

Teaching Effective Presentation Skills to ESL/EFL Students

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This article discusses some practical techniques that ESL/EFL teachers can use in teaching effective academic presentation skills. It is suggested that macro organization, micro organization, thesis and support, strategies to involve the audience, response to audience input, non-verbal communication, use of visual materials, and pacing should be taught explicitly to the students.

Introduction

Being able to present oneself precisely and concisely is a key to success in one's course of study. In what follows, I suggest some practical tips on academic presentation skills that are easy to use in teaching your ESL/EFL students.

Macro Organization

The first step is teaching macro organization. The organization of an academic presentation should consist of purpose, objectives, outline, introduction, and conclusion. The purpose is a statement that suggests the general goal of the presentation. The objectives are the specific goals that you want to achieve by the end of a presentation. The outline refers to the different parts, sections or components in your presentation. As regards the introduction, you may teach your students to start off with a word origin, an interesting question, a definition of a term, an analogy, or even a personal experience. Concerning the conclusion, no new information should be introduced to this part; the conclusion only summarizes the key points of your talk. You can begin the conclusion using the phrases such as in a nutshell, the bottom line is..., what it boils down to is ... or other similar phrases.

Micro Organization

The second step is teaching micro organization which refers to textual coherence, transitions, and connections from one part to another. A student can try the following useful phrases to make a smooth transition, such as I am going to switch gears, let's move on to the next part, next let's look at..., or next, I am going to talk about... .

Thesis and Support

Next, you can go on to teach the idea of thesis and support in an academic presentation. Teach your students to present their ideas clearly with explanations and plenty of examples. Sometimes, analogies are useful means to help explain an idea.

Strategies to Involve the Audience

Teach your students to use a variety of strategies to engage the audience. Practical strategies to involve the audience are questions, comprehension checks, and tasks. Examples of questions are "Do you have any questions about this concept or this vocabulary that I just taught?" Always ask specific questions instead of general questions such as "Do you have any questions?" Comprehension checks are essential tools to involve your audience. Examples of comprehension checks are "Is everyone with me so far?", "Is everyone on the same page?", "Can you repeat the definition of X, in your own words?" Tasks

are small exercise to check the audience's understanding. The presenter can throw a question to the audience and encourage them to discuss it with the person sitting next to him/her for approximately thirty seconds to one minute. The audience will be asked to report their thoughts to the rest of the group.

Response to the Audience Input

If the answer from the audience is incorrect, the presenter can say good try or good guess. Never say the word wrong or incorrect to embarrass those who try hard enough to produce a response. If the answer from the audience is right, respond to them positively by saying very good, excellent, terrific. Many times, if your student presenters do not know the answer to the questions from the audience, your student presenter can say "I do not have an immediate answer to your question. I will look it up and get back to you, if you remind me." It's normal that you do not know everything in this world.

Non-verbal Communication

Gaze, facial expression, movement, and gesture are typical means of non-verbal communication. Most of my students lack movement during their presentation and many are frozen. Approach the audience especially when the audience ask questions. Especially to the students who have soft voices, it is strongly encouraged that they come closer to the audience to talk from time to time.

Use of Visual Materials

Nowadays, using powerpoint is not uncommon in presentations. Still, it will be a good idea to supplement the talk with a handout containing key points of the presentation, pictures, or illustrations. Real objects are good tools to help your students present an idea efficiently.

Pacing

Pacing means balancing the amount of information with the speed of presentation and the time allotted. Always rehearse the presentations as many times as possible. Always time yourself in the rehearsals. In actual presentation, the number of the questions from the audience is often unpredictable. Sometimes, you just cannot present all the materials you have prepared. Always present the more important information first. When you run out of time, you can cut those least important parts that follow.

Conclusion

Teaching students the techniques to deliver a well-organized, interesting presentation is not that difficult. Macro organization, micro organization, thesis and support, strategies to involve the audience, response to audience input, non-verbal communication, use of visual materials, and pacing should be taught explicitly to the students. If you follow this advice closely, you will see a significant improvement in your students' macro- and micro- organization skills.

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