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Classroom Methods and Materials to develop Presentation Skills

Fergus O'Dwyer

1. Introduction

This paper describes activities, carried out over two 15-lesson semesters in classes for Non-English majors in Osaka University (Faculty of Foreign Studies), with a specific focus on presentation skills. I explore teaching methods and materials for that particular skill, and briefly conclude with notes on evaluation of materials and possible implications. The first 21 classes predominantly focused on developing basic presentation skills. The remaining 9 classes centred on effectively planning and delivering an academic presentation. The next section describes the former.

2. Step 1: Basic presentation skills

The first 21 classes focused on awareness-raising, coaching and, to a much greater extent, the implementation of basic presentation skills. Activities from a task-based textbook (Benevides & Valvona, 2008) were adapted and extended. These activities involve learner groups simulating being employees in a company as they participate in a variety of connected product-planning, market research, negotiation, and, above all, presentation tasks (see Table 1 and the following paragraph for a brief description of activities used).

In stage 1, learner groups (four to five learners per group) brainstormed, discussed and presented about one product idea per learner. These product ideas of each group were passed on to other learner groups in Stage 2. The learner group's task was to select the best idea from the group, and then make a poster presentation explaining the product idea and reason for selection. The selected product ideas were

then used for the topics (e.g. market research) for the learning stages that followed.

Stage (Timing)	Description
Stage 1 (Classes 1-3)	Product idea presentation
Stage 2 (Classes 4-7)	Best product idea poster presentation
Stage 3 (Classes 7-11)	Market Research Presentation
Stage 4 (Classes 11-13)	Infomercial Presentation
Stage 5 (Classes 13-15)	Region and Product selection Presentation
Stage 6 (Classes 16-21)	Distributor Contract Negotiation

Table 1. Description of activities to develop basic presentation skills

Presentation tips are incrementally introduced over the course, with the focus of stage 1 and 2 being *Language: repetition and simple language are effective in presentations; Use your voice effectively: speak loudly and slowly, use pauses; Eye contact: make eye contact with each audience member where possible; Add gestures to eye contact*. Tips are accumulated from the following presentation-related textbooks, which may be a source for other materials: Alley 2003; Comfort 1997; Elwood 2006; Hood 2007; Kobayashi & Clankie 2011; Powell 2010.

Presentation activities are supplemented by a learning cycle (learning stage outline, self-assessment, goal-setting, and reflection procedures) that surrounds the learning stages (see O'Dwyer 2010 for more details). The purpose of these learning cycle practices, in this case, is to raise awareness and reflect on presentation-skill related matters. These practices which inform all of these classes are based on the European Language Portfolio, but can be traced to several, much wider perspectives on education. The guiding principle of this approach could be summarised using the following amended quote from Confucius: "Learning without thought [and reflection] is labour lost, thought without learning is perilous". In order to exemplify these practices, Stage 3 (Market Research Presentation) is outlined in more detail.

To begin, the learning stage outline is presented to learners so as to clarify the

content of upcoming activities, before conducting self-assessment and goal-setting procedures. The outline of Stage 3 is as follows: *Discuss and make improvements to a new product idea. Use a questionnaire to see what people think about the product. Analyse the data. Summarise the findings and prepare handouts. Give a short presentation using powerpoint including all relevant information and arguments.* This leads to self-assessment and goal-setting for the stated goal of the activities: *I can give a short presentation in a clear and precise manner, highlighting significant points and providing relevant supporting detail.* This goal has been adapted from the level B2 Spoken Production *Goal-setting and Self-Assessment* checklists of the *Language Portfolio for Japanese University* (Framework & Language Portfolio SIG, 2009). These checklists aim, for each skill and level, to describe the general descriptors of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) in more detail.

Presentation tips introduced in this stage focus on the rule of 3: *In the body of the presentation you should have three main points (your audience will generally only remember three points: choose them carefully, phrase them simply, and repeat them to make them memorable).*

After preparing and practicing with groups, all learners brainstorm what is a good presentation. This is done by answering the following questions (brackets contain suggestions contributed by learners):

- A. How can we give relevant, clear, and easy to understand explanations? (Slow, loud simple English voice gestures. Using stress appropriately. Pause before important words. Repeat important words)
- B. How can we efficiently highlight the significant points? (Make powerpoint colourful, simple, easy to understand Use a model, gestures, tone coloring Repeat key words. Use body language (point at slides). Distinctive animation. Slow down and make eye contact.)
- C. How can we provide relevant supporting details? (Use pictures and graphs to

explain details. Use keywords of data in powerpoint and handouts. Explain clearly). These learner answers are then accumulated by the instructor into an assessment rubric (see Figure 1 below) which is used for self-, peer- and instructor-assessment of the presentations.

****Assessment instructions: be fair, realistic and constructively critical****

Market Research Presentation Assessment

Team name:

1 The <u>data</u> was clear with significant points highlighted efficiently [Efficiently used keywords, pictures and graphs to explain details of data in powerpoint and handouts. The presentation of data was colourful, simple, easy to understand.]	1 2 3 4 5
2 The <u>presentation style</u> was clear, visual, attractive and well-prepared [For example the presenters used slow, loud, clear, simple English. Used repetition, stress etc. appropriately to emphasize important points.]	1 2 3 4 5
3 The <u>body language</u> and <u>voice quality</u> helped me understand [These helped me understand the significant points and related supporting details.]	1 2 3 4 5
4 The <u>explanations</u> were relevant, clear, and easy to understand [The explanations of supporting details were clear. The significant points were distinctively outlined.]	1 2 3 4 5
<p align="center">The presenters can give a short presentation in a clear and precise manner, highlighting significant points and providing relevant supporting detail</p>	
*(reasonably well) *(well) *(very well)	Total: /20
Comments and advice: What was done well: _____ _____ _____	
What can be improved: _____ _____ _____	

Figure 1. Assessment Rubric

The peer- and instructor-assessment of presentations are passed to the presenters,

who then can compare with their self-assessment of their presentation. This is then used for reflection, which is conducted by asking questions such as *In a presentation what can I (my group) do well? What have I improved in this presentation? What do I need to improve in the next presentation? How?* This reflection leads onto the next goal of the next infomercial stage: *I can prepare and present an infomercial; using stress and intonation to convey finer shades of meaning, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.* These goals are incrementally graded according the levels of the CEFR, so the Stage 4 goal corresponds to level C1 of the Spoken Production *Self Assessment and Goal-setting Checklists*. There were varying degree of competency within the class, but it is felt use of such practices, alongside the transparent and comparable targets of the CEFR, can facilitate progress toward quantifiable and realistic language-learning goals.

I will not explain the learning stage of semester in any detail, with the exception of brief comments on the infomercial (Stage 4) stage, negotiation (Stage 6) stage and reflective elements. Learner groups had the opportunity to record the infomercial (a lengthy commercial describing and advertising a product idea) in the Sub-studio located in Building B of the Osaka University Minoo campus. During a classroom presentation one week before the recording, peers were encouraged to give specific and constructive feedback and advice on how to improve the infomercial for the recording. Learners could receive a digital copy of the presentation on a CD ROM. Recording presentations gave students something to keep as a record of learning progress (this could be filed in a dossier section of a language portfolio) with possible use in job-hunting etc., it also gives the presenters a new perspective on their presentation style.

The final reflection of the first semester worked on questions such as *What have I learned since starting this presentation class? What have I improved upon since starting this presentation class? What have I found interesting since starting this presentation class? What have I found difficult since starting this presentation*

class? What would I like to learn in the second semester of this class? What would I like to improve upon in the second semester of this class? It is felt that occasionally taking time for focused reflection can induce greater learner motivation and involvement in the activities that follow.

This reflection led to the first parts of the second semester (classes 16-21), a distributor agreement negotiation scenario (stage 6 in table 1). This involved teams role-playing a manufacturer (who would hypothetically market product ideas learners used in Stage 3-5) and a distributor who are negotiating a distribution agreement. The purpose of these negotiation activities is to be able to clearly outline the main points of the argument. This skill, along with all other skills developed in the presentation activities outlined above, is useful for individual academic presentations that took up the remaining classes.

3. Step 2: Academic presentations skills

It has been put forward that the process of effectively planning and delivering an academic presentation is often ignored over a focus on the content of a presentation. This can result in presentations that do not engage the audience. This, in turn, can result in a reduction of the impact of the main message of a presentation, however important or stimulating. The activities leading to the final individual academic presentation task, based on materials developed by Garr Reynolds (2012), focused on the process of effectively planning and delivering presentations.

Learners were required to submit an abstract of an academic presentation in lesson 18. The topic of the academic presentation was to be one that would be useful for the future career of the presenter. The instructor gave feedback regarding focus and scope of the topics. From lesson 21 onwards learners worked through the process of planning, designing and delivering a presentation. The Appendix, given to all participants after the final presentation, outlines this process in greater detail, and does not really require greater explanation except for the format of the presentation:

pecha kucha. This was developed by engineers in Japan who were frustrated with presenters who took too long to present using slides, resulting in presentations that were uninteresting and did not engage the audience. The format limits the number of slides (typically 20) and automatically times slide transitions (typically 20 seconds). I modified this to ten slides, with one minute transitions. It is a quiet challenging format, particularly when you are standing in the centre of the classroom with no script (another condition of the presentation). It forces presenters to create interesting slides and also to thoroughly prepare the content of your presentation, while delivering in an engaging fashion that captures the audience's attention. These *pecha kucha* individual presentations were delivered in the final five lessons. Presenters were given detailed feedback from peer groups and the instructor directly after the presentation.

4. Conclusion

It can be argued that presentation skills have not received the attention they deserve in university education in Japan and elsewhere. Learners can greatly benefit greatly if given the opportunity of focused instruction on relevant skills, along with numerous chances to hone presentation skills. Assessment can play an important role alongside reflection in enhancing the learning experience. It is hoped this paper, and the classes they describe, can, in a small way, contribute to the development of the presentation skills of learners at Osaka University, and elsewhere.

References

The following general presentation skill textbook-like materials may be a good source of structured, generic advice for presentations:

- Alley, Michael (2003). *The Craft of Scientific Presentations*. New York: Springer
Comfort, Jeremy (1997). *Effective Presentations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
Elwood, Kate (2006). *The Way to Effective Speaking*. Tokyo: Nan'un Do

- Hood, Michael (2007). *Dynamic Presentations*. Tokyo: Kiriara Shoten
- Kobayashi, Toshihiko & Clankie, Shawn M. (2011). *Your First Speech and Presentation*. Tokyo: Nan'un Do
- Powell, Mark (2010). *Dynamic Presentations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- The Presentation Zen materials developed by Garr Reynolds (2012, see <http://www.garrreynolds.com/Presentation/index.html>) are thought to be an excellent resource. For the purpose of this class, most materials from the website are sufficient (the appendix is based on the above website). Garr Reynolds has are other publications which deal with the matters in slightly more detail: (2008) *Presentation zen : simple ideas on presentation design and delivery* Berkeley, California : New Riders
- (2010) *Presentation Zen design : simple design principles and techniques to enhance your presentations* Berkeley, California : New Riders

Other references:

- Benevides, M., & Valvona, C. (2008). *Widgets: A task-based course in practical English*. Hong Kong: Pearson Longman.
- Council of Europe (2001). *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Framework_EN.pdf
- Framework & Language Portfolio (FLP) SIG. (2009). *Language Portfolio for Japanese University*. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/LP4JU>
- O'Dwyer, F. (2010). *Can do* statements at the centre of involving learners in the self-assessment, goal-setting and reflection learning cycle. In M. G. Schmidt, N. Naganuma, F. O'Dwyer, A. Imig, & K. Sakai (Eds.), *Can do statements in language education in Japan and beyond* (pp. 218-234). Tokyo: Asahi Press.

Appendix

You could refer to the notes below when preparing a presentation:

An **abstract** is a short statement designed to give a complete, yet concise, understanding of your paper's research and findings. It is a mini-version of your presentation. If you need to submit an abstract before your presentation, you could use this structure:

- ① Explain the purpose of your study/paper. Ideally in one sentence, state the primary objectives and scope of the study or the reasons why the document was written. Also state the rationale for your research: Why did you do the research?
- ② In terms of methodology (research methods), clearly state the techniques or approaches used in your study. For papers concerned with non-experimental work, describe your sources and your use/interpretation of the sources.
- ③ Describe your results, the data collected, and effects observed as informatively and concisely as possible.
- ④ Your conclusions should in essence describe the implications of the results: Why are the results of your study important to your field and how do they relate to the purpose of your investigation? Often conclusions are associated with recommendations, and suggestions.

(Taken from: <http://webapp.comcol.umass.edu/msc/absGuidelines.aspx>)

Example Abstract: THE FIRST WORKS OF HEGEL AND NIETZSCHE: YOUTH SPIES A UNIVERSAL SPIRIT Matthew J. Daube, Department of Comparative Literature, University of Massachusetts

Nietzsche and Hegel are rarely mentioned in the same context, despite the fact that Nietzsche grew up in a Germany still reverberating with Hegel's influence. The view will be put forward, however, that these two icons of German philosophy are birds of

a similar feather ① . To explore this contention, this paper will concentrate on each author's first attempt to outline his philosophy in a major work ② . For Nietzsche, that was *The Birth of Tragedy*, a tantalizing plea for western society to return to the exciting combination of Apollonian logic and Dionysian freedom last found in the heights of Greek tragedy. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, an unknown student rhapsodizes about the process of life, a process strikingly similar to the interplay of Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian spirits. By placing these works side by side, one finds two young philosophers rejecting the science and religion of their times and surveying history for explanations as to what drives the world. Both Hegel and Nietzsche believe that behind everything lies a universal essence which humanity must recognize in order to live to the fullest ③ . These discoveries shed light on their later philosophies and are intriguingly relevant to an age often tired of the uncertainty of postmodernism ④ .

When **pre-planning** your presentation, you could follow these steps:

Step 1: Think about the essence of your presentation content and write it one sentence

For example: The philosophers Nietzsche and Hegel are very similar.

Step 2: If your audience could remember only three things about your presentation, what would you want it to be? (1)_____ (2)_____ (3)_____

Example: (1) Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*=Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, works about the process of life

(2) Both Hegel and Nietzsche reject the science and religion of their times and survey history for explanations as to what drives the world

(3) Both Hegel and Nietzsche believe that behind everything lies a universal essence which humanity must recognize in order to live to the fullest.

⇒ You should use these elements to guide you when you **plan your presentation**.

Plan your presentation

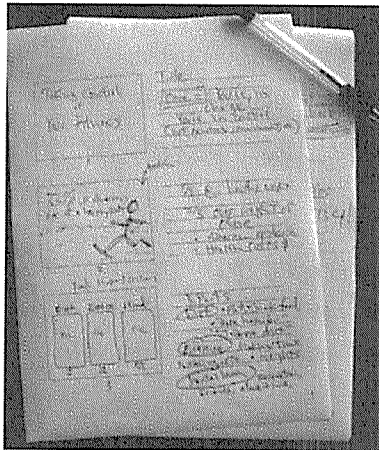
The structure of a presentation structure is very important. It is recommended you plan using pen and paper (or a whiteboard etc.). The reason is that if your ideas are not clear first, it will be impossible to design the proper structure later when you create visuals (powerpoint) and/or supporting documents (handouts).

At this planning stage you should visualize the logic of your content and the flow of the presentation.

Step 1: You should first take notes about the things you want to say in each section of the presentation.* see hint below

Step 2: When you have the content of your story draw simple images that you can use in the presentation to support a particular point (e.g. a pie chart here, a photo there, perhaps a question mark or other symbol here etc.).

This approach to sketch out my ideas and create a rough storyboard really helps solidify and simplify the message of the presentation in your own head.



You could create a plan of your presentation using a page like the graphic above. You should first take notes about the things you want to say in each section of the presentation. Then draw simple images that you can use in the presentation slides

to support each point

*When building the content of your presentation always put yourself in the shoes of the audience and ask "so what?". Is this point relevant? Is it important and helps your presentation in a very important way? After your first plan look at each slide plan and ask "So what?" If you can't really answer that question, then cut that bit of content out of your talk.

You may think it would be easier to start create your presentation in front of the computer using powerpoint but it would actually take longer as you would constantly have to go from normal view to slide sorter view to see the "whole picture."

Starting to create your presentation in PowerPoint before you have your key points and logical flow first worked out (on paper or a white board etc.), is like a movie director hiring actors and starting to film before a script has been written.

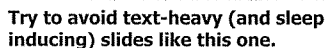
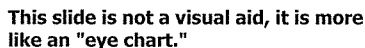
You are now ready to create slides.

You could refer to these **PowerPoint Slide Design Recommendations:**

Most important is to keep it simple!

Your visual message can become powerful if it is simple. Try not to make slides complicated, busy, or full of unnecessary charts. Nothing in your slide should be superfluous. Your slides should have plenty of space. You don't need to fill empty areas on your slide with unnecessary graphics or text that do not contribute to better understanding. The purpose of the powerpoint slides is to get the attention of the audience. Once you have their attention, they are ready to listen to message of your presentation.

Text The best slides may have no text at all! You should aim to have a detailed **handout** or publication for the audience to be passed out **after** your talk. You don't need to fill your PowerPoint slides with a great deal of text. Finally remember to make sure the text can be read from the back of the room.



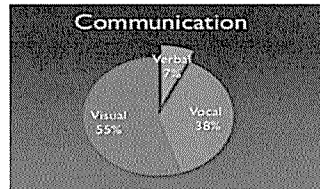
Glance at your notes to see what visuals you want at certain points and then use your own pictures or images available to download (for example <http://www.morguefile.com/archive/>). It is good to use images of people in slides, as photography of people tends to help the audience connect with the slide on a more emotional level. If you want to use ClipArt, use it carefully and judiciously. It may have been interesting in 1993, but today the inclusion of clip art often undermines the professionalism of the presenter.

Use colour well The right color can help persuade and motivate. Studies show that color usage can increase interest and improve learning comprehension and retention. Colors can be divided into two general categories: Cool (such as blue and green) and Warm (such as orange and red). Cool colors work best for backgrounds. Warm colors generally work best for objects in the foreground (such as text) because they appear to be coming at us. You may choose to use a variation of those colors.

Charts Always be asking yourself, "How much detail do I need?" Presenters are usually guilty of including too much data in their on-screen charts. There are several

ways to display your data in graphic form; here are a few things to keep in mind:

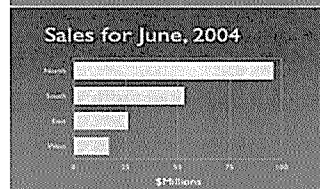
Pie Charts. Used to show percentages. Limit the slices to 4-6 and contrast the most important slice either with color or by exploding the slice.



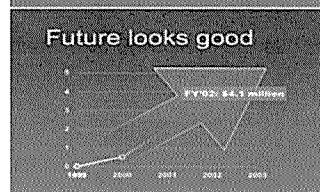
Vertical Bar Charts. Used to show changes in quantity over time. Best if you limit the bars to 4-8.



Horizontal Bar Charts. Used to compare quantities. For example, comparing sales figures among the four regions of the company.

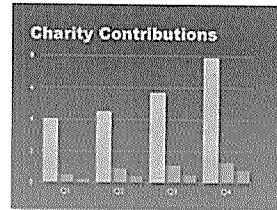


Line Charts. Used to demonstrate trends. For example, here is a simple line chart showing that our sales have gone up every year. The trend is good. The arrow comes in later to underscore the point: Our future looks good!



In general, tables are good for side-by-side comparisons of quantitative data. However, tables can lack impact. If you want to show how your contributions are significantly higher than two other parties, for example, it would be best to show that in the form of a bar chart (below, right). If you're trying to downplay the fact that your contributions are lower than others, however, a table will display that information in a less dramatic or emotional way.

Charity Contributions				
Quarters	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Group A	4.0	4.5	5.7	7.9
Group B	5	9	1.1	1.1
Group C	2	4	5	8



You are now ready to practice the presentation. If you follow the steps above, the content will be well-prepared and fresh in your mind. You can then focus on delivery of the presentation. Some tips: **Start and finish strong** People will make an assessment about your performance in the first two minutes, so you have to start strong (don't talk too long about superfluous background information or personal/professional history, etc.). You also have to finish even stronger. People remember most the first part and the last part of your presentation. The middle stuff is important, of course, but blow it at the start or at the end and all may be lost. This is why you have to rehearse your opening and your closing so much. And save your strongest stuff for the end.

Tell Stories: Good presentations include stories. The best presenters illustrate their points with the use of stories, most often personal ones. The easiest way to explain complicated ideas is through examples or by sharing a story that underscores the point. Stories are easy to remember for your audience.

Develop rapport with the audience. Smile! Use eye contact. Speak with no notes. Be passionate and enthusiastic.

When making and assessing your presentation you could refer to this assessment rubric to help you prepare, noting the things you may need to focus on in the brackets:

Final 10 minute Presentation Assessment

Name:

1 The presentation is organised effectively	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
[]
2 The content of the presentation is logical and flowed well	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
[]
3 The design of the slides is simple but effective	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
[]
4 The delivery includes good body language and eye contact	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
[]
5 The handout provides relevant information	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
[]
The presenter can give a short presentation in a clear and precise manner, highlighting significant points and providing relevant supporting detail	
*(reasonably well) **(well) *** (very well)	Total: /50
Comments and advice: What was done well: _____	

What can be improved: _____	

The majority of these tips are taken from <http://www.garreynolds.com/Presentation/index.html>. This is an excellent resource for presentation-skill related matters.