**Student Leaders Programme**

**Advanced Public Speaking**

**Physiological Effects of Anxiety**

Under stress such as when we are preparing to deliver a presentation, we tighten our muscles and hold the tension we’re feeling. One of the first places this tension shows is in our breathing pattern.

The direct consequence of anxiety on your voice is losing control of tone and pitch. Shallow breathing means you restrict the fullness of sound and range your voice might have. The less air we take in, the worse we feel and the less effectively we speak. It will sound squeezed or strained because you are talking off the top of your lungs with a tight throat, jaw, mouth and face.

Forcing your voice to over-ride the restrictions is not an answer. It causes damage ranging from reasonably mild inconveniences like a sore throat to serious problems requiring surgical intervention. Consistently being fearful and therefore breathing shallowly can become a vicious cycle.

The only way to break the cycle is to learn to use good breathing habits.

**Breathing Exercise**

1. Stand with your feet a comfortable shoulder width apart.

2. Support the weight of your body through your hips and legs rather than locking your knees.

3. Consciously release and relax your shoulders.

4. If you're holding your stomach in, let it go.

5. Place your hands on your stomach.

6. Breathe in through your nose to the count of four. Count slowly. As you inhale, feel your diaphragm rising.

7. Breathe out through your mouth to the count of four and now feel your diaphragm expanding.

8. Do three rounds of inhale and exhale to a four count while making sure you keep your shoulders, stomach and legs relaxed.

9. Once you have mastered the four count, increase it. Through regular practice you will soon be able to extend it for an eight or even ten count.”

By using this deep breathing exercise, you slow your heart rate and give your body the oxygen it needs to perform. It’s a great exercise to do before public speaking to calm your nerves.