

BUSINESS ENGLISH FOR PRESENTATION - USE OF THE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

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Abstract. *In the modern world of communication, presentation skills are required daily. We are all aware that giving any presentation at work is actually a chance for personal promotion, proving your own value and introducing some new ideas. As such, it has to be taken very seriously. Doing needs analysis is where we should start. The only safe way is to practice, using authentic material, recording the performance, keeping track of time, and polishing language skills. Teaching English language skills is what a teacher is supposed to do in any class. What stands as a huge challenge is getting approximately the same level of knowledge in the field of your client's expertise. The ultimate question of the exact role of the teacher in the teaching process is inevitable here. You need to be an English teacher, a professional life coach, and to have an insight into the field of expertise of your student.*

Key words: *presentation, authentic materials, stage fright, body language*

1. PRESENTATION AS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF BUSINESS WORLD TODAY

The ability of presenting information clearly and effectively is needed if you are to get your message or opinion across. In the modern world of communication, presentation skills are required daily as ‘most business people, at some stage of their career, are required to present parts of their organization, products, a report, figures, etc.’¹ Whether you are a teacher, a shop assistant, or an executive, if you want to start your own business, win an election, or pass your final exam, you will have to make a presentation. This can be a very demanding task.

Many authors give very detailed instructions considering the very technique, instruments, and various situations in which you are to give a presentation. (How To Make A Great Presentation, Liam Lusk, 2012; How to create it, shape it and deliver it! Emma Ledden, 2013, www.pearson.com/uk; Strategic Storytelling-How to Create Persuasive Business Presentations, Dave McKinsey, 2014, SpeakingSherpa LLC, etc.) Most of them give the reader their version of an ideal presentation, including numerous useful tips, advice, and comments. However, an ordinary executive, not a professional used to presenting keynote speeches, might get a bit confused by their detailed and sometimes opposing attitudes. Apart from the technical division of features, functions, timing and all the other elements of a presentation, the presenter is at a loss.

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¹Peter Wilberg, Michael Lewis, *Business English*, Language Teaching Publications, UK, 1990

The ideal situation of delivering a presentation in front of an audience that is just listening, preferably is well informed on the topic, and asking only the questions closely connected to what has been said, is really too much to ask in everyday business setting. What usually happens is that ‘presentations’ have to be given very fast, without preparation, in short discussions, in an office, sometimes even in a café, they are two-way, and you have to act fast, and think fast as well. Depending on the reaction of the audience, and in most cases the audience is only one person, you have to make instant changes, modifications, as well as keep the professional attitude in an unusual setting.

2. USE OF THE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

In my experience of Business English Teaching, use of the authentic materials has proven as the most useful means of preparation. We are all aware that giving any presentation at work is actually a chance for personal promotion, proving your own value and introducing some new ideas. As such, it has to be taken very seriously, since it might be an important factor in keeping the career going upwards, or in some unfortunate cases, downwards. My students, who are usually on very high positions in their companies, are very well aware of that fact. For a successful Plant manager, for example, it would be highly embarrassing to mispronounce even a single word, while giving a presentation in front of a multi-national audience, which sometimes consists of a couple of native speakers, too.

The only safe way is to practice, using the authentic material, record the performance, keep track of time, and polish the language skills. Easier said than done, you will agree. In the latest classes we had, my student had the task of presenting the topic of Managing safety in his company. My student is the above mentioned Plant manager of a very big multinational company, so this is not his first presentation. His level of English is not the problem, it is intermediate. Nevertheless, one element was dominant – stage fright - the audience will consist of his colleagues from Serbia, as well as his superiors, mainly native speakers, and it caused a lot of stress.

3. WHO DO WE PRESENT TO AND HOW? (OUR BOSSES, COLLEAGUES OR TO A MIXED AUDIENCE)

The decision about the aim of the presentation had to be reached first. The audience will be mixed, so he had to adjust the content and make it interesting, not too long, or complicated. We decided that he will need to share information that is relevant to managing safety and the cost of doing it, respectively. In addition, the need to explain more technical terms in his presentation appeared as logical. He decided to start using rhetorical questions, since that draws attention and helps in creating ‘links between the various points²’. Many detailed instructions that can be found online³, helped us prepare an outline of the presentation. As homework, he prepared the Power Point slides and practiced presenting them.

² Ellis M., O’Driscoll N, *Giving presentations*, Harlow: Longman, 1992

³ <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/presentation-skills.html>

Although the presentation was more or less technically suitable, there were many details missing. We needed to imagine the situation, the audience, the atmosphere, and the most difficult task was to see the presentation from the angle of the audience.

‘Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look at each other’s eyes for an instant?’ – Henry David Thoreau⁴

That is, in my opinion, the most important thing - to feel the audience and to care. To care about their interests, to understand why they want to listen to you and what will be useful for them to hear; in a word, to feel empathy. **Empathy** is the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within the other person’s frame of reference, i.e., the capacity to place oneself in another’s position.⁵ It is a powerful state of mind that motivates us to be genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of others.

Once my student was able to do that, it was easy to define the opening question, the way he would address the audience, since he knew who they were and he could imagine being one of them. The frame was determined. The opening should take about 10 percent of the presentation and the body about 65 percent to 75 percent. Finally, the key points should be pointed out once more, and then the presentation is to be closed with a statement that emphasizes the main goal of the presentation. In the end the questions should be answered. One additional homework assignment for him was to anticipate the questions and to formulate satisfactory answers. It all contributed to a more relaxed atmosphere in the class and reduced the level of stress.

4. HOW TO OVERCOME STAGE FRIGHT?

No matter how experienced the speaker, how skilled or how fluent, the stage fright is always there. It is said that it is a positive element of public performance that keeps you more focused or helps you stay alert. On the other hand, it can be paralyzing at times and as such is an unpleasant companion of every presenter. One never knows which course it may take. The one thing that is certain is that practice makes perfect, and that we can always practice more.

As Michael Port clearly states in his book *Steal the Show*⁶ - any interaction in life is a performance, and we have to make the most of every presentation and interaction. How? That is gained through practice. So we took his advice and acted ‘as if...’ The presentation was getting better with each try. My role was to be ‘the audience’ and ask both expected and unexpected questions. Considering the fact that my student was an expert in his field and was fairly confident in his knowledge, he knew exactly the right measure and did not have the need to prove himself to the audience by giving too detailed explanations and by being a boring theoretician.

Body language, on the other hand, was not his strong point. The posture was wrong and the fidgety movements of his fingers, created an overall impression of unease. ‘If what we are saying with our bodies can be understood intuitively by another and we in turn understand their body language, then we have a very powerful tool box to employ in our

⁴ <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/h/henrydavid386485.html>

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empathy>

⁶ Michael Port, *Steal the Show*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, New York, 2015

relationship with others⁷. In order to face the problem properly and potentially find a solution, one smart phone was used in the class, which is usually not allowed. An audio and later even a video recording of his performance were made, in order to analyze the movements, the posture, and the body language that was screaming with fear. Each recording brought a certain improvement. It was easy to correct once you were aware of the fault. He sometimes even could not believe that he really moved or acted the way he did. Once the physical segment was improved, another element that had to be corrected emerged.

5. THE GAP BETWEEN THE WRITTEN WORD AND PRONUNCIATION

While presenting in front of an unknown audience it is not strange to mispronounce a word even in your mother tongue, let alone presenting in a foreign language. A professional in any field tends not to make mistakes, and to be taken seriously. This is a challenge to a person presenting in a foreign language, especially in front of native speakers. As the plant manager, my student was to a large extent exposed to written language in different forms: e-mails, letters, books, magazines, brochures, etc. He was well aware of proper spelling, grammar rules and could understand both written and spoken English. The problem occurred in the field of using spoken language. Some of the professional terms were correctly used, although they were rather difficult, whereas some everyday words were mispronounced. The words used were memorized according to their spelling, together with the right use and meaning, however, literally pronounced as they were written. That was the scary element, since we could not predict all the possible questions, and all we could actually do was to improve the vocabulary closely connected with the topic, practice and hope for the best. 'It would be a lot simpler to pronounce English if the written form resembled the spoken form more closely'.⁸ The most difficult thing was not to learn, but to unlearn and relearn.⁹ It took some repetition and practice as well as persistent correction on my side, to finally reach the satisfactory level of pronunciation.

6. WHAT IS THE PRIORITY? IS IT THE LANGUAGE OR THE PRESENTATION SKILLS?

Although an English teacher in most cases does not want to admit, at least to the students, in this case, the perfection of language skills is not the primary goal. If we try to be objective and judge from the point of view of the audience, a confident, interesting speaker who keeps attention and is not boring, would be much more effective than a linguistically impeccable presenter, who would pragmatically and clearly state what he had in mind, without any liveliness.

Since the presentation is not on English language or linguistics, the focus of our classes in this case was on the presentation skills. Once this high expectation of flawless speech was put aside, the real energy outburst came out of my student. As if a burden has been removed from his back, he approached the presentation practice with almost no stage fright and infused more joy into his work. Now I realize that a non native speaker has a double

⁷Max A. Eggert, *Body Language for Business*, Skyhorse Publishing, New York, 2011

⁸ <https://pronunciationstudio.com/english-difficult-pronounce/>

⁹ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/568874-the-illiterate-of-the-21st-century-are-not-those-who>

burden, when it comes to presenting in a foreign language, and we as teachers have to be more flexible than usual and more understanding. This led to more wonderful ideas implemented with creativity, and the final result was stunning. Not only has he managed to be interesting and relaxed while presenting, he also showed fairly decent English language knowledge, if a slight presence of Serbian accent is excluded.

7. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER - TO TEACH, TO LEARN (ABOUT THE TOPIC), TO FIND THE WAY TO CORRECT AND NOT INSULT, OR...?

The ultimate question of the exact role of the teacher in the teaching process is inevitable here as well. Although in this case we have a one-to-one class, which means more freedom, variety of resources at hand, a person who is highly collaborative, and such facilitating factors, the role is a highly demanding one.

Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.¹⁰ Teachers tend to panic when finding resources is in question. In this case, with one person, precise needs, and topic, that should not be an issue at all. Doing needs analysis (NA) is where we should start. As Brown defines the NA, it is: 'the systematic collection of and analysis of all subjective and objective information necessary to define and validate defensible curriculum purposes that satisfy the language learning requirements of students within the context of particular institutions that influence the learning and teaching situation.'¹¹ All the information you need can be gained in an informal discussion with your student. The reason why a person invests time, money, and energy in having English lessons is certainly to improve. What needs improving is up to you to define. However, most of my students so far have been well aware of all the imperfections and drawbacks in their knowledge, so what is the most natural thing to do is to use the learner as the main resource.

First of all you are to teach some missing elements both considering English language knowledge, and presentation skills. In order to do so, it goes without saying that you should be competent yourself. Teaching English language skills is what a teacher is supposed to do in any class. What stands as a huge challenge is getting approximately the same level of knowledge in the field of your client's expertise. After defining the needs, the most difficult part for an English teacher takes place: doing the homework - finding out about the topic, the field of interest, as well as the area of expertise of the ESP student. Not only do you need to learn very specific and highly professional terminology, but you also have to be able to understand a wider picture and act quickly should any correction of language be needed.

My personal experience shows that taking it too seriously might not be the right measure. You are not required to be a manager or an expert in marketing to do your part properly. What proved right is to have authentic material in advance, so that you can be focused on the very topic of the presentation, and do a little bit of research. Starting from terminology, over hidden meanings, to the context, if you have the material, you have the tool box you need.

Using all the information you have and know about, correcting and polishing fine faults in the production of language, imagining possible and potential situations your student

¹⁰ <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/t/theodorero100965.html>

¹¹ Brown, J. D., *The Elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development*, Boston, Heinle and Heinle, 1995

might be in, you will have to control the situation completely and act naturally. You need to be an English teacher, a professional life coach, and to have an insight into the field of expertise of your student. To be precise, you need to juggle! As simple as that. Another important factor of success in this demanding discipline is the manner in which you correct a person on a very high position in his company, who is used to being treated with the highest of respect. To correct and not insult is the goal.

8. CONCLUSION

To conclude, a successful Business English presentation to a defined topic is not an unattainable result, provided you have the patience and skill. The ideal number of classes for preparation would be five, which might be adjusted according to the situation. The first class would cover determination of the goals, and defining the drawbacks. The following two classes would consist of practice, repetition, analyzing, and correction. The fourth should already give you a clear idea of the final outcome, and the final class would be a simulation of the real situation. Clear ideas, precise language, and genuine communication from your heart, without unnecessary details, will keep the audience engaged and not bored. Finally, the right length is of crucial importance, as Winston S. Churchill has once wisely said: "A good speech should be like a woman's skirt; long enough to cover the subject and short enough to create interest."

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