

## GOOD PRACTICE IN TEACHING ESP PRESENTATIONS

Galina Kavaliauskienė

Mykolas Romeris University

Public speaking is the one skill no successful person can afford to be without.

Anonymous.

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking in public always aims at communication and presupposes a different level of formality depending on the settings and the audience. Learning to speak in a foreign language differs from learning other subjects due to its social nature. Language is part of person's identity, and speaking is used to convey this identity to other people. Since oral production is open to audience scrutiny, lack of confidence and fear of looking foolish cause speakers' anxiety. People are also concerned about such things as grammar, lexis, and pronunciation.

There is a wealth of publications on the issues of making presentations and how to prepare a presentable talk and deliver it. However, teaching and learning to make well-organized presentations in front of an audience takes a lot of practice - learners need some systematic training in preparing and performing. The principal purpose of training is to provide the most effective learning experience for the student.

This paper addresses the research into learners' attitudes to speaking in public on different themes and learners' perceptions of experienced gains and lacks. Each learner encounters various difficulties in making presentations, and these difficulties need to be identified and dealt with. Evaluation of public speaking allows to determine strengths and weaknesses and work out the methodology of teaching effective presentations. The outcome of research is drawing general outline of good practice in helping learners master public speaking.

## BACKGROUND TO RESEARCH

Public speaking is a productive skill aiming at communication. For communication in a foreign language to be successful, a speaker needs to be familiar with linguistic and cultural backgrounds, that are shared by native speakers, and has to obey certain rules and conventions, that are not

written down anywhere, nor are easy to define (Harmer, 2001:246). Socio-cultural rules and turn-taking belong to spoken genres which public speaking is part of. Another feature of public speaking is a different level of formality that is sometimes described as 'distance' and 'closeness', i.e. language production is more 'writing-like' or 'speaking-like' (C. Tribble, 1997:21).

Speaking involves two types of skills – basic, lower level motor-perceptive skills of producing right sounds and using accurate grammatical structures, and communicative strategies such as what and how to get the meaning across (Bygate, 1987:5).

Learning to speak in a foreign language differs from learning other subjects basically due to its social nature. Language has always been part of person's identity, and speaking is used to convey this identity to other people. 'Exposing language imperfections in front of others, person's self-image becomes more vulnerable, and it leads to anxiety' (Arnold, 2003:2).

The main reasons for anxiety in public speaking appear to be lack of confidence, unfamiliar situation, sense of isolation, self-consciousness, fear of looking foolish, fear of the consequences, i.e. be judged by others (<http://lorien.ncl.ac.uk?ming/dept/tips/present/>).

Since oral production is open to audience scrutiny, speakers are concerned with various difficulties such as grammar, lexis, and pronunciation. Referring to pronunciation problems of language learners J. Morley (1994:67) points out that 'it is well documented that speakers with poor intelligibility have long-range difficulties in developing into confident and effective oral communicators; some never do'.

It is claimed that the average person speaks over 34,000 words each day (<http://www.tufts.edu>).

'And yet, when polled, the number one fear of American people is that of public speaking. The fear of speaking to a group is ranked above fear of dogs, fear of flying, and even fear of death'. As Oscar Wilde remarked in his famous quotation : 'The human brain starts working the moment you are born and never stops until you stand up to speak in public'.

There is an opinion that as with most personal skills oral communication cannot be taught. Instructors can only point the way and emphasize essential features such as person's *voice* – *how* you say it is as important as *what* you say, *body language* – movements express your attitudes and thoughts, *appearance* – first impression influences the audience's attitude to speakers. Actors, politicians and VIPs are taught how to manage their voices and body language, and, with a bit of practice, any learner can cope with superficial features of public speaking. Matter-of-fact speaking uses background and linguistic knowledge to create a meaningful message, and it is directed at a specific audience in a face-to-face situation (Arnold, 2003:3).

There is a wealth of publications on the issues of making presentations and how to prepare one's talk and deliver it. The instructions are quite straightforward and include tips on, firstly, how to prepare oneself, secondly, the material, thirdly, the presentation. Nevertheless, learners need some systematic training in preparing and performing – from planning and introducing a topic to concluding and handling questions. Learning to make well-organized presentations in front of an audience takes a lot of practice.

The personalized approach of teaching impromptu speaking, which employs a methodology of teaching a short talk before practising skills of making a presentation was presented in (Kavaliauskienė, 2004). 'A short talk' means a non-stop speaking for 2 or 3 minutes. The talking time may be extended to 5 minutes in the successive stages. The aim of short talks is fluency rather than accuracy. Success in learning speaking skills depends on what goes inside and between people in the classroom. Speaking in front of peers gives practice in social use of the language. An uncontrolled practice of giving a short talk in the class means for learners the integration of linguistic risk-taking with social risk-taking since a short talk is perceived by learners

as a slight and justifiable risk to take.

Teaching presentation skills requires from teachers a lot of patience. Before delivering critical remarks and giving feedback, a good teacher should remember the famous quotation by Theodore H. White: 'the most difficult thing in the world is to know how to do a thing and to watch someone else do it wrong without comment'. In other words, it is wise to allow students to use self-assessment and peer-assessment techniques to evaluate their performance by commenting on their gains and lacks.

Students' views on the value of undergraduate presentations were studied by D. P. Carmody (2004). Presenters indicated the reasons for presenting which include personal challenge (89%), encouragement from a professor (59%), and career (34%). Presenters also reflected on their gains such as a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy, and the pleasure of having their work accepted and valued by a receptive audience. Among regrets there were insufficient preparation for the presentation and the questions following it. The percentage of students who remarked on personal gains are: improved self-confidence (12%), a sense of accomplishment (7%), personal growth (7%), improved self-esteem (3%) and pride (3%), pleasure in sharing research with a receptive audience (14%) and pleasure of having their work valued (12%).

In presentations, learners have to meet the accepted standards for organization of a presentation. The standards include: 1) the design of the introduction that states clear objectives; 2) the context and structure of the message that contains an outline, clear ideas, a proper organizational pattern, visual aids; 3) the delivery – clear pronunciation, eye contact with the audience, appropriate rate of speaking, positive body language; 4) the conclusions – reviewing the main points, summarizing the contents and using appropriate closing techniques ([http://depts.inverhills.edu/LSPS/pub\\_speaking\\_eval.htm](http://depts.inverhills.edu/LSPS/pub_speaking_eval.htm)).

However, knowing the standards alone does not assure a reasonable performance. Learners need to be trained, and they have to learn presentation skills by experience. Undoubtedly, learners encounter various difficulties which need to be identified and dealt with individually. Each teacher has to find her own ways of disseminating good practice in ELT.

Although the concept of good practice is elusive, seven principles of good teaching practice were first published by the American Association of Higher Education. These principles are the result of the analysis of 50 years research on good teaching (Chickering & Gamson, Ehrmann, 1987). Good practice in undergraduate education 1) encourages contact between students and faculty, 2) develops reciprocity and cooperation among students, 3) encourages active learning, 4) gives prompt feedback, 5) emphasizes time on tasks, 6) communicates high expectations, and 7) respects diverse talents and ways of learning. Together all principles employ six powerful forces in education: activity, expectations, cooperation, interaction, diversity, and responsibility. A further expansion of these principles highlights the standards of good practice: 1) clear organization, smart preparation and presentation of new knowledge; 2) good practice is based on interconnected knowledge and creation of a meaningful and relevant context for learning; 3) good practice communicates enthusiasm for the subject; 4) good practice emphasises fairness between students (<http://www.csd.uwa.au/about/publications/principles>).

Significance of feedback in teaching public speaking is of a particular importance. Feedback can come from teachers, peers, the self, or relevant professionals outside the teaching-learning relationship. Active learning requires not only prompt but also specific, challenging feedback. Without feedback the learner is most likely to recycle past achievements and errors rather than create new insight, ability and competence (<http://metleweb.unimelb.edu.au/assess1.html>).

The guidelines for giving feedback are generalized by C. McNamara (2005). Effective feedback 1) implies clarity, 2) emphasizes the positive features, 3) is specific, 4) focuses on behaviour rather than the person, 5) is descriptive rather than evaluative, and 6) is careful with advice.

Summing up the overview of literature on teaching public speaking allows to state the objectives of this research. First, learners views on preparing and delivering presentations have to be examined. Second, learners' strengths and weaknesses in public speaking need to be explored. Third, elements of good practice in teaching learners to master speaking skills have to be deduced.

## RESEARCH METHODS AND RESPONDENTS

There were 60 respondents who were the 1st and 2nd year day-time students at the Faculty of Social Work of our University. Research employed a survey of learners' attitudes to speaking in front of the audience and perceptions of individual difficulties in preparation and delivery stages. For this purpose, students were requested to answer the questions of a specially designed questionnaire which is given in the Appendix.

Students' presentations were assessed throughout the academic year. Evaluation of students' presentations allows to identify strengths and weaknesses that are revealed in speaking.

The analysis of survey data and students' performance helps re-assess effectiveness of teaching speaking skills and outline good practice in teaching. The findings are presented in the following sections.

## RESEARCH DATA AND DISCUSSION

The first question in our inquiry concerns learners' general attitudes to presentations, i.e. their likes or dislikes. Chart 1 demonstrates how views are divided up: 64% of learners like making presentations while 36% - dislike them.

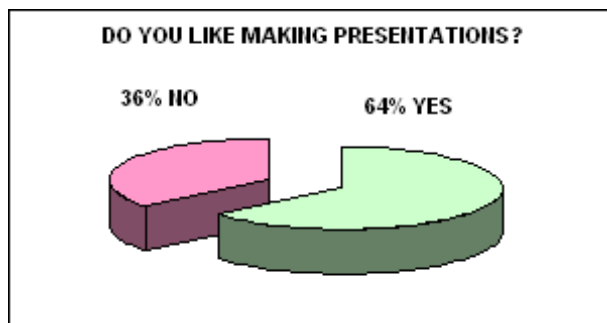


Chart 1. Learners' attitudes to presentations.

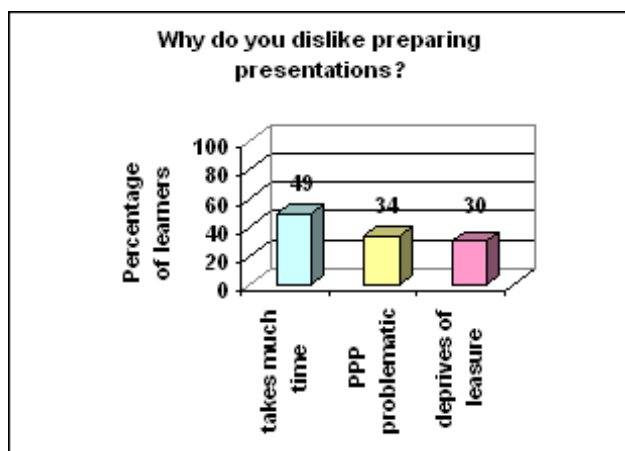
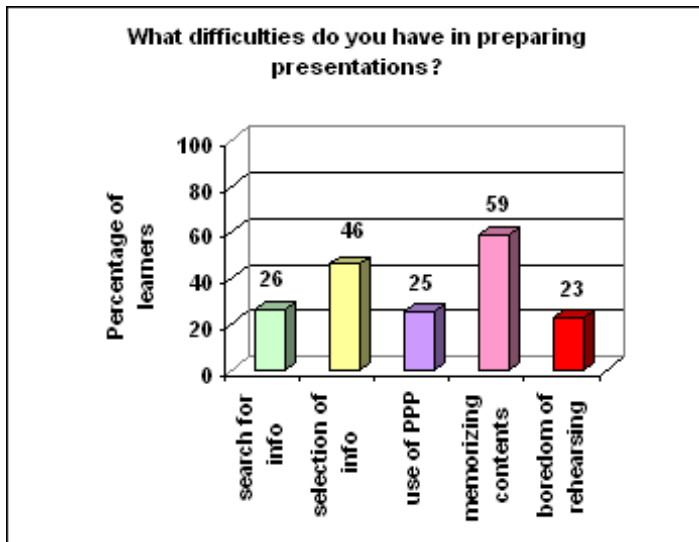


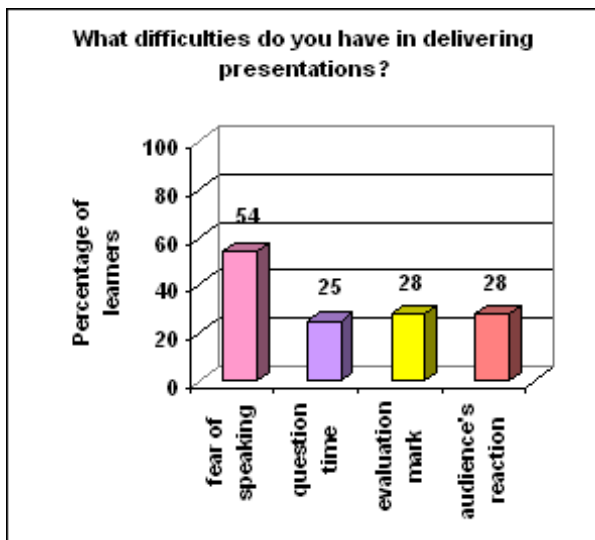
Chart 2. Why learners dislike presentations.

The reasons for disliking presentations do not vary much. Almost half of respondents (49%) claim that it takes them a lot of time to prepare. Some learners (34%) find PowerPoint software hard to use. 30% of students feel that activity of preparations deprives them of leisure time.



**Chart 3. Learners' difficulties in preparing presentations.**

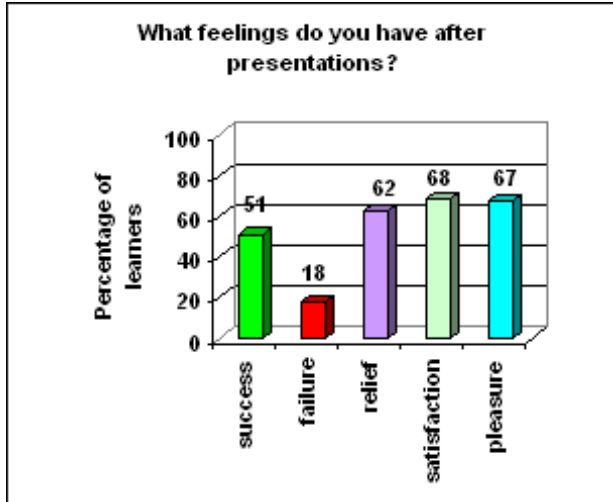
The most important difficulty in preparation for 59% of learners is memorizing the contents. The second one is a selection of information (46%). For the quarter of learners, search for information, use of PowerPoint software and boredom of rehearsing are perturbing.



**Chart 4. Learners' difficulties in delivering presentations.**

Delivery of presentations does not seem to be problematic. Only a quarter of students feel anxious about question time, evaluation mark and the reaction of the audience. The most disturbing feature of responses is fear of speaking – 54% of students are worried about it.

Students' feelings after completing presentations are overall positive – the data are displayed in chart 5. Over half of learners feel successful, and the two thirds (between 62% and 68%) have feelings of relief, satisfaction and pleasure. Regrettably, 18% of students have the feeling of failure.



**Chart 5. Learners' feelings after presentations.**

Some students volunteered giving their individual views under items 'other' in the questionnaire. These responses are listed in the Table 1.

**Table 1. Learners' individual views on presentations expressed under the item 'other' in the questionnaire (Appendix).**

No	STUDENTS' PERSONAL VIEWS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
1	No difficulties whatsoever	1
2	Presentations are useful and important	10
3	Will use PPP software in the future	20
4	A good way of learning to speak fluently and accurately	15
5	Interesting to prepare and deliver	5
6	Lack of general knowledge	1
7	Unable to plan my time	1
8	Unable to organize information	1
9	Feel anxious before presentations	2
10	Fear of forgetting something	4
11	Fear of saying something incorrectly	3
12	Not sure about contents of a presentation	1
13	Do not have a PC at home	13

Interestingly, learners mentioned what was omitted in the questionnaire: 10 students included usefulness and importance of presentations (row No 2), 20 students will use the PPP software in the future (row No 3), 15 students think that presentations help them learn to speak fluently and accurately (row No 4), and 5 students found it interesting to prepare presentations and deliver them. Surprisingly, only 1 learner had no difficulties at all (row No 1). Among students' worries, there is anxiety (row No 9), fear of forgetting (row No 10) and fear of saying something incorrectly (row No 3). Very few students are unable to plan, organize or lack knowledge (rows No 7, 8, and 6). Not having a personal computer (PC) at home complicates matters of preparing presentations for 13 students (row No 13).

It is worth noticing that only a few students of Faculty of Social Work were familiar with the PPP software, so the rest had to be instructed how to use it. Moreover, these students did not have experience in making presentations, either. Therefore, the first step in teaching presentations involved a thorough examination and practice of how to meet the standards (Comfort, 1995). By the end of this introductory training in making presentations course students were familiar with the standards, which are listed below in the form of public speaking evaluation.

# Format of Public Speaking Evaluation

Students are expected to meet the standards in presentations, i.e. the student 1) produces the introduction that states a clear objective; 2) constructs the content and structure of the message appropriately: a) gives an outline of the talk, b) states main ideas clearly and distinctly, c) chooses an appropriate organizational pattern, d) communicates ideas clearly and understandably, e) uses visual aids appropriately; 3) meets the standards for delivery: a) pronounces words clearly, b) maintains good eye contact with the audience, c) speaks at an appropriate rate, d) uses appropriate body language such as gestures, movement, posture, stance; 4) constructs the conclusion of the speech: a) reviews the main parts of the talk, b) summarizes, c) uses appropriate closing techniques; 5) skillfully deals with questions.

A thorough analysis of learners' public speaking on various themes throughout academic year enabled me to ascertain students' strengths and weaknesses which are summarized here:

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
	in delivery of presentations
- fluent and accurate speech	- memorized message
- appropriate body language	- unnatural ('written like') speech
- remarkable audio and video aids	- frequent register errors
- choice of interesting materials	- reading from notes or screen
- ability to deal with tricky questions	- spelling errors in PPP guidelines
- good enunciation of ideas	- inappropriate pronunciation

My teaching experience has proved that in order to help with presentations students need, first, a checklist for preparing and delivering a presentation and, second, a feedback after delivering it.

Checklist covers content and organization of a presentation, interaction with audience, register (level of formality), accuracy of grammatical structures and range of vocabulary, fluency of speech, impeccable pronunciation, and high-quality support (e.g. visual aids) materials.

A feedback can come from teachers, peers, the self. Active learning requires not only prompt but also challenging feedback. There is an opinion that feedback is beneficial under controlled conditions, but it does not always increase achievement. Some researchers feel that feedback helps learners to correct their errors and refine skills.

Next section describes what makes good practice in teaching public speaking.

## GOOD PRACTICE IN TEACHING PRESENTATIONS

The principles of good teaching practice have been referred to in the literature review. Good practice in teaching presentations depends to a great extent on the requirements to ESP speaking skills that learners need to have mastered on completing the course.

In accordance with the standards of higher education, students should be able to

- use language structures easily and fluently, adapt language usage to a variety of situations;
- take part in discussions and express opinions in a culturally acceptable way, be flexible and be able to respond appropriately to unforeseen situations;
- demonstrate the ability to apply learned vocabulary accurately and use a right style, tone, register, body language, etc.

Reflection on what works in improving students' public speaking allows to offer some useful tips. Apart from following the principles of good teaching practice, there are **three key** aspects in teaching presentations: **1** - dealing with learners' anxiety and fear, **2** - delivery of presentations, and **3** - giving feedback.

In ESP classes, learners' willingness to speak out depends to a large extent on how they feel about taking a social and linguistic risk. Learners who had experienced negative emotions in language classes in the past, for example, at school, are often reluctant to make oral contributions. Teachers' duty is to do their best to enhance learners' self-esteem and to encourage every single effort of shy students to participate in expressing their opinion or taking part in a discussion. During presentations learners feel anxious and are very sensitive to any critical remarks or interruptions. The classroom settings are extremely important, in particular, the atmosphere of goodwill and camaraderie among students. Only pedagogical intuition and goodwill can guide teachers in fulfilling such a sophisticated task.

In order to perform adequately, learners need to be trained. First stage is teaching learners to comply with the requirements for appropriate layout and organization: stating an objective in the introduction, giving an outline of the talk, designing the content and structure of the message, formulating conclusions and meeting the standards for delivery. In the stage of delivery, encourage learners to involve the audience, avoid reading either notes or guidelines on the screen, feel at ease while speaking and deal with questions confidently. The principal purpose of training is to provide the most effective learning experience for the student. Effective contact instructor-student is a universal requirement for any training which should serve the best interests of students.

Listening to teacher's feedback for students is often concomitant with feelings of fear or anxiety. Harsh remarks, admonition or critical comment might have disastrous effects on learners' future willingness to make a contribution. Teacher's praise is more valued by learners than criticism – begrudging compliments does not pay off. Feedback is supposed to be prompt, i.e. provided immediately after presentation. I think that good practice in providing feedback is to delay teacher's feedback and ask learners themselves to evaluate their presentations. It might be either self-feedback or peer-feedback – the choice depends on speaker's personality. Teacher's feedback to shy students might even be avoided or given individually after the class. This attitude to delayed feedback found a confirmation online - some advantages are also being offered. First, delayed feedback spaces learning over time which helps learners develop alternative memory routes to the information and prompts greater attention to the feedback. Second, it enables learners to make their own assessment of their performance. According to this source, to produce long-term retention of knowledge, feedback should be delayed at least an hour and up to 1 to 2 days ([http://www.work-learning.com/instructional\\_design\\_tips\\_3.htm](http://www.work-learning.com/instructional_design_tips_3.htm)).

## Conclusions

The following conclusions have been drawn:

- Learners' dislike to preparing presentations is caused by consumption of time (59%), problems with using a PowerPoint software (34%) and deprivation of leisure (30%);



- Major difficulties in preparing presentations are selection of information (46%) and memorizing the talk (59%);
- Fear of speaking during delivery is troublesome to 54% of students;
- After presentations, half of students have positive feelings of success, and the two thirds – of relief, satisfaction and pleasure;
- Learners' strengths and weaknesses in public speaking have been identified;
- Good practice in teaching presentations includes three key points – dealing with anxiety and fear of speaking, guiding learners in preparation and performance stages, and delivering feedback after performance.

## References

Harmer, J. 2001. The Practice of English Language Teaching. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Pearson Education Limited.

Tribble, C. 1997. Writing. Oxford University Press.

Bygate, M. 1987. Speaking. Oxford University Press.

Arnold, J. March 2003. Speak Easy. How to Ease Students into Oral Production. HLT Magazine.

Issue 2. <http://www.hltmagazine.net>

Public Speaking Anxiety. <http://lorien.ncl.ac.uk/ming/dept/tips/present/>

Morley, J. 1994. A Multidimensional Curriculum Design for Speech-Pronunciation Instruction. In J. Morley (ed.) Pronunciation Pedagogy and Theory. Alexandria, VA:TESOL.

Making Presentations. TUFTS University. <http://www.tufts.edu>

Kavaliauskienė, G. Teaching Impromptu Speaking: A Short Talk before a Presentation.

'English for Specific Purposes World', Web-based Journal, March, 2004.

[http://esp-world.info/Articles\\_7/Galina\\_2004.htm](http://esp-world.info/Articles_7/Galina_2004.htm)

Carmody D.P. Student Views on the Value of Undergraduate Presentations. Psi Chi Newsletter, 21(3), 1996. [http://www.kon.org/stud\\_views.html](http://www.kon.org/stud_views.html), [http://www.spc.edu/~carmody\\_d/psichi.html](http://www.spc.edu/~carmody_d/psichi.html).

Public Speaking Evaluation. [http://depts.inverhills.edu/LSPS/pub\\_speaking\\_eval.htm](http://depts.inverhills.edu/LSPS/pub_speaking_eval.htm)

Chickering A. and Gamson Z. Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. 1987. <http://www.msu.edu/user/coddejos/seven.html>

Chickering A. and Ehrmann S.C. Implementing the Seven Principles. AAHE Bulletin, pp. 3-6. 1996. <http://www.aahe.org/technology/ehrmann.htm> Last modified 01/20/2005.

Some Principles for Good Practice in Teaching and Learning. 2005.

<http://www.csd.uwa.au/about/publications/principles>

Feedback. 2005. <http://metleweb.unimelb.edu.au/assess1.html>

McNamara, C. 2005. Basic Guidelines for Giving Feedback.

<http://www.mapnp.org/library/commskills/feedback>

Comfort, J. 1995. Effective Presentations. Video Course. Oxford University Press.

Delaying Feedback. [http://www.work-learning.com/instructional\\_design\\_tips\\_3.htm](http://www.work-learning.com/instructional_design_tips_3.htm)

### **Appendix. Questionnaire on learners' attitudes to presentations**

- 1 Why do you like / dislike preparing presentations? a) it takes a lot of time, b) using PowerPoint is problematic / not difficult, c) it deprives me of leisure, d) other
  
- 2 What difficulties do you have in preparing presentations? a) searching for relevant materials, b) selecting information, c) using a PowerPoint software, d) memorizing the contents of my talk, e) boredom of rehearsing a presentation, f) other
  
- 3 What difficulties do you have in presenting your talk? a) fear of speaking in public b) worrying about questions to be asked, c) evaluation mark, d) reaction of the audience, e) other
  
- 4 After your presentation, do you have a feeling of a) success, b) failure, c) relief, d) satisfaction, e) pleasure, f) other?

**05.10.2006**

[Top](#)  [Home](#) [Contents](#) [Resources](#) [Links](#) [Editors](#) [History](#)

[ESP World](#) Copyright © 2002-2008  Design [Ashvital](#)



jn Web jn esp-world.info