

10 tips for managing classroom presentations

John Hughes and **Robert McLarty** offer ideas to challenge the non-presenting student.

Presentations are a common feature of many classrooms, especially for Business English or English for Academic Purposes. Typically, we spend time preparing students with the language they will need to present, and then they give their presentation to the rest of the class. What sometimes gets overlooked is what the rest of the students will be doing while their peers are presenting. Of course, it is an opportunity for the audience of fellow students to develop their listening skills, but classroom management difficulties can occur. For example, students who are waiting to give presentations will find it hard to concentrate. Or the audience will lose concentration if they find it hard to understand each other or simply not find the presentation very interesting.

Here are ten tips on managing in-class presentations so that they are useful for the students in the audience as much as they are for the presenter.

1. Presentations per lesson

Many of your students will want to develop their presentation skills, but if everyone presents in the same lesson, it can take up lots of time and be hard to maintain everyone's concentration. As a general rule, it's a good idea to spread presentations over a series of lessons if you can. For example, set aside time in each lesson for two or three; that's the right amount to keep everyone

interested, and students often like the mixture of the 'normal' lesson and watching their peers present.

2. Set time limits

Following on from the issue of time above, it's also wise to set clear time limits and force students to stick to them. Don't allow students to run over a time limit for presentation because it will irritate other students. You will need to be firm, but if you stop students when they overrun early on in the course, they will soon learn to control their timekeeping.

3. Set comprehension questions

If you are familiar with the content of the presenter's talk, prepare a set of comprehension questions for the audience which they have to answer during the presentation.

4. Create three questions

Instead of writing comprehension questions yourself, tell the students in the audience the title of the presentation and say a few words about the general topic. Then ask them to write down three questions before the talk that they expect the presenter to answer. During the presentation itself, students in the audience listen out for answers to their questions and note them down. At the end, if any of their questions remained unanswered, they can ask them then.

5. Noting the key points

Ask the listening students to write down the main points that they think the presenter wants them to take away from the talk. At the end, ask students to compare with a partner what they noted down. Students should notice any differences between what they focused on and why. It can also be helpful for the presenter to receive feedback on what other students noted down as it tells them if they managed to get their key message across.

6. Allocate tasks

When running in-class presentations, there can be a few different things to manage, so allocate them out to students. For example, you might set time limits on a presentation so one student in the audience could be in charge of timekeeping and signal to a speaker when their time is about to run out. We often video presentations, so put a student in charge of filming each one.

7. Filling in peer feedback forms

Unit 42 looks at what to include in a feedback form for business presentation skills and how to use the form effectively. The same form, or similar, can of course be completed by peers, although you may need to simplify it or at least clarify exactly how to complete it.

8. One thing I liked was ...

If you think that using long feedback forms will be overly complex – especially early on in a course – then simplify the observation task like this: ask students, while watching or at the end, to write down one thing they really liked about their peer's presentation and one suggestion they have for improvement. Then set aside a little bit of time for feedback to be given at the end.

9. Students choose an observation point

As a variation to tips 7 and 8 above, ask each student in the audience to write down one area of presenting that they are currently trying to improve and work on. So they might write down 'making clear introductions and conclusions' or 'using eye contact effectively'. Explain that they must watch the presentation and consider how the presenter copes with this area. They don't necessarily give any feedback, but instead they think

about whether the presenter did or didn't handle that area successfully. If they observed a successful demonstration, they can learn from this person about how to improve their own presentations. On the other hand, if the presenter demonstrates the same difficulty, then the observer might be able to recognise what is causing it and apply the conclusions to their own presenting.

10. A buddy system

Because presenting can be stressful, you could pair up students so that on one day when one of them presents, the other partner is their 'buddy'. He or she is responsible for helping the presenter with any basic preparation such as arranging for all the technology to be set up correctly, dealing with any last-minute hitches and possibly being the person primarily responsible for giving peer feedback. Obviously, you'll need to pair up students sensitively or even let them select their own partner.



John Hughes and **Robert McLarty** have many years' experience in teaching and writing books for Business English and Academic English courses. This article is adapted from their new resource book for teachers, *Business English ETpedia* (Pavilion). Visit www.myetpedia.com for more details.

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