

## **Presentations in English: Find your voice as a presenter**

**Erica J. Williams**

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**Reviewed by Sally Ashton-Hay**

With estimates of more than thirty million given each day, presentations have become an integral part of modern society. They can signify the difference between gaining or losing a job, or being successful or unsuccessful at university and a future career. *Presentations in English*, combining a 128-page book and DVD, is an innovative and complete course aimed specifically at non-native speakers of English. It follows seven flexible steps for building and improving intermediate to advanced level skills as well as instilling greater confidence in making presentations in English.

The main aim is to assist non-native speakers to find their own voice and individual presentation style. Students are encouraged to 'examine, analyse, experiment, take risks, have fun, accept, reject and finally, to find what works' for them. Besides the standard fare of transition signals, language exercises and presentation tasks found in most texts, there are some differences that distinguish this as a quality resource.

The book is organized with each of the seven training steps as stand-alone chapters. Steps 1 - 3 provide the basics of presentations, Steps 4 – 6 build on techniques, and Step 7 is devoted to question answering strategies. 'Lay Solid Foundations' is step one and covers an audience attention curve graph; useful phrases and grammar, structure and signposting and delivery tips (such as pausing). There's also a speaking task, peer feedback forms, 'Find Your Voice' activities and focus questions for a reflective log. The DVD offers examples with evaluations from audience members.

Each consecutive chapter deftly builds on and consolidates previous work but could also be useful to pinpoint specific areas. Subsequent steps are: 2) Connect with your Audience; 3) Use Visuals to Connect (this chapter has a great section on numbers, trends and explaining graphs and timelines); 4) Top up your Techniques; 5) Be Positive and Dramatic; 6) Love Your Audience...Not Everyone is Like You; and step 7) Questions are a Big Opportunity, Aren't They? The text includes a 29-page answer key for the language exercises and transcripts for each student speaker. The layout is clear and user-friendly with chapter highlights shaded in blue to focus attention. The book also has a companion web link with additional teacher

notes and other business communication materials to enhance or extend the text.

One of the distinctions is that the DVD features authentic international students, rather than actors, to demonstrate the cumulative skills depicted in the course steps. Four students from Thailand, Ukraine, China and Mexico test the various approaches, making errors and showing improvement while travelling along the skills-training journey. Their talks are original and cover everything from recycling to mathematical genetics, with some of the student presentations at postgraduate and PhD level. When I trialed these materials, my own students found the international speakers engaging because they made familiar mistakes; however, we all wondered how two of the 'non-natives' could have such incongruously perfect British accents.

Peer review feedback forms are another value-adding innovation included for each step of the presentation course journey. The peer review sheets focus on the specifics in every phase such as: 'Did you hear any of the Yale 12 power words?' or 'Do the presenters use any 'love your audience' activities or language?' The peer review process is designed to be used along with the DVD presenters and with individual class member presentations. These triggers encourage a keener awareness of skill-building, critical thinking and the process of learning for non-native English speakers.

A third bonus is the currency of topics which are skillfully embedded throughout the presentation chapters. These include story-telling with metaphors, the use of mantras, representational systems such as VAKOG (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory and gustatory), multiple intelligences and personality types. One of the most constructive benefits is the 'Find Your Voice' activities which hone in and cultivate individual learner development by balancing the practical tasks with personal reflection. For example, students are encouraged to prepare and present an item which addresses a different multiple intelligence or to find a metaphor/ analogy to describe an aspect of the student's work or area of study. Such activities have the potential to challenge creativity, build confidence and create a dynamic community of learners.

*Presentations in English* is recommended as a valuable resource for any teachers of presentation skills. Williams is obviously an accomplished trainer with expertise to offer, especially in assisting non-native English speakers to improve their skills and knowledge, gain confidence and find their own voice in making presentations. Her message to trainers continually resonates with the main aim of the book: 'Authentic presenters are congruent: their voices, language and bodies are in harmony with the message they are giving. Help your learners to find this authentic voice.'

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