



Presentations in English

Find Your Voice

Erica Williams

If 30 million presentations are given around the world every day, there are perhaps 30 million different ways to give these presentations. So, how can we begin to teach presentation skills? There are basic presentation phrases, techniques and rules that should be learnt. But, presenters also need to be able to select just the right vocabulary and techniques in order to present to particular types of audience or achieve specific objectives. Sometimes, they have to recognise when and how to bend or even break the rules. Other factors such as country or corporate culture may come into play too. Most importantly, presenters need to be able to adapt presentation structure and style according to individual personality and language skills - to 'find their voice'.

An effective teacher/trainer for presentation skills should:

- be systematic and motivate the learner by giving clear achievable targets at all stages
- be knowledgeable about presentations in order to introduce the learner to a wide range of research and techniques
- not give absolute 'dos and don'ts' but rather introduce research and techniques in such a way that the learner has access to an extensive range of skills and can 'pick and mix' for each individual presentation
- motivate the learner by explaining the theory behind the practice
- let the individual learner find what suits and doesn't suit his/her personality in order to develop an authentic style
- develop a creative training environment where every trainee feels safe, has fun, experiments, experiences success, makes mistakes, learns from mistakes and takes a risk from time to time
- give realistic models (presentations given by actors are often inauthentic and give learners unachievable goals and expectations)
- provide trainees with the time and space required for preparation and practice
- guide learners on how to give and use feedback
- give constructive feedback
- provide scope for self reflection

In short, the trainer/teacher wears a number of hats. S/he's an expert who introduces learners to a wide range of skills, techniques and research; a facilitator who creates a relaxed environment; a cheerleader who motivates and a coach who fosters self-reflection, exploitation of knowledge and target setting.

Presentations in English is a complete presentations course (book and DVD) that addresses these points.

- learners build their skills and confidence in a step by step approach.
- research is examined and the reasons for using techniques are explained.
- material that is largely new to ELT publications on presentations is introduced including exercises on Dr. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, psychological research, psychometric testing, NLP, story telling and using metaphors.

- *Find Your Voice* sections encourage learners to experiment with examples relevant to their work or studies at every point.
- The DVD presentations are given by 4 non-native speakers who are NOT professional actors but come from different business and academic fields. These 'guinea pigs' were not given scripts but prepared and shaped their own presentations based on their work and / or studies and the 7 step training. They were filmed in a true training situation and the DVD tells a story in which you see real presenters going on a journey of experimentation. They are learners just like any other learners and trainees identify with them.
- Learners give full presentations based on presentation briefs given in each step. These briefs have defined subject, audience, structure and objectives designed to exploit the skills that have been gained.
- Feedback is given from different perspectives. Firstly, learners analyse a DVD presentation at the end of each step with the aid of a form provided in the book which directs learners to comment on points raised in the previous step(s). This encourages learners to give feedback and to analyse. This, in turn, helps them in the process of finding what they like and don't like in presentations and developing an authentic style. Secondly, learners analyse colleagues' presentations. Analysis again helps presenters to work on their own performance. Finally, each presenter has scope for self-reflection, analyses his / her own performance and sets goals for the next presentation(s) in a presentations diary. This moves from training to coaching methodology.