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**English Speaking Practice Through Presentations**

**By Josef Essberger**

If you're anything like most teachers, you're probably constantly looking for new ways to encourage your students to practise their oral English and speak spontaneously. This month, we're going to consider the value of the 'presentation' in achieving this.

Asking students to give presentations has the following advantages:

- \* it gives the presenting student a good opportunity to practise unaided speaking
- \* it gives the other students good listening practice
- \* it increases the presenting student's confidence when using English
- \* it can be good practice for the real situation for those students who may actually need to give presentations in English in their professional lives
- \* it is an excellent generator of spontaneous discussion

First of all, let's define what we mean by 'presentation'. For our purposes, we mean:

- \* 'A short talk by one person to a group of people introducing and describing a particular subject (for example: a new product, company figures or a proposed advertising campaign).'

This is a narrow definition. In reality, presentations may be given by more than one person, are not necessarily short and are not necessarily a 'talk' since they may be by video, Internet etc.

Here we are considering, not so much the 'presentation' as an end in itself as the use of presentations for speaking practice.

Whether your students themselves will be keen to give presentations will depend on various factors. Their level is one. From intermediate upwards, students should derive real benefit from this type of activity. (That is not to say that below this level they should not attempt presentations.) Culture is another. Some nationalities are quite used to speaking in public and may be only too happy to have the opportunity to practise their spoken English in this way. Other nationalities are much more reserved and will be reticent or downright unwilling. At the individual level, a student who is an expert on something of great interest may be keener to talk than one who apparently has nothing to talk about.

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Only you can judge the situation. It may be necessary to introduce the idea of presentations with tact. Imposing a presentation on unreceptive students will probably be counter-productive. Asking, suggesting, implanting the idea are more likely to be productive approaches.

### Choice Of Subject

The first question that goes through any student's head is 'What will I talk about?' That is where preparation on your part, perhaps weeks before, can help.

Before any mention of a presentation, elicit interests from each student. These may be hobbies, professional activities, past holidays etc. Rarely do you find that every student in a group is a professional sky-diver, brain surgeon or stand-up comedian. Yet, with a little prompting, you will often find that each student has an interest or skill that is particular to her but of potential interest to others.

Having dug a little into each student's mind, you can store the interests for the moment when you propose presentations. Even then, you do not normally need to suggest to each student what he could talk about. Say something like: 'The subject could be anything, for example, your work, your hobby, a holiday.' Only if a student is at a complete loss do you need to help her with your previously elicited list of interests. But students are often more imaginative than we suppose. One of the best student presentations I ever saw was 'How To Change Baby's Nappy', illustrated with a life size doll, Pampers, talcum powder and a flask of water!

### Time limit

If students are apprehensive about giving a presentation, it may help to point out that it need not be a long presentation, 'just 5 or 10 minutes, plus questions.' In reality, it is far more difficult to prepare and give a 5-minute presentation than a 20-minute one. In addition, once underway, students very often overrun on their time. The important thing is that they be given a time-limit of some kind. It is up to you to decide this. It will depend on how many students there are, the overall time available, and whether the presentations are to be given during the same lesson or over a series of lessons. In general, it is probably best to limit the number of presentations to two per lesson and to set a time-limit for each of 10 to 15 minutes plus questions. You should build a certain amount of overrun time into your lesson plan. You may wish to adhere strictly to time limits, but the speaking practice and spontaneous discussion generated by presentations are so valuable that it may better to be more flexible.

### Equipment

Clearly, this will be governed by your environment. The main thing is to encourage students to use support material and visual aids. The bare minimum would be a whiteboard or flipchart. If you have an OHP, so much the better. But encourage students to bring in additional material, for example wall maps or samples (realia).

### Preparation

Without doubt, preparation is the key element of any presentation. Give your students plenty of time to

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prepare. It will give them confidence on the day. They can use homework and/or classroom time for preparation. You can help them to prepare by explaining what they need to think about.

### The Presentation

You may wish to help your students by teaching the principles of presentations. It depends on your objective. Are you teaching 'presentation' as an end in itself, or are you using presentations as a means to practise English? In any case, explaining the value of, for example, preparation and signposting will help. As a teacher, you are presenting all the time and probably take for granted the sheer mechanics of presentation and forget the butterflies you had before your first lesson.

### Keywords And Notes

Remind students that the objective is not to come to class, show everybody the top of their head and read a text. The objective is speaking, admittedly prepared, but without a text. Key words, yes! Notes, yes! But no texts please. Again, you can help them prepare their notes or keywords.

### Questions

Presenters usually indicate to their audience when they will answer questions – ie, during or after the presentation proper. For your purposes, it may be best to encourage question-taking after rather than during the presentation. This will give the presenting student more time for uninterrupted, unaided speech and avoid any danger of the presentation itself degenerating into a free-for-all. But a well managed question-and-answer session at the end of the presentation is of real value. Encourage the presenting student to invite questions and the audience to ask them. You can certainly start the ball rolling, but try not to dominate. And don't be afraid of silence! Students need time to think of and formulate questions.

### Teacher Feedback

If you are actually teaching presentations, you will probably want to give feedback on each presentation. This should be done with tact. You are best placed to judge the value of such feedback, depending on level and culture. You might prefer to use a prepared observation feedback form, divided into sections such as body language, signposting and audience rapport. Then you can give your comments verbally and/or in writing. A feedback form is particularly valuable in giving the presenting student something tangible to take away as a mark of achievement. And you should certainly strive to ensure that overall the feedback is positive, while not avoiding important negative points that need to be worked on.

### Peer Feedback

Again, depending on group, level and culture, you may wish to invite feedback from other students on the presenting student's performance. You can give the audience a prepared feedback form, listing the points to watch out for and comment on. But be very careful. This will definitely depend on the group, its level and culture. Some nationalities will be unwilling to, as they see it, 'criticise' their colleagues. At

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lower levels, students may be totally demoralised by such feedback. In all cases, the audience should be looking for positive points at least as much as for negative ones. This can be a useful activity as it sensitises all students to the do's and don'ts of presentation giving. But if in doubt, it's probably best avoided.

### Presentation Resources

A number of ELT coursebooks deal with the language and art of presentation giving. There is a particularly useful chapter in 'Business Class' by David Cotton & Sue Robbins.

You'll find useful presentation vocabulary at English Club Business English.

### Using Video

You could try videoing each presentation for subsequent playback and comment, perhaps giving each participant a cassette of his performance. Again, this depends on various factors. The important point is that any such exercise should have a positive, beneficial result. If there is a danger that videoing will be counter-productive, don't do it. If you're not sure, try asking your students. Maybe they will all clamour to be videoed!

Josef Essberger formerly taught English as a foreign language in Asia and Europe. He is founder of

<http://EnglishClub.com>

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ESL teachers. Looking for Business English resources? Learn more at

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## **English speaking and foreigners**

**By Ransy Reynis**

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Sins I am a foreigner and English is not my language I would like to tell you about how I write and read articles. When I write article I sometimes have to write them in Norwegian and translate them in to

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English even if Norwegian is not my language I have been living for so many years in Norway that speaking and writing in Norwegian all the time, has made it difficult for me writing in my own language. When I have finish writing article that I would like to post I always kopi the article and past it into program call Read Please so that I can hear it, because I understand English much better when I hear it then reading it and I some times have problems concentrate when I am reading. I always kopi interesting articles that I would like to read into the same program. Listening to it and reading it at the same time has help me learn English much faster. It also helps me concentrate better when I can hear it and read it at the same time. It is a lot of work writing first in Norwegian and then translates it into English but I love writing so I don't mind doing it. So if there are a lot of foreigners like me writing articles out there I recommend that you try this program it is totally free and it has help me learn speaking and writing English. I think this program can help English speaking persons too, especially if you have problems with concentration while you are reading. (This is not an advertisement for Read Please there are lot of others free programs like this that you can use) After I started using this program it has been much easier to concentrate reading article when I listen at the same time as I reed them. I hope this is of help to someone out there.

Thank you for reading this article Ransy Reynis

Ransy Reynis is an Independent Wealth Builder and a Webdesigner. Helping individuals earn career incomes from home.



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