

Effective Presentation Skills

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<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/public-speaking-skills>

Public speaking is considered the number one fear of most people

- People are caught in the crossfire between their fear and the fact that many employers expect them to demonstrate good verbal communication skills
- Most interviews by PhD's have a presentation component
- Academic interviews always have a presentation/chalk talk
- If your job doesn't demand presentation skills, odds are good that you'll need them in your next job

Public speaking involves talking in front of a group of people, usually with some preparation. It can be in front of people that you know (e.g. at a family celebration) or a crowd of strangers. Unlike a presentation there normally isn't a lot of opportunity for interaction between the audience and the speaker – the speaker speaks, and the audience (hopefully) listens.

Speeches have different functions. These include being persuasive (e.g. trying to convince the audience to vote for you), informative (e.g. speaking about the dangers of climate change), entertaining (e.g. a best man's speech at a wedding) or celebratory (e.g. to introduce the winner of an award). Some speeches may have more than one of these aims.

Why is public speaking useful for students?

Most people, at some point in their life, will need to stand up and speak in front of a group of people. Teaching students the necessary skills for doing this will therefore help them to do this more successfully. As a result of the practice, students often report an increase in general confidence as well as a marked sense of achievement. Many students get incredibly nervous the first time they have to do a speech in front of their classmates but with practice the nerves subside and they usually begin to enjoy the whole process.

Working on public speaking also helps to develop students' overall fluency and requires them to consider how they speak as well as what they say. This is useful for speaking in any situation, public or otherwise.

What techniques can we teach our students?

a) Ideas / content generation

Lots of students find getting started quite difficult. It's a good idea to give students either a type of public speech that you would like them to do, or a particular topic. It's often useful to get students working in groups at the planning stage, helping each other to come up with ideas.

Showing students a variety of ways of making notes of ideas works well as not everyone likes the same methods. These could include mind-mapping, making lists or writing ideas on post-it notes and then arranging them on a piece of paper into groups.

b) Structure

Stress the importance of having a beginning, middle and end and keep reminding them of this. You might then like to give them a standard introduction to use for their first speech. For

example, “Good evening. My name is x and today I am going to talk about y. I will talk about three main areas, x, y and z’. This then gives them a focus for the structure of the rest of the speech. It can seem a little dry, however, so once they get the idea it’s worth experimenting with different styles of beginning – e.g. using jokes and anecdotes.

Many students are so relieved to have got to their end of their speech that they rush the conclusion or sometimes completely forget to do one. Again, a suggested format may help them to summarise what they have said.

c) Body language

There are various statistics for how much of our communication is done through our body language – they seem to hover around 70%, which is a massive chunk, so some work in this area is a very good idea.

Posture: Doing an activity where you get everyone to stand up and then suddenly ‘freeze’ works well. You then ask everyone to stay still but look around at how everyone is standing. Then try getting everyone to stand straight and well-centred, behind the podium if you have one to use. You’ll be surprised how many people rock from side to side or slouch. Sounds pretty basic but it can make a big difference to how confident and in control someone appears to be.

Gestures: One way to practise these is to give out some sentences with key words in them, such as “I caught a fish and it was this big!” or “there are three important reasons why you should vote for me”. Ask the students to practise saying these sentences while standing up and work out what gestures might be the most appropriate. Stress the importance of keeping gestures controlled.

Eye contact: It’s very important that speakers make eye contact with all areas of the room, ideally with every person but with large audiences that isn’t possible. Many students tend to look at one spot or at the teacher. One way to practise this is to ask each student to do a short 30 second introduction and then at the end get any student who feels the speaker did not look in his/her direction to raise their hand.

d) Chunking (pauses and stress)

This is a technique which can help speakers to sound much more confident and increase the overall effectiveness of their speech. The theory is that when we do this type of speaking we stress the key words in a sentence which carry the meaning, e.g. “I **DON’T** want you to just **SIT** there and **DO NOTHING**” We also pause after many of these key words, and at the end of a sentence.

To practise this, try playing your students an example of a speech – Earl Spencer’s eulogy speech for Diana is a good one for this, or Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’. Ask them to listen and identify the stressed words and pauses from a small section of the speech and then practise delivering it in the same manner. They can then mark the stress and pauses on their own speeches and practise incorporating the idea into their own work. It really makes a difference!

Common problems and solutions

Lack of confidence

This is very common and one that only practice, practice and more practice will help to overcome. You could also try getting the students to first speak in front of three or four others, then adding to the number as they become more confident.

Reminding students to breath properly while they're speaking as well as thinking positively about their ability to speak well will also help, along with lots of encouragement!

Speaking too fast

This is another common one, usually caused by nerves. Try getting them to do the introduction of the speech in an exaggeratedly slow manner. Once they have done this a few times they may find it easier to find a middle ground.

Appropriacy of body language

If this is a problem, try videoing the speaker and asking them to watch themselves. They will usually be able to identify where the problems lie and then work on improving these areas. Raising awareness is the most important thing here.

Boring speeches!

It's really important to get the students to think carefully about their audience when planning their speech. For example, if they want to do a speech about the dangers of smoking, but no one in the class smokes, this probably won't be very interesting.

Encourage the students to think of creative ideas for their speeches - do the planning stage in class so that you and the other students can monitor and give advice on topics that look like they might get a few yawns.

Appropriacy of style

Here again it is important that the students think about their audience. You might like to play them several different examples of famous speeches and ask them to comment on the style and discuss the purpose of the speech and the audience, before reflecting on their own.

Plagiarism of material

Unfortunately this is a very common problem. One way to tackle this is to ask the students not to write out their speeches in full but to use only notes or key words to help them deliver their speech. This then increases the chances of them being more original with the delivery. Another option is to collect in the speeches and run whole sentences through an internet search engine to see if it comes up with anything. And of course, impress upon your students the importance of doing their own work!

Giving and encouraging feedback

This is a very important part of the process and can take three general forms:

1. Peer
2. From the teacher
3. Video-taping and playback

For feedback from peers and from the teacher it's best to choose particular areas to give feedback on for each speech, rather than trying to cover everything. This might be based on the techniques you have recently been looking at in class (e.g. using gestures, chunking, structure, etc.) or as a result of feedback on a previous speech.

It's a good idea to go through what you expect of the students when giving peer feedback as sometimes students can be very vague. Make up a sheet with a (short) list of the areas to look at to help them focus their comments and encourage them to say positive as well as constructive things.

Video-taping is an invaluable method of helping students to see where their strengths and weaknesses lie. The only drawback, apart from the technical side of using the camera, is the time it takes to do and playback. This can be partially overcome by videoing sections of speeches, rather than the whole thing for each student.

Conclusion

In this article we have looked at a variety of techniques that can be used to help students develop the necessary skills for delivering public speeches. Practice in these areas can help to increase your students' overall confidence and fluency and provide an interesting and useful diversion from regular language work.

Understanding the Audience

Put yourself in the shoes of the people who will be listening to your presentation

Analyze The Audience

- Values...What is important to them?
- Needs...What information do they want?
- Constraints...Understand their level of knowledge on the subject and target them appropriately
- Demographics...Size of audience and location may influence the presentation

3 Key Components of a Good Presentation

- Structure
- Body Language and Movement
- Verbal Delivery

Tips for Reducing Anxiety

Organize

- Knowing that your presentation and thoughts are well organized will give you confidence

Visualize

- Imagine delivering your presentation with enthusiasm and leaving the room knowing that you did a good job

Practice

- All successful speakers rehearse their presentations
- Either do it alone, with your team, or video tape yourself and review your performance after
- Practice standing up as if the audience was in front of you
- Then practice again

Make Contact Before Your Talk

- If possible, speak with the audience before your presentation begins...(not always possible with a large audience)

- Walk up to them, shake their hand and introduce yourself
 - Thank them in advance for inviting you to speak today
- Break the imaginary glass barrier between you and the audience
 ...It relaxes both sides

Break the imaginary glass barrier between you and the audience

Comment by an MIT Postdoc who went on an academic interview:

“One thing I did, which I think made a huge difference, was to follow your suggestion to break the glass barrier between me and them by interacting with them as much as possible before my presentation. I did so and it worked out great! All of a sudden, they became normal people to me and we simply had a nice conversation about my research.”

Breathe

- Inhale deeply several times to stay loose. When your muscles tighten, you feel nervous and it’s more difficult to breathe
- Try to clear your mind. Breathe and tell yourself to “relax”

Release Tension

- In a quiet area, do an isometric exercise
- Starting with your toes, and working up your body, tighten all of your muscles including making fists. Then release all tension while taking a deep breathe

Move

- Speakers who stand in one spot experience tension. In order to relax, release tension and flex your muscles, move in a purposeful manner and use upper body gestures to make points

Eye Contact

- Make your presentation a one-on-one conversation. Build rapport by making it personal and personable. Use words such as “we”, “our”, “us”. Eye contact helps you relax because you become less isolated from the audience

Personal Appearance Reminders

- 55% of the message we send is based upon what people see
- People make snap decisions about us based on what we wear
- It is up to you to manage that impression
- What they see is what you get

Presentation Hints

1. Know What the Needs of Your Audience Are

Match your presentation content to those needs.

Thoroughly know and understand your material, and then place the material in a logical order.

Make sure your speech will capture your audience.

2. Know Your Strong and Your Weak Points

During your presentation, you will want to highlight your strong points. Dress appropriately for your presentation.

Make sure you look relaxed and calm. Speak slowly and show the right amount of emotions.

You want to establish a rapport with the audience.

3. Remember Your Body Language

Body language is important yet it is often overlooked. How you walk, move, and stand, along with your facial expressions and your hand gestures are all seen by your audience and project a message about your presentation and you.

4. Speak as if You Believe What You Are Saying

When you speak with conviction, your audience is much more likely to believe what you have to say.

You should never just read your notes as this can become quite boring for the audience. Instead refer to your notes but breathe life into your speech by speaking loud and clear. You should sound confident and if you make an error just apologize and move on.

5. Use the 3 Second Method

Always maintain eye contact using the 3-second method, where you look straight into the person's eyes for 3 seconds. Try to make eye contact with several audience members.

6. Listen to Your Audience

Not only should you speak to your audience you should listen to them too, and answer all their questions. You should be able to adjust when necessary and change your strategy mid-stream.

7. Use Humor

Whenever it's appropriate use a little humor to set the mood and create interest. Humor is an excellent tool that can help to keep the audience focused during your presentation, and it removes the boredom component.

8. Use Audio and Visual Aids

To enhance a presentation take advantage of both audio and visual aids. Make sure you have everything you will need set up prior to your presentation and it's always a good idea to have a backup system in place for any emergency. Present handouts at the appropriate time and tell the audience in advance that you will be giving out a handout.

9. Know When to Quit

There's nothing worse than a speaker who drones on. Know when to stop talking. End your presentation on an interesting note that keeps your audience engaged right to the end.

Presentation Skills Tips

These presentation skills tips will help you create a top-notch presentation.

Content

- Should be relevant to the audience
- Express main point 3 times
- Present only what you know

Audience

- A full small room is better than a large room that's nearly empty
- Audience experience with the topic
- Audience interest with the topic
- Age range
- Culture appropriateness
- Gender balance

Delivery

- Make eye contact frequently

- Should try to keep delivery to less than 20 minutes
- Keep it short and simple
- Watch your volume
- Humor is a powerful tool

You can quickly improve your presentation skills by taking a presentation skills course, which will teach you all kinds of great techniques to enjoy a successful presentation.

“Present your skills like you’d present yourself always putting your best foot forward.”

Checklist Before the Presentation

- Is the room set up properly?
- Seating -can everyone see the screen?
- Equipment -do you know how to operate it? Have you checked the focus?
- Are your visuals and other supplies ready?
- Are your notes (if any) ready?
- Have you checked your clothing?
- Appearance, taken change out of your pockets, zippers in closed position, etc.?
- Do you know what to say in the opening?
- What are your key points of your presentation?
- Do you know how you will close?

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us”

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Sources

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