journal*

**Julie Jaffee Nagel, Ph.D.**

[www.julienagel.net](http://www.julienagel.net)

# Welcome

Many people have found that keeping a journal helps them organize their thoughts and feelings. Maybe you are one of those folks.

Keeping a journal about stage fright can lead to effective insight and problem solving. Whether you have kept a journal in the past or would like to try it now for the first time, I am going to help you start journaling about stage fright.

Think first about if you want to carry your journal with you all the time so it is at hand when a thought enters your head — or choose a larger book that will stay in one place at home or in your office. The idea is to post your thoughts and feelings regularly and let yourself think freely when you do. No one will read your journal but yourself. It will be interesting for you to realize how some thoughts stay the same and others change over time. Sometimes, look back at entries you wrote at other times. The process will be interesting, will not take any more time than you wish to spend on it, and there are no value judgments about anything you write.

I will offer you some thought questions about stage fright for triggers (as I do at the beginning of each Chapter of *Managing Stage Fright: A Guide for Musicians and Music Teachers*) and then offer some ideas that may be useful to incorporate into your teaching and performing. You are invited to read the entire book to augment the comments I provide here.

In many ways for me, writing *Managing Stage Fright* was like keeping a journal, although not as private! I hope you will find journaling as useful and it will be a starting point — or continuation — of your own journey to manage stage fright. You are the Author of your journal — as you are the Author of your management of stage fright.

Please use the following as the basis for your journaling. You may print off these pages and write directly on them as the start of your journal, or just use these questions to give you some ideas about what to journal on as you focus on managing and overcoming stage fright.

As you begin your journal, I will introduce and suggest methods to utilize the **A B C** model of analyzing and managing anxiety, with emphasis on **Letter B**. The application of **Letter B** appears throughout *Managing Stage Fright*, where it is explained through different psychological perspectives. In this guide, as in the book, we will begin very simply and progress to more sophisticated **Letter B** responses which may raise or lower anxiety.

The main objective is to pay attention and listen to your words and statements. You will quickly realize that words evoke feelings. Anxiety is a feeling. As you realize how you and/or your students are thinking, speaking, and feeling about performing you will be more able to detect various levels of anxiety and in a better position to employ strategies that can help you and your students lower anxiety. Remember that your journal is a preliminary step toward deeper exploration and understanding.

In my book, *Managing Stage Fright: A Guide for Musicians and Music Teachers*, I explore the topics of feelings and thoughts with examples, specific ideas, and implications for teachers to use in their work tuning into what they and their students say and feel. There are no “rights or wrongs” to worry about when journaling. Let yourself associate freely and write down what comes to your mind. As you tune into all your feelings, think about them, and journal about them, you will reach a point of re-evaluating your anxious responses regarding stage fright and be on your way to better managing it. You might also use journaling as an activity with your students as a way to help them with their performance anxiety. It is important and very helpful for you to take inventory of your emotions before you help others.

I hope you find these thoughts and triggers helpful in your journey!

# Questions for Thought

1. What is stage fright?
2. What causes stage fright?
3. What *are* stage fright symptoms, anyway? List a few that bother you and/or your students. Use the list below to get started.

## Symptoms of Stage Fright

### Physical

Shaking  
Rapid heartbeat  
Shortness of breath  
Sweating  
Abdominal distress  
Cold hands

### Psychological

Low self- esteem  
Worries  
Poor concentration  
Sleep problems  
Appetite problem  
Rejection worries

4. Can symptoms be helpful? How or how not?
5. How does your body express anxiety in physical ways?
6. Why or why not is clear and positive thinking and good preparation insufficient to manage stage fright for many people?
7. Is there such a thing as an “irrational” feeling? Why or why not?

8. How is stage fright/performance anxiety related to other issues in one's life?
9. What is "magic thinking"? (hint: it's related to the wish for "perfect performances and/or perfect teachers".)
10. What are conflicts?
11. What does psychodynamic mean?
12. How can teachers use the concepts of displacement and transference to understand their students (and their own reactions to students and teaching)?

In my book, *Managing Stage Fright* I introduce the **A B C** model of recognizing and managing anxiety. The **A B C** model provides a method to replace non-productive thoughts with more positive ideas that ease anxiety. Next is a brief overview of the model. Review and note in your journal ways that you can implement **Letter B** responses to better manage stage fright.

## The **A B C** Model

### Recognizing Anxiety

**A** = performance

**B** = thoughts, feelings, physical reactions

**C** = consequences (how one performs, self- esteem)

### To use the **A B C** model,

1. Think of a stressful performance (**Letter A**)

2. What did you say, think, feel about the stressful performance? (**Letter B**)

Discuss or make a list of your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations (**Letter B**).

3. Rate your anxiety (performance “temperature”)

1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 . . . . 5 . . . . 6 . . . . 7 . . . . 8 . . . . 9 . . . . 10

low anxiety

high anxiety

## Now Re-evaluate

4. Did you use helpful or unhelpful self-statements? An example of a helpful **Letter B** response is “*I will do the best I can. I practiced carefully, and I am prepared.*” while an unhelpful response might be “*I worry about memory slips.*”
5. How did you experience anxiety (**Letter C**)? Do you think your **Letter B** statements raised or lowered your anxiety?

Let’s do this activity once again. Start the same way — with **A B C** examples. Rate your anxiety at **Letter C**. How did your responses at **Letter B** help or not help your anxiety level on a scale of 1-10? (1 is lowest anxiety and 10 is the highest anxiety)

NOW.....

Please do this activity once again, but challenge your **Letter B** statements that increased your anxiety. Become aware of any self-defeating statements or “commands” you may give to yourself....for example, “the audience will not like my performance” or “ I must play with wrong notes.” After you challenge and relabel **Letter B** several times, re-rate your anxiety level once again on a scale of 1-10.

# Rethinking and Relabeling Anxiety Responses

1. Think of a stressful performance (**Letter A**)
2. What did you say, think, or feel about the stressful performance? (**Letter B**)
3. Rate your anxiety (performance “temperature”/ arc of anxiety)

0 ..... 10  
low anxiety ..... high anxiety

4. Challenge **Letter B** (i.e., unhelpful cognitions—then respond to **Letter B** with adaptive cognitions)
5. Re-rate your anxiety

1 ..... 2 ..... 3 ..... 4 ..... 5 ..... 6 ..... 7 ..... 8 ..... 9 ..... 10  
low anxiety ..... high anxiety

6. List some of the adaptive cognitions you used

A.

B.

D.

7. Were the relabeled self-statements effective in lowering your anxiety?



# *If You Have Students, the **A B C** Model Can Be a Helpful Teaching Tool*

- Learn how to use **A B C** model (above — try it yourself first)
- Become aware of student's responses at **Letter B**
- Listen for self-doubts and anxious self-statements at **Letter B**
- Help student become aware of what student is saying at **Letter B**
- Help student relabel unhelpful **Letter B** responses
- Rate anxiety level on a subjective scale of 1- 10 (both before and after relabeling level of anxiety)
- Discuss with student the before/after responses and any changes in anxiety levels
- Repeat this activity many times
- Compare the range of anxiety responses (low to high) and range of dynamics (soft to loud) to illustrate the variety of feelings and sounds students can experience
- Encourage students to pay attention to themselves and to become familiar with how they talk and feel about their anxiety (**Letter B**)
- Help students realize that anxiety can be lowered by how they label their feelings
- Assist students in developing their own **Letter B** statements

In your journal, list some general ideas for helping students reduce performance anxiety. What would you say in a private lesson? In a studio class? (List your ideas before reading suggestions.)

# Tips To Apply the **A B C** Model With Students

- Normalize performance anxiety — make the private lesson a safe place for you and your student to talk about stage fright as part of music-making.
- Listen to what students say — do not try to convince them they should not be nervous. It may be helpful to share information about famous performers, public speakers, or actors who have spoken about their performance nerves, such as pianist Vladimir Horowitz, violinist Isaac Stern, opera singer Renee Fleming, or some popular performers such as Barbra Streisand.

**There are numerous articles on Google about musicians, actors, athletes (and others), and stage fright. Try searching for Beyonce and Adele and ‘stage fright’.**

- Help students become aware of what students think, feel, and say to themselves about performing. Point out self-defeating, conflicted, and negative self- statements.
- Talk about performance anxiety with students individually and in studio classes.
- Teach how to use anxiety effectively as a cue to cope (use examples about school, home, friends) with **Letter B** responses.
- Practice **A B C** strategies in studio classes when students play for each other. Help students recognize ego defenses, cognitions, feelings, and conflicts (**Letter B**).
- Realize that several psychological theories can be informative for student responses at **Letter B**.
- Invite students to be “performance coaches” for each other.
- Let students know that it is “cool” to talk about what they feel in a safe environment. (What is said in class stays in class!)

- Invite students to offer constructive suggestions or share experiences with their classmates in a nonjudgmental manner. (It takes time to develop a studio group-safety atmosphere)
- Invite students to offer suggestions about what makes the studio class a safe place to speak.
- Emphasize that “perfection” is a myth — there is no such thing as “perfection” except in our wishes and imagination. There is no “perfect performance.”
- Emphasize that there are competent performers, not omnipotent performers.
- Customize what works best for each student at each age level.
- Involve and teach parents about child development, anxiety cues, and learning tools.
- Organize a parents’ class a couple of times a year. Invite a mental health professional to join or lead the class and to be available year-round as a resource.
- Develop working relationships with mental health professionals in the community for teacher consultation or referrals when necessary.
- Respect boundaries and privacy.

## Writing Prompt

### How is the emotion of shame related to stage fright?

Hint 1: Shame is a feeling such as *I am embarrassed and feel humiliated when performing and making mistakes.*

Hint 2: Shame is also the fear of others watching you and believing they will find you are inadequate.

Both ways of experiencing shame are part of experiencing stage fright.

In your journal, record when you have experienced feelings of shame and how that might have affected your performance. Recognizing and recording your experience of shame may help to understand and reduce stage fright.

# Writing Prompt

## Performance Anxiety Conflicts

The conflict between your wishes and fears can increase your experience of stage fright. Have you experienced the following? How did it affect your performance?

### **Wish**

I want to play well.

### **Fear**

I fear I will forget my music and technique.

### **Evaluation/ Rejection**

I want approval.

I fear people won't like me.

### **Competition**

I want to win.  
I want to be nice to others.

I fear I will mess up/ lose.  
If I win, someone loses; I will feel guilty.

## Activity

### Imagine This

- Imagine yourself practicing for your recital at home
- Imagine seeing the music on the page
- Imagine yourself getting ready to go to the recital
- Imagine what you are wearing (including shoes — important for pedaling and comfort walking on and off stage)
- Imagine eating a healthy snack before you go to the recital
- Imagine arriving at the recital venue
- Imagine seeing other students coming in
- Imagine that you are next on the program
- Imagine walking on stage
- Imagine bowing
- Imagine starting the first piece
- Imagine you are anxious but you use a **Letter B** tip to deal with your anxiety
- Imagine bowing after you finish
- Imagine feeling good about your performance

## *Writing Prompt*

### **What are Ego Defenses?**

What are some ego defenses you notice in your performance anxious students? In yourself? (**Letter B** statements can be thought of as an Ego Defense and used in both helpful and unhelpful ways to lower or raise anxiety.)

# Performance Anxiety Symptoms As Ego Defenses

## (LETTER B)

### Psychological (Emotions/Feelings)

- I feel embarrassed
- I fear humiliation
- I feel helplessness
- I worry about audience reaction
- I feel self-consciousness
- I am afraid of technique not working
- I worry about memory slips

### Physical (Body)

- My hands are shaking
- My heart is beating fast
- My hands are sweating
- My stomach hurts
- My chest is tight
- I cannot sleep
- My hands are cold

### Cognitions (Thoughts)

- I will not play well
- My teacher/friends will not like me
- I know what they are thinking
- I look stupid
- I will mess up
- I will be ashamed
- People will laugh at me
- I do not want to be in another recital

## Defending Against Anxiety With Ego Defenses

Review the following examples and record in your journal similar experiences. How can you understand ego defenses as defenses against anxiety? As symptoms of anxiety?

**PROJECTION:** The belief that other people are thinking something (usually uncomplimentary) about you.

*GENERAL EXAMPLE:* If I have a memory slip, the audience will not like me.

*STUDENT:* If I am not always able to see my boyfriend he will not like me and will date someone else.

**RATIONALIZATION:** An attempt to minimize or explain away a thought or feeling, typically using common sense.

*GENERAL EXAMPLE:* I was late to school because I had to make my lunch.

*STUDENT:* I will practice tomorrow because I already know the music.

**DENIAL:** Believing that something does not exist.

*GENERAL EXAMPLE:* I bet my teacher won't choose me to play in the recital.

*STUDENT:* I will not worry about this recital because it is so far in the future.

**REACTION FORMATION:** Saying or feeling the opposite of what one really thinks or feels.

*GENERAL EXAMPLE:* I don't know why everyone else freaks out about performing. I am pretty relaxed about it.

*STUDENT:* I am not nervous at all about this recital.

**ISOLATION OF AFFECT:** The inability to experience or acknowledge feelings so that one talks about a highly charged topic with little or no emotion.

*GENERAL EXAMPLE:* I had a memory slip in the last recital but that does not bother me.

*STUDENT:* I really do not care about what the audience thinks.

How can you understand ego defenses as defenses against anxiety? As symptoms of anxiety?



## *Writing Prompt*

### **Helpful Ego Defenses**

Review the following and note in your journal ways you can begin to implement helpful ego defenses while preparing for your performance.

Suggestions for adaptive ego defenses (self-statements) to enhance self-esteem and lower performance anxiety (**Letter B**)

- I cannot make everyone appreciate me, no matter how I perform.
- I will do the best I can. I practiced carefully, and I am prepared.
- I will focus on what I am doing, not on what people may think.
- If I do not think highly of myself, it is likely I will project that same feeling onto others and believe they do not like me.
- Mistakes do not make me a terrible person. I am sharing the music with others — I do not have to prove anything.
- It doesn't help me to compare myself with anyone else; we all are different.

## *Concluding Remarks*

Hopefully, you have found keeping a stage fright journal interesting, thought provoking, and helpful. There are many more things to think about than were presented here, but you are on your way to managing stage fright after you have thought about the various ways it is expressed and dealt with.

The writing prompts included in this journal can be used following each performance. Note which prompts provoked positive insight for you and return to those prompts following each performance to further define the triggers for your performance anxiety.

Best wishes for enjoyable teaching and performing.

Please stay in touch! Sign up for my newsletter and keep up with my tips on how to manage stage fright.

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