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Getting Pushy in Brazil: Using P.U.S.H. ("Present Up The Stairway To Heaven") To Teach Presentation Skills In A Business English Context

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GETTING PUSHY IN BRAZIL:
USING P.U.S.H. ("PRESENT UP THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN")
TO TEACH PRESENTATION SKILLS IN A BUSINESS ENGLISH CONTEXT

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING DEGREE AT THE SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT

BY

WILL A. BEEBE

FEBRUARY 2007

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Date: __________________________________________

Project Advisor: _________________________________

Project Reader: __________________________________

Author: ________________________________________

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Where would I be without the encouragement of my parents, Allen and Barbara Beebe, both of whom were teachers? Many teachers inspired me throughout the years. I’ll always remember Miss Deborah Thomas, my sixth-grade English teacher at John Fitch School in Windsor in 1969, who challenged us with her lists of “Demon Words”, and had us write letters to our soldiers in Vietnam, including her own sweetheart—MIA. More recently, my SIT teachers motivated me to learn and teach better: Bonnie Mennell and Susan Barduhn (my advisors), Diane Larsen-Freeman, Elka Todeva, Thomas Santos, and Lauren Alderfer. Special thanks goes to John Abbott, a consummate professional, a passionate man of letters, and “the reader” of this IPP. Finally, there was Anna, whose support, understanding, and kindness got me to this point.
ABSTRACT

In a business English (“English As A Second Language” or “ESL”) context, is there a relatively straightforward, effective, and fun way for students to improve their presentation skills? In this paper, I propose a modular system which I call “Present Up The Stairway To Heaven” (or P.U.S.H.), complete with exercises and simulations, designed to take students through successive steps towards better business presentations in English in approximately 24 hours of classroom instruction and practice.

ERIC Descriptors:
Class Activities
Communication Skills
Language Teachers
Learning Modules
Simulation
Speech Skills
Teaching Skills
Verbal Communication

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I remember a few fleeting glimpses of kindergarten in a one-room schoolhouse called Stony Hill. One such glimpse was my first public speaking engagement at age five. It was called “Show and Tell”: You showed your 25 squirming classmates something from home, and told them something about it—until your ears burned too badly, and you had to sit down. It’s not such a great leap to where I am today: Helping businesspeople in an English-As-A-Second-Language context improve their language and presenting skills experientially.

Besides a love of reading, letter writing, and the occasional telling of tall tales, where did my interest in teaching business English begin? I paid $20 to attend an intriguing lecture entitled “Jobs in Japan” at the University of Washington’s “Experimental College”. In addition to a wonderful slide show featuring cherry blossoms, Meiji-era temples and bullet trains, the gist of the lecture was how “easy” it was for anyone with the slightest interest to go to Japan and teach English. At the same time, you could experience a strong and mysterious culture, in a country where teachers were respected—even revered, make a sizeable salary, and travel to other completely different countries nearby. I simply had to give it a go.

My brother Seth had a high school classmate, Brendan, who had married a Japanese woman and settled in Tokyo. He encouraged me to join them, offering me help finding a job and a place to stay.
On November 3, 1988—“Culture Day” in Japan—I landed at Narita Airport. My one year of learning Japanese in Hartford had hardly prepared me for the six-year roller coaster ride I was to experience in “The Land of the Rising Sun”. After the nightmare of almost not finding Brendan’s apartment on my first day, I quickly found some work with Phoenix Associates, a small consultancy started by two Japanese-American Mormon brothers, Tom and Bob Kent. Tom didn’t hesitate to explain to me that I had arrived in November, and that the country slowed its business pursuits in late December, and things started slowly again only in the second week of January. My timing was off.

The money I had painstakingly saved the previous year living with my Dad would barely make ends meet in the world’s most expensive city. But, out of the goodness of his heart, Tom set me up with a corporate project for Phoenix’s critical client at the time, IBM-Japan. They would pay handsomely for an English transcript of the lengthy film, “The Nuremberg Trials”, starring Spencer Tracy. My job was to watch the movie, dictate all the lines, and input them on the company’s Mac computers. With two fingers, I managed to type fifty pages. Then, there was an inexplicable computer crash. I approached Tom sheepishly, and he told me tough luck—next time, make sure to “save” every five minutes or so. I had never used a computer before (nor did computers automatically save then as they do now!).

Phoenix introduced me to the world of professional business English training. Before I knew it, I was called on to design all kinds of learning materials, present a four-hour session to five-hundred-strong at Nissan’s Freshman Training, and act in a video promoting Fuji Photo Film’s thrust into world markets. Most interestingly, I was called in to meet the guru of presentation skills training at Phoenix at the time, Gordon Jolley, a feisty Canadian who had carved out a comfortable niche for himself training Japanese executives, all while wearing colorful suspenders.
I’d like to think that I was a natural at teaching presentation skills. Acting, storytelling, understanding and working with other cultures, and helping others have fun while learning were some of my strong points. It was hard work mastering and refining the material. There were a lot of exhausting train and taxi rides, and I personally witnessed hundreds of lousy presentations, as well as a few outstanding ones that kept me going. The Phoenix instructors were a constant source of inspiration: the esteemed John Abbott (the “Reader” of this very IPP), Les Gill, Stephen Getz, Kenny Johnson, Kelly McCabe, and Andrea Konuma.

Despite a few struggles between us, Tom taught me a lot. Besides Brendan, he gave me my first real encouragement in Tokyo: “Japanese businessmen will respect and listen to you. The fact that you’re losing your hair will help.” The system that I have developed for teaching presentation skills that forms the core of this “Independent Professional Project” (or IPP) originated in Tokyo. What do I call the system that I developed over my years in Tokyo, followed by almost a decade teaching business English with Lado Consultants in Taipei, Taiwan, and one that I continue to work on in Brazil? I call it P.U.S.H.—“Present Up The Stairway to Heaven”. I would like to share it in detail with you on the following pages.

In a nutshell, P.U.S.H. is a ten-module course designed to teach the essentials of presenting in English. It is ideally taught in 24 hours, with roughly two hours spent on each module, and time for final presentations by participants. It was designed with businesspeople in mind, but can be easily adapted for learners of general English. The modules can be used individually, or as part of a series, leading to a “graduation” or “awards ceremony”.

Business people the world over present themselves, their companies and services, on a daily basis. It’s a nerve-wracking experience, especially when done in a second (or third!) language. Every time I’ve conducted a “needs analysis” with potential business English clients, they have
always rated their need for presentation skill enhancement near, or at the top of, their list of priorities. Luckily, it’s a priority that people share, and it’s a set of skills that can be both taught and learned. This IPP is designed to give you a few more ideas of how you might practically approach this vital set of skills—both as a trainer and as an improved presenter.
CHAPTER 2

WHAT IS P.U.S.H. (“PRESENT UP THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN”)?

If you want to improve your own presentations, or your clients’ (or students’) presentations, where would you start? The idea came to me that all presentations, regardless of the language used to present, are simply the sum of a discrete set of skills that we combine to deliver a key message, or a series of related messages. I will approach the teaching of this system from the point of view of a business English teacher in an E.S.L. (English As A Second Language) setting. The fact remains that the skills can and should be practiced, with appropriate feedback, and that presentations should be continuously simulated.

The idea of “the Stairway” comes from the understanding that certain presentation skills are more “fundamental” than others. In other words, they have to be mastered, or at least dealt with adequately, before the presenter is prepared to move on to the next skill up “the Stairway”, or scale, of relative difficulty. The chart of “the Stairway” on the next page (see page 6) will show you the system I follow.
P.U.S.H. = Present Up the Stairway to Heaven

1. Eye Contact
2. Voice Control
3. Body Language
4. Messages vs. Facts
5. Analyze Audience
6. Outline & Visuals
7. Q & A
8. Language Devices
9. Humor
10. Manage Anxiety

Assess + Video
Thus, the most fundamental aspect of making effective eye contact (or “eye communication”, as some call it) while presenting will usually be practiced and checked before moving on to the slightly more difficult, but also fundamental, skill of using vocal variation (voice control, or “modulation”) when presenting. Every step of P.U.S.H. involves some assessment of the participants’ ability to use the skill(s) involved. If it’s clear from the beginning that a participant has no trouble making strong eye contact, or using appropriate body language, then we can quickly move up the stairway until we arrive at more difficult modules, including our discussion and practice of “language devices” (see Chapter 11 on page 117).

We could look at “the Stairway” from the KASA (Knowledge, Awareness, Skills, and Attitude) framework developed at SIT\(^1\) where the practicing presenters need “Knowledge” (K) of presentation techniques that they will come to know better during the training. They also need “Awareness” (A) of how they look when presenting, and how others may look at them when they are presenting, as well as awareness of the skills they are using precisely while they are using them. The training of course will focus on the “Skills” (S) that others have identified, and that they accordingly will identify, as those that lead to better presentations, and an enhanced use of the English language in presentations. Finally, they will be challenged to assess and perhaps change their “Attitude(s)” (A) towards presentations in general, and English in particular, to arrive at a better place in their minds, in addition to in their audience’s eyes.

The system is designed so that the trainer and the student presenter(s) can easily move up—and down—the stairway, depending on their level of assessed ability when they enter the training, and as they participate. It’s designed so that each step, or stair as you would have it, allows more “layered” assessment. Thus, when the student presenter moves through the tasks set up to practice “Voice

\(^{1}\) Kathleen Graves, *Designing Language Courses* (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 2000), 83.
Control” (Module 2), the trainer and student presenter simultaneously look at the application of “Eye Contact” (Module 1), and so on up the stairway. The time spent on each step or stair (from now on called a “module” in the system) may also be adjusted, depending on each learner’s, or each group’s, needs.

It has been argued that the tenth and final module, “Manage Anxiety”, is indeed the most fundamental—the most deeply rooted in our psyches. As the trainer, I do treat it as such, working with it from the beginning of the training, all the way through to the end. It is, however, not as much a discrete skill as others that can be broken down and practiced as sub-skills. Rather, presentation anxiety, and how to manage it, is an overarching concern that we are always aware of—as trainers, presenters, and language learners.

The steps may seem overly simplistic at first glance. Again, the number of tasks or sub-skills in each module that is examined and practiced by each presenter, or group of presenters, can easily be adjusted. My goal in this IPP is to share with you as many tasks related to improving presentations in English as I can, from which you can then pick and choose according to the needs of your students. (By the way, the unofficial theme song to accompany the system is Led Zeppelin’s classic, “Stairway to Heaven”. I play it at the beginning of each course, with the implicit permission of Mr. Robert Plant.)
One of the oft-cited objectives of language learners is to know what they sound like, and to know that they sound understandable and intelligent. In the same way, one of the objectives of presenters is to know what they look like, and to know that they look confident, competent, and professional in a business setting—as well as sound it! At the moment, there is no better system than simple videotaping. The instructor or coach can talk himself blue in the face telling the budding presenter what he thinks the presenter should and should not do or say. But a simple video viewing can immediately illuminate what’s good, and what can be improved, for posterity.

Typically instructors use video with student presenters in a “before-and-after” format. The presenters receive a simple presentation assignment before the training, and without further ado, are taped as soon as the training begins, to establish a baseline. After some, or all, of the training is carried out, videotaping is scheduled again, and a stark contrast is usually seen. Often student presenters have never viewed themselves on video before (at least in a presentation situation). Therefore, the first viewing is generally done more quickly, with fewer in-depth comments, along with a relatively simple rubric for assessment. This is the ideal time to ask the presenter what he or she thinks of himself or herself on tape. What are their general impressions? Just prior to the first
taping and viewing is also an ideal time to introduce the “buddy system” which establishes the constant presence of peer feedback in training (at least in a group scenario).

Just like scuba diving, where no diver is ever allowed to dive alone for safety purposes, we introduce the buddy system early in presentation training due to our belief that after self-assessment, peer assessment is the second most valuable type of feedback, followed by the trainer’s feedback. In some cultures such as Japan where status and age in business and society are paramount, it may not be easy or feasible for individuals (especially by those who are younger and more junior in status to their seniors) to give direct, critical feedback to their peers. This was pointed out to me recently in Brazil where members of a teacher training seminar informed me that “due to the pride of Latinos”, it may be difficult for them both to give and receive (constructive) criticism.

My answer to this group of Brazilians was that first, I always ask the presenter to assess himself immediately after watching the video, based on some previously agreed criteria. Then, I ask the buddy for her feedback, but I require that the buddy’s feedback always begin with something positive (to bolster confidence). Next, suggestions for possible improvement can follow. Finally, the trainer weighs in with something additional which was also positive or well done, followed by suggestions for improvement. Discussions on assessment criteria can be rich. What do participants believe can and should be assessed? Can these criteria be seen and assessed through objective eyes? Are these criteria “universal”, or do they only belong to particular cultures? Can the same criteria used to judge good storytelling be transferred to assess presentations?

One more magical feature of video needs to be mentioned here—your camera does not even need film or tape to be effective. Just setting up a camera in the back of the room, without even plugging it in, begins to stimulate the feeling of nervousness and anxiety that every presenter must feel before and during a big presentation. The all-seeing camera eye reiterates the need for adequate preparation
and rehearsal, the feeling of an audience scrutinizing your every move, as well as the reality of preserving your every mistake (and good moves, we shan’t forget) for “future generations”. Or until we erase the tape and move on, that is. Thus, I typically begin the course by asking student presenters to make relatively short presentations on video. Later in the course, I set up the camera again, but do not tape (as I mentioned). Finally, the course ends with longer student presentations, duly taped for the students to observe, comment on, and walk away with.

Another suggestion that has been made is to place pictures of faces on the backs of all the chairs in the “presentation (practice) arena” so that if a presenter has no classmates to practice making eye contact with, he can still feel the “intensity” of 20 pairs of eyes staring back at him during rehearsal. I have done this, but found that it can never match the intensity of a “real” audience. I sometimes ask people to walk in (and out) unannounced during practice presentations to raise the anxiety levels. “Brandishing” my large stopwatch (which I show to the students before they begin their practice presentations) which ticks loudly and sometimes beeps, makes some participants nervous during training. Naturally, time pressure is an issue every presenter has to deal with. Why not make them deal with time management when they practice their presentations before going “onstage”?

Use Video To Show Presentation “Role Models”

When I taught in Taiwan, we used a book called “Effective Presentations” which included some good material. I especially liked something called the “Fog Meter”—a complex formula which looked at the length of a speaker’s sentences, then multiplied them by the number of syllables in the average sentence, etc. The basic idea was presenters often make the mistake of using long

---

sentences, multi-syllabic words, and complex arguments, whereas the opposite would probably serve them better. The opposite would be “spoken English” (as opposed to “written English”), featuring simpler words, shorter sentences, and so-called “clearer logic”.

I also made use of one obvious and immediate problem which was the book’s cover design. Despite the beautiful deep blue cover, it showed a picture of a supposedly professional presenter who was actually turning away from his audience to look at the screen where his slides were projected. Thus, I often started a discussion on “effective presentations” by asking what the participants thought of this presenter’s posture. Most agreed that he was not, at that moment, delivering his “best message” (including eye contact, and “openness” in terms of posture) to his audience.

This textbook also came with an instructional video which was supposed to show a contrast between truly “bad” and “good” presentations. Indeed, I will never forget the first presentation shown on the video. A woman is asked to present a beer producer’s new image, but she makes a mistake with the time that the presentation is supposed to start, and she is tragically late. Naturally, she rushes breathlessly in the beginning of her presentation, puts her slides on the overhead projector upside down without checking them, assumes her audience knows things they obviously don’t (and would like to), starts presenting some slides and then suddenly decides to skip them, etc.

However, in my humble opinion, the video did not have a truly good presentation example on it. The effective presenters supposedly shown to contrast the first awful presenter mentioned above all had “flaws” that I thought could be improved. This led me to think that not only was this video lacking in its attempt to show appropriate “role models”, but that perhaps students from different countries like Taiwan would prefer to see Taiwanese make successful presentations. That is, to put together an “amateurish” video, highlighting non-native speakers from their own business context
making presentations which satisfied criteria they themselves had chosen, would be far more beneficial. This is a project I would still like to complete.

Three Assessment Tools: From Simple to Complex

Before I go into the individual skills and sub-skills that we try to practice and develop under “the Stairway” system, let me share with you three assessment tools I developed, and some other comparable ones I’ve seen. These tools (one simple, one moderately complex, and the last the most thorough) can be used during video sessions, both before and after significant training is done. They were developed after reading through innumerable presentation materials, and after countless discussions with colleagues and presenters, both seasoned and would-be.

The basic idea of when to use these various assessments with student presenters is to hand out the “simple” form as you initially explain how the “buddy system” will work with the very first videotaped session of the course. I would then use the “most thorough” assessment form with the final videotaped session of the course, after the students have become familiar with the buddy system and the topics covered in the assessment. The “moderately complex” form is included only for purposes of comparison.

(See Appendix One, page 162, for “Alternative Assessment Forms”)
Rate Your Fellow Presenter

Your Name:      Date:

Buddy’s Name:

Evaluate Your Buddy on a Scale:
5 = The Best / 1 = Needs Significant Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction &amp; Conclusion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Eye Contact</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Voice Control</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hands, Body, &amp; Movement</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Confidence Level</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments / Suggestions for Improvement:
# Rate Your Fellow Presenter-Final

Your Name:     Date: 

Buddy’s Name: 

Evaluate Your Buddy on a Scale:  
5 = the best / 1 = needs significant improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Introduction (Includes Greeting, Topic, Purpose, Name, How Long, Questions)</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Makes Good Eye Contact</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Uses Varied Voice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Uses Gestures, Body, &amp; Movement Well</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Designs Clear, Effective Visuals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Controls Visuals Professionally</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Organizes Logically</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Handles Questions Comfortably &amp; Concisely</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Uses Humor Appropriately</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Presents Confidently</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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Comments / Suggestions for Improvement:

English Issues:
### Linking Learning and Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Objectives</th>
<th>Instructional Activities</th>
<th>Possible Assessments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students should be able to:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Short (10-min.) Student Presentations</strong></td>
<td>SELF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Use Good Eye Contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Use Varied Voice Control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Use Professional Posture / Effective Gestures / Body Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Use Message-Based Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use Clear, Complete Opening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Use Transitional “Sign Posts”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Include Summary &amp; Clear Conclusion (“Call to Action”)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Handle Questions &amp; Presentation Arena</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Emphasize Availability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Exude Overall Confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Rate each category according to the following scale:**

9-10 = Excellent; 7-8 = Very Good; 5-6 = Good; 3-4 = Satisfactory; 1-2 = Poor; 0 = Unsatisfactory.

Total Possible Points = 100 (10 / Category)

**Criteria to Help Rating:**

1. **Eye Contact:** Lock On / 3-5 Seconds / Contact Everyone / Use Controlled Random System
2. **Varied Voice Control:** Exercise The 4 P's (Pitch / Pace / Power / Pause) / Stay Steady
3. **Body Language:** Subway Stance / Make Gestures: Big, Slow, Descriptive / Minimize Pointer Use / Control Movement
4. **Message-Based Structure:** Clear Message(s) / Message(s) Supported by Relevant Facts
5. **Opening:** Greeting / Topic & Hook / Name & Position / How Long? / When to Ask Questions?
6. **Sign Posts:** Use Clear & Varied Transitions
7. **Summary:** Summarize Key Points / **Conclusion:** Final Message + Call for Audience Action
8. **Handle Questions & Presentation Arena:** Focus on Questioner / Rephrase / Answer to All / End on Someone Else / Handle Equipment & Space Smoothly
9. **Emphasize Availability:** Alert Audience Clearly of Availability / Handouts Contain Contact Info
10. **Exude Overall Confidence:** Maintain Poise / Recover from Mistakes / Smile!
The first module of the P.U.S.H system is eye contact. If you ask a group of business people why they use eye contact when presenting, you will surely elicit a variety of useful responses. If you ask them how they “communicate” with their eyes (or what “system” or techniques they use), you may get fewer ready responses. From the first module of “the Stairway” on, the pattern that I follow is first to determine if a skill (or a group of sub-skills that makes up a larger ability) is important or not. If it’s deemed important in making better presentations by those I’m working with, then it follows that it (or they, in the case of sub-skills) should be practiced.

The discussion of why a skill is important can run its course—brief or in-depth, depending on language ability of the participants, and of course the time constraints of the seminar or course. My belief is that if a group of participants agrees in principle that something is important, then the group should move into practicing it as quickly as possible. Opinions on how a skill should be done “properly” or “correctly” will naturally vary, depending on individuals, and cultures—both national and regional, and within a certain company itself (often referred to as “corporate culture”). If we subscribe to the concept of “experiential learning”, then it’s better for the participants themselves to discover how something can or should be done—during the process itself.

Thus, my purpose here is not to give the final word on how eye contact should be used in a presentation scenario. Rather, it is to propose that eye contact is generally viewed as a fundamental
technique that people use when communicating. From there, I (the trainer) propose a series of exercises or activities, all involving eye contact, that will allow the group to experiment with the skill in a controlled manner. The exercises will also allow the participants to raise the skill to the conscious level so that they can assess themselves and others in terms of the skill’s application. Again, the exercises are designed to maximize experimentation and practice—and fun.

**Why Is Eye Contact Important?**

Before you launch into an initial discussion of why eye contact is vital to successful communicators, your brain may be flooded with maxims from your past: “The eyes are the windows to the soul”; “Look me in the eye, and tell me the truth”; “I see what you’re saying”; etc. It’s ideal for the group to quickly generate a number of reasons for why eye communication is indeed vital. Some possible answers:

1. Making eye contact builds trust with your audience: “Good eye contact is taken to mean that you are open and honest, while looking away is interpreted as an indication of insincerity or dishonesty.”

2. Making eye contact helps keep the audience’s attention.

3. Making eye contact allows you, the presenter, to monitor the audience’s reaction(s).

4. When you look at someone, they usually look back at you. When you look away (or out the window, for example), they look away too (or out the window).

5. When you look at individuals in the audience for a “meaningful interval”, they pay more attention.

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6. The “right amount of eye contact” indicates that you have confidence in yourself and what you are saying.  

7. When you combine eye contact with other skills (such as vocal variation), you can have a greater impact on the audience (the idea of “the Stairway” is thus enhanced).

Further Rationale for Eye Contact Practice, & Exercises

In the “Linking Learning and Assessment” document that I developed (see page 15), you may have noticed the sub-points listed under “Criteria to Help Rating”, specifically “Eye Contact”.

- **Eye Contact:** Lock On / 3-5 Seconds / Contact Everyone / Use Controlled Random System

Why did I (or anyone, for that matter) decide that these were good ways to judge the effective use of eye contact in a professional presentation? Some time ago, I stumbled upon a book called “Presentations Plus: David Peoples’ Proven Techniques” by—guess who—David Peoples, the man himself. I need only go as far as the book’s back cover to tell you that, “David A. Peoples is an internationally celebrated speaker, presenter, and sales trainer for major corporations and professional associations. He was IBM’s first consulting instructor, where, over the past thirty years, he has trained more than 8,000 IBM salespeople. Dave’s other clients include GE, Alliance Capital, Genuine Parts, Merrill Lynch, Siemens, the American Institute of CPAs, and the American Red Cross.” Now, don’t we all wish we could have a David Peoples working in our office?

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After reading Dave’s book, I began to incorporate some of his techniques and wisdom in my own teaching. Despite the fact that the book is advertised as “Revised and Updated for the ‘90s!”’, I find some of the material therein to be most current. But, let me warn you that David Peoples is an American, and his ranting and raving has an American slant which may not translate well into all cultures. But we shall save our cross-cultural discussion for later in this paper. When I looked for an “objective”, or at least a somewhat measurable way to assess the use of eye contact, I remember Dave’s section on this vital skill: “Have you ever been in one of those meetings where the presenter is looking at the floor, the ceiling, or out into space with a glazed look? We speak to people through our eyes. Don’t handicap yourself. Look at the audience. More specifically, look directly at one person in the audience for three to five seconds. Here’s how: Before you speak your next sentence or thought, lock in on a specific person and hold the eye contact until you have completed that phrase or thought. Careful now—not too long, because eye contact can turn into a stare, and that can be intimidating.”

Dave continues, “If you have cards or name plates, or if you know the people or some of them, use their names as you speak to them. If you do these two simple things—make eye contact and use their names—I promise you, you will have no problem getting attention and keeping interest. The best use of this technique I’ve ever seen is by professors at the Harvard Business School. They will look at every person in the room multiple times and call them by name. And every person there thinks, “He’s talking to me.” And he is—for those five seconds.”

What are some exercises you can use in your training to help people become more aware of and practice the use of effective eye contact to groups they’re presenting to?

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**Exercise 1**: Brief One-on-One Eye Contact

All participants choose a partner to start with. They look at each other directly for thirty seconds without speaking. Using a stopwatch, the instructor announces the end of the interval.

**Discussion**: Q1. How did you feel? Q2. What’s the point of this exercise?

This exercise has often been described as “desensitizing” exercise (to make the participants feel “less sensitive” to the use of direct eye contact) similar to the training given to astronauts before they go into space. They are required to undergo repeated and prolonged exercise of a certain technique or sensation to ready them for outer space, while in reality such a sensation may happen only for a brief interval, if at all.

Q3. Is it possible to look at both eyes simultaneously, or only one?

At this point, the instructor may ask, why exactly am I doing this? While I will attempt to discuss this more later (specifically related to the use of humor), the first point to remember is that no instructor needs to do any exercise that doesn’t make sense, or that might “hurt” someone in the group at hand, or that he or she is not comfortable with conducting. Furthermore, most exercises don’t require a lot of explanation, as the participants will generally do things they are asked to do—as long as they are quick, relatively “painless”, and look like they will lead to some greater good, so to speak. Thus, if they know they will move soon to a more sophisticated practice of eye contact, they will readily participate.

The element of “pain” is something that comes up with the teaching of presentation skills, and the learning of a foreign language. They are both situations in which people can feel uncomfortable, insecure, and to an extreme, in which people can be publicly humiliated. However, if we approach the teaching and learning of both with a dose of good humor, and a reassurance that we will always
encourage, but never force someone to do something against his or her own will, then we can usually proceed.

As in Community Language Learning (CLL)\(^7\) developed by Charles Curran and the C. L. Institute, the concept of creating a community which supports and encourages one another to go further and deeper applies here. To foster the idea that the classroom is like a laboratory where participants can feel free to experiment, without the adverse side effects they might experience in the real world (for example, possibly losing their jobs if they make a major mistake), and that the classroom is the “safest place” they will ever present themselves is an idea I embrace.

**Exercise 2:** Introduce Yourself with Strong Eye Contact

With a partner, each participant introduces himself (his job / his family, etc.) for a minute. The partner maintains strong eye contact throughout the introduction. Again, the instructor calls out the end of the interval. Partners switch roles.

With this or any exercise, the trainer can always choose whether or not to have “briefing” (explanatory talks before the exercise) and “de-briefing” (discussion after the exercise) sessions, depending on time, group size, the language level(s) and expressed needs of the participants, either by the group itself, or other stakeholders such as the Human Resources department of a given company.

**Exercise 3:** Introduce A Third Party

With two partners, each participant practices introducing a third party to his other partner. Partners take turns, all while maintaining strong eye contact. This exercise should be useful for corporate

students who may be comfortable with talking about their business areas ad infinitum, but may be
decidedly uncomfortable in situations that require “socializing” in English (the “Cocktail Party
Syndrome”). Of course, there are many exercises on “making small talk”, both in business English
texts and on the Net.

**Exercise 4: Present To Small Groups**

In groups of four, each participant takes a turn presenting to a group of three on a given topic. The
group can choose appropriate topics, or topics can be written on strips and taken from a hat (or any
container). The idea, however, is to provide relatively accessible topics (i.e.-your best vacation or
trip) so that participants can focus on making good eye contact. Some texts suggest the assignment
of “simple” topics such as apples, chairs, pens, rocks, or even teeth, but to me, these topics strike me
as abstract and less accessible.

At this point, it’s useful to consider whether good presenters actually use a “system”, or a
systematic approach, when making eye contact with larger groups. Most people agree that everyone
should be contacted, at least in a small group. The eye contact should be meaningful. That is, it
should be long enough to create a sensation that each audience member is receiving individual
contact. Here, I refer back to David Peoples who was quoted on page nine recommending that
meaningful eye contact is “three to five seconds” per audience member. Some participants may
wonder out loud how to determine such a time interval. Three to five seconds is enough time to
deliver a long phrase or a short sentence to one audience member. This is also where the phrase
used in the assessment criteria, “Use Controlled Random System”, comes from: the contact is
controlled (not too fast) and random (not too predictable) at the same time.
A technique I have used with success with both smaller and larger groups is to have audience members raise their hands if they aren’t “satisfied” with the amount of eye contact they are receiving as the presenter goes along. When they raise their hands in such a fashion, the presenter is required to look at them, and then they put their hands down. Naturally, if this is done later in presentation training, the presenter will probably assume that the audience member has a pressing question.

The final question here is should everyone in a small or medium-sized group (10-20 audience members) be contacted equally? In a so-called “democratic” society, where each vote is equally counted, it seems to make sense. This can lead to an interesting cross-cultural discussion since in some societies such as Japan, direct eye contact from a younger participant to an older one may have been traditionally considered aggressive or impolite. In Module 5 of the P.U.S.H. system (“Audience Analysis”), we will look at cross-cultural considerations in more detail.

**Exercise 5:** “The Matador’s Walk” or “The Oscar Award Winner’s Walk”

If we subscribe to the old adage, “You never get a second chance to make a good first impression”, then it follows that the presenter should be aware of the first impression he creates using effective eye contact and body language. Remember, your speech starts before you even say one word! Your audience takes notice of you before you begin to speak. They watch you as you walk to the front of the room. They form an impression about your level of confidence, your ability, and your credibility during your short trip to the podium. Manolo Martín-Vasquéz, a famous Spanish matador, said, “The most important lesson in courage is physical, not mental. From the age of 12, I was taught to walk in a way that produces courage. The mental part comes later.”

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To exude such confidence, especially in a presentation situation, seems appropriate. As a pacifist (albeit an aggressive soccer player) and lover of animals, I prefer to use the name, “The Oscar Award Winner’s Walker”, for the following exercise. Each participant (or several volunteers, if that seems more adequate with your group) has the opportunity to walk from the back to the front of the classroom with her head up, her spine straight, and shoulders back. She turns to face the audience, and stands at the lectern or podium (if available) for several moments without speaking. After making eye contact with several audience members, the presenter simply says “good morning” or “good afternoon” (“good night” should probably be avoided here for the time being).

In his seminal work, “The Courage To Teach”, Parker Palmer speaks of the need to teach who you are. He claims that knowing yourself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing your students and your subject. I often ask myself, who am I as a presentation skills teacher? From Palmer, I understand that as a presentation skills trainer, I should be comfortable making presentations myself, and certainly I should be a good listener. Am I as comfortable making presentations as I could be? Am I as good a listener and coach as I could possibly be? Moving to Brazil in 2004 has given me an entirely new awareness of myself (I think my awareness as a presenter began in a Connecticut kindergarten when I was five years old, and I participated in “Show-and-Tell” with my classmates), and I will be the first to admit that I am still learning and experimenting myself with presentation skills, as well as with coaching. I’m trying to be a better listener all the time, both in the classroom and in my personal relationships. I will also talk later about teaching P.U.S.H. to teachers, and the approach I use.

As a language learner myself (currently learning Brazilian-Portuguese), I like to have fun in the classroom. This exercise, “The Oscar Award Winner’s Walk”, should be fun for the participants.

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As I mentioned before, in order to encourage the participants and to make them feel (somewhat) safe, I always ask for volunteers to do certain exercises first. I also try to encourage the fun factor by making it known to all the participants that they can clap or applaud at any time for a good performance by one of their peers.

When the first participant readies himself for his triumphant walk to the podium, I make an exuberant introduction of the participant, “Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Mr. _________!”, or “Please give a warm round of applause to Mr. _________!” after which I clap heartily. In my mind, this ties into the technique of visualization (P.U.S.H. Module 10—“Manage Anxiety”) where presenters are asked to imagine a time when they were successful in making a presentation, and to visualize an audience in front of them that smiled, nodded their heads positively, and clapped appreciatively as they wrapped up. These are some of the things I enjoy as a presenter, and that I like to do as I continuously strive to teach who I am. You, my reader, may not be entirely comfortable with my approach. I ask you to take your approach and the exercises that support it so that you too may teach presentation skills as you are.

Since “The Walk” is also an exercise that takes body language into consideration, it can be used again, or separately, in P.U.S.H. Module 3.

**Exercise 6**: Present To A Larger Group

The hardest thing to do is to prepare a client that you may be training one on one to make a presentation to a larger group. There is no real way to simulate the pressure of having 20 expectant faces staring at you rather than just one.

If you do have a larger group to work with, then you’re in luck. However, if time is limited, you have to think of ways that can maximize the practice time of the group. One of the useful tips I
learned in Japan when running a training seminar is to work with the time schedule “backwards”. In other words, if you start with the time you want to finish the training (since the trains in Japan are extremely punctual, and you don’t want to run the risk of missing the one you want to be on), you can work backwards to plan the time you must start the final exercise, given the number of participants you have, in order to finish on time.

Thus, if you have 10 participants, and each is expected to speak for five minutes, and they will also have two minutes each to answer questions, and you will spend three minutes giving feedback, then you have a total of 10 minutes times 10 participants which equals more than an hour and a half in total. You will probably want to take at least a 15-minute coffee break in the middle, and then there’s the time it takes for one participant to collect his things after finishing, and for the next participant to get set. You may also have a feedback form planned to hand out after all the presentations are complete (+10 minutes), and you may even have a “Graduation Ceremony” (where you give out “Certificates of Achievement” to all those that are still alive) (+10 minutes), and possibly you’ll want to snap a group picture (+5 minutes). If this is the afternoon of the second day of a two-day seminar, then you’re looking at a total of about two and a half hours.

Therefore, if your seminar is scheduled to finish at 5 PM, and you want to be on the train at 5:30 with your favorite beverage in your hand, you had better start the group’s final presentations by 2:30 PM! Another pertinent question which comes into play here is: Will the group members really benefit from sitting through two hours of their peers’ presentations, or would they be better off rehearsing themselves, or in smaller groups? This is why, at this stage in the P.U.S.H system, I would probably not have the members present to an even larger group, just for the sake of eye contact. Since the module for eye contact is only the first step in the system, I would wait at least until Module 3 (“Body Language”) is finished before the participants present to a larger group.
When you listen to a good story, what do you pay attention to? When I think back to my mother reading bedtime stories to us as kids, I can still hear her soothing voice inside my head. And believe me, no matter how riveting the story was, I didn’t stay awake too long. I can also recall a series of audiotapes I listened to some time ago about making good presentations.

The presenter asked me (the listener) to react to an exaggerated story he told: “I was walking down the street one day with a wad of money in my pocket—you see, I had just been paid! Birds were singing happily while children played noisily in the park. Suddenly, there was a car crash in front of me. Five people died—it was great!!” Certainly, a morbid tale, but when he told it in his enthusiastic, fun-filled voice, I chuckled at the end. Most of us will recognize the use of an exaggerated voice that doesn’t fit the message as a key component of ironic humor.

This story proves that most listeners react first to the tone of voice (“the vocal channel”) rather than the words used (“the verbal channel” or vocabulary). They may find themselves laughing at first, and then quickly check their laughter when they realize that they are indeed making fun of five people dying in a car crash! After asking the participants which of the three channels (visual, vocal, or verbal) they think is most important in delivering a simple face-to-face message, I show a slide featuring a study conducted by Dr. Albert Mehrabian at UCLA which found that 55% of the total message was conveyed through the visual channel (including the eyes, the posture, the facial expressions, the gestures, and the attire of the presenter), 38% came from vocal signals (sounds and
tones), and only 7% from the words.\textsuperscript{10} While this is good news for speakers of English as a second language who can gain confidence from the fact that effective presentations can be made with limited vocabulary, it also shows the need to “practice” effective vocal control. When the message is delivered on the phone, it’s said that 80\% of the impact comes from the voice, and a mere 20\% from the words chosen!

\textbf{Why Is Vocal Control Important?}

As with eye contact, it’s useful to have a discussion initially on why vocal control is vital, and then move into how it can be accomplished. We start to discuss the use of the voice in storytelling and humor above. I normally begin this discussion by asking the participants about their “favorite” speakers—in their country, in their company, and in their lives.

However, I can never forget a discussion that occurred in a workshop that I lead at SIT where I showed an old black-and-white videotape of Martin Luther King, Jr. delivering his moving civil rights speech, “I Have A Dream”, in front of tens of thousands of protesters at the Washington Monument in the early ’60s. One of the discussion questions was: “Why do you think King is such a powerful speaker?” I had phrased the question in such a way since I thought everyone would naturally agree with me that he was one of the most powerful speakers in American history. One woman said, “I don’t think he’s such a good speaker—he’s too preachy.” That remark opened my eyes to different interpretations of different speaking styles.

While we’re on this topic, it’s useful to point out that entire speeches can easily be listened to and downloaded from the Net. The web site, \url{www.historychannel.com}, has a number of famous

historical and current speeches in its archives, including King, Mahatma Ghandi, John F. Kennedy, and Lou Gehrig speaking as his body was wracked with terminal disease. I plan to speak more about analyzing speeches and tones of voice in the exercises that follow.

Further Rationale for Vocal Practice, & Exercises

Since we know that a soothing voice can put the audience to sleep, then we can assume that a dynamic speaking voice will keep them awake, if not completely interested. I do remember once having a student nodding out in the front row of my class in Tokyo, and I quickly raised my voice to re-capture his attention. He snapped his head up, startled back to reality. He told me later, “Beebe-san, sometimes in Japan, we listen better with our eyes closed.” Point taken…

As with eye contact, we can make a quick list as to why vocal control, or variation, is important:

1. Vocal variation helps attract and keep the audience’s attention.

2. Speaking in a monotone is one of the quickest ways to lose the audience’s attention (especially at certain times, like when you have to make a presentation right after lunch!).

3. Your voice can carry conviction, and hence can help you be more persuasive (I will talk more about persuasiveness, one of the main reasons for presenting in the first place, in P.U.S.H. Module 4—Messages vs. Facts).

Therefore, we should look next at how speakers vary or modulate their voices. The criteria I showed back on page 16 for judging a presenter’s voice are:

➢ Varied Voice Control: Exercise "The 4 P's" (Pitch / Pace / Power / Pause) / Stay Steady

How do we define the “4 P’s”? How do we “stay steady” vocally? The exercises that follow should demonstrate these points thoroughly. All of the vocal exercises here can be accompanied by
discussions on vocal quality and effectiveness. The discussion format that you choose of course will vary based on your group.

**Exercise 1:** “Oh, My Goodness!”

Write the sound “oh” on the board. Go around the room asking about six volunteers, if possible, to give you their “interpretation” of this single-syllable sound. If the people you ask are at all expressive, you will get a range of interpretations like: “Oh?”, “Oh!”, “Oooohh”, and “Ooh#$%&!”.

The exercise shows that a simple sound can take on significant meaning, depending on the vocal signal that accompanies it.11

**Exercise 2:** Say “Ahhhhh”!

“Most monotone voices are caused by anxiety. As the speaker tightens up, the muscles in the throat and chest become less flexible and air flow is restricted. When this occurs, the voice loses its natural animation and a monotone results.”12 To fight against this, we should start by thinking about breathing, the basis of both relaxing and speaking. Get the class to stand and ask: What’s the first sound the doctor requests you to make? After you have elicited the “ahhhhhh” sound, make sure everyone understands what a “roller coaster” is. Then, have the class blow all their air out together, deeply inhale, and make the “ahhhhhh” sound together, going up and down like a roller coaster. If they seem to like it, do it again while having a “contest” to see who can keep making the sound the longest while using only one breath.

I typically say that nobody has ever “beaten” me by maintaining the sound longer than me on one breath, and then in that very class, somebody will invariably beat me. I use my hand in an

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exaggerated fashion to “conduct” the class. This has two justifications: to show that everybody has the ability to change “pitch”, no matter what the natural pitch (high-pitched or low-pitched) of their voice is, and that when we breathe deeply, we relax more as oxygen floods our brains. To make this clear, ask the class how they feel just after finishing their second round of “ahhhhhh”s.

**Exercise 3: “The Voice Paper”**

To have a handout with a variety of sentences that allows would-be presenters to experiment with different vocal techniques is useful. Make sure the participants understand the “4 P’s” first: Pitch, Pace, Power, and Pause. So far, we’ve touched on pitch. Ask the class if they know what “pace” (speaking speed) means. National Basketball Association fans in your class may know the team, the Indiana Pacers, but they may not know what a “pace car” in a race actually does. I explain the idea of the pace car in the Indianapolis 500, and ask students if they think a problem can occur in presentations when the speaker becomes anxious and speaks too fast. Most people will agree that the speaker should slow down when he delivers his key points. At this juncture, you may also introduce the vocabulary word “articulation”. “Power” (volume) will be covered in detail in Exercise 4. A copy of “The Voice Paper” (which allows students to practice the types of vocal variation they have at their disposal) follows on page 33.
THE VOICE PAPER

Is your voice interesting, or monotonous?
*If it’s not interesting*, you can make it better!

**Practice**
(1) Read the following, using only **one breath** per sentence.

(a) "So many deeds cry out to be done. Time presses; the world rolls on. One thousand years are too long. Seize the day—seize the hour!"

   *Mao Zedong*

(b) "It's always a delight to welcome friends from afar."

   *The Analects of Confucius*

(2) Read the following twice: the first time, **normally**; the second time: **Vary** your pitch, pace, **or** power.

(a) "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

   *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

(b) "People are persuaded more by the depth of your conviction than the height of your logic; more by your enthusiasm than any proof you can offer."

   *David Peoples*

(3) Use **pause** for dramatic effect:

(a) "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

   *John F. Kennedy*

(b) "That's one small step for man; One giant leap for mankind."
**Exercise 4: “Sound Check”**

During my illustrious soccer career, I had a brilliant college coach named Manfred von Schiller. “Von”, as he was affectionately called, was nothing short of enthusiastic. At times, he was simply so passionate that he shouted himself hoarse. To illustrate that a speaker can be monotonous at a loud volume, as well as a soft one, I recall one game when Coach yelled at us due to our inadequacies for almost the entire halftime period. Needless to say, he may have had some salient points, but after a few minutes of his nonstop yelling, we all nodded in unison while we got something to drink and re-tied our shoes. If you had asked the team five minutes later what Coach actually said, you would have been met with a number of blank stares. Anyway, we managed to win the game.

But, most problems in presentation training will happen because of the opposite effect: a speaker’s soft or shy voice. If you have a large classroom, ask two other students to help the suspect with the soft voice. One sits in the front row, and the other goes to the back of the room. The suspect speaks, and the person in the back gives a signal when the speaker can be heard clearly. Ask the speaker to note (awareness, again) her volume level. How does it feel? Then, check with the person in the front row to make sure the speaker wasn’t too loud.

**Exercise 5: Practice with Poems and Jokes**

One of the best ways to practice vocal “pace” and timing is to work with poems and jokes. The latter will be dealt with in P.U.S.H. Module 9—“Humor”. Experimenting with and reciting poems is a workshop, or even a course, unto itself. However, the trainer can easily provide some short poems for the class to tinker with. One of the best ways I have found to work with poems is to provide a sampling of them on a central table in the classroom, and let the participants pick ones they like
which can be read with a buddy or partner (as with “The Voice Paper”). A few of my “faves” (favorite poems) are included in Appendix Three on page 176.


Naturally, learners of English are constantly studying new vocabulary. Yet, when they are exposed to a simple list of words which a Yale University study\(^\text{13}\) has shown to be the “World’s Most Persuasive Words”, they will be forever grateful. Even though this list can be used here in the voice module, I typically introduce it a bit later, specifically in P.U.S.H. Module 4 (“Messages vs. Facts”) with an exercise called “60-Second Pitch”.

If you want to use it here, I would recommend first asking the participants to brainstorm with a partner what they imagine are the “12 Most Persuasive Words in English”. You may need to briefly explain what “persuasive” means in this case. A simple example is to ask the group: When you hear a speaker use the words “I” and “you”, which word makes you pay more attention? Then, after briefly sharing the list on a handout (see page 36) or slide with the students, ask them to make short presentations to each other about their companies or best products using as many of the words as they can. However, while we’re at it, we might as well mention what David Peoples says are “the most powerful word combinations in the English language”\(^\text{14}\):

1. You
2. Thank you
3. Would you please
4. What do you think
5. I am proud of you

(I’m sure from personal experience that Combination 5 works wonders.)


The 12 Most Persuasive Words in the English Language:

- You
- Health
- Money
- Safety
- Save
- Love
- New
- Discovery
- Results
- Proven
- Easy
- Guarantee

(Based on Yale University Study)
**Exercise 7:** Analyze Voices on Tape

What vocal qualities attract you to certain voices / speakers in the first place, and keep your attention as their stories, jokes, and presentations move along? As we’ve seen in the previous exercises with voice, the participants are encouraged to experiment with and analyze their own voices, and to listen to the voices of their peers and comment on them as well.

In *How To Present Like A Pro*, Lani Arredondo asks: “Is your voice high-pitched or low-pitched? Do you speak loudly or softly? Is the tone of your voice pleasant, resonant, shrill, or grating? The optimum vocal quality is midrange. The best speakers deliver words in a moderate pitch, at a moderate volume and rate of speech, in well-modulated tones (with some variations, of course, to keep it interesting).”\(^{15}\) We may not all agree entirely with Lani, but we do need to bring the analysis of our voices and others’ to a conscious level of awareness.

Thus, the teacher can listen for voices of famous speakers to share with his group, or such audacious examples as Darth Vader in *Star Wars* can be offered as a springboard for discussion. But since most people (including the author) balk at listening to their own voices when recorded, why not analyze other voices from everyday walks of life on tape? When I lived in Tokyo, I was fascinated by the booming voices of the hawkers that rose over the din of the bustling fish market. I made an audiotape, not necessarily because I wanted to analyze the meaning of the words they chanted, but because the voices held the power of persuasion in an utterly mysterious tongue.

Make your own tape, brainstorm some discussion questions regarding vocal qualities, and have some fun.

Have you ever noticed people talking on cell phones these days, and gesticulating madly all the while? Why do they feel the need to use gestures when the party on the other end can’t even see them? Have you ever been riding “shotgun” and suddenly noticed your friend driving with one hand and gesturing passionately with the other? This leads us into a discussion of why body language is important to presenters. Module 3 of the P.U.S.H. system is all about body language, including facial expressions, posture, movement, hand gestures, and what has been called “control of the presentation arena”. Body language is a subjective area that is culturally sensitive, and presentation trainers may wonder how such a topic can be “taught”.

Certainly, in Latin cultures such as Brazil where I now work, gestures are used with great frequency. It’s important to note that during a business presentation in Japan, a speaker who smiles or chuckles might transmit confusion or embarrassment to his listeners. On the other hand, an American speaker might purposely laugh to express irony or humor. American speakers typically use a variety of gestures and facial expressions to help maintain their listeners’ interest, and to appear more relaxed and in control.\footnote{Lani Arredondo, \textit{How to Present Like A Pro: Getting People To See Things Your Way} (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), 22.} Since I am originally an American, and I know what kinds of presentations I like and believe are most effective, I approach the teaching of presentation skills from
this perspective. I try to gesture freely, naturally, and descriptively while I speak. At the same time, I try to avoid telling my clients what is “right” and “wrong” about the application of a certain skill.

**Why Is Body Language Important?**

If you asked a group of businesspeople why they think body language is important in presentations, what do you think they would say? Of course, we have already seen (on page 33) that a large part of the delivery of a face-to-face message comes through the visual channel, according to Dr. Mehrabian, which includes expressions, gestures, and movement that the audience sees and reacts to, besides eye contact. You might get a list that includes some of the following reasons:

1. Body language can help attract and maintain the audience’s attention.
2. Smiling and using natural, relaxed gestures helps establish rapport with the audience.
3. If the presenter appears calm (something that can be easily “read” through body language), then the audience tends to be more at ease. Conversely, if the presenter appears overly nervous, the audience may be adversely affected, or at least find it more difficult to focus on the intended message!
4. Descriptive gestures can be entertaining. Exaggerated gestures can be seen as funny (at least we know that children react favorably to them!).
5. Making gestures can help the speaker release some of his pent-up nervous energy.
6. Gesticulating can help a presenter express something that he might not have the vocabulary for in his second language.
7. Gesticulating is a natural way of creating rhythm while speaking.
8. Certain gestures serve as easily recognized symbols in certain cultures or specific groups.
9. Movement within the “presentation arena” (the space in which the presentation is made) can reduce the physical distance between the presenter and her audience, and hence make the presentation seem more personal and interesting.

At this point, we need to look at how a presenter can use body language more effectively in presentations. Is there some kind of system that presenters can use to improve their overall ability to present? While body language may not exactly be “universal”, I would venture to say that gestures are commonly used to communicate in all cultures. Just take a look at the facial and hand communication that goes on in maddening markets around the world on a daily basis. Once again, video is one of the best ways to capture, analyze, and discuss body language. If you have access to a video camera, it can be used as an integral part of training. By simply asking a presenter to comment on the body language he sees while watching himself on video, you will gain a wealth of knowledge about both the culture you are in, and individual perception.

The criteria that I shared back on page 16 for beginning to assess body language are:

- **Body Language**: Subway Stance / Make Gestures: Big, Slow, Descriptive / Minimize Pointer Use / Control Movement

In the exercises that follow, “the subway stance” will be made explicit, as well as looking at ways that gestures can be “bigger, slower, and more descriptive”. We will mention the use of mechanical pointers (such as collapsible and laser pointers) and how controlled movement can be an asset to a presenter. “The Oscar Award Winner’s Walk” has already been discussed on page 24 (Module 1: Eye Contact). It could be used here with body language to illustrate how a presenter can “exude” confidence. The word “exude” simply means “to display conspicuously or abundantly”, but when we look at the Latin root, “exsudare”, we learn it actually means “sweat out”! Again, it is the
trainer’s choice whether to lead a discussion during or after any given exercise, or to simply let the participants enjoy and discover for themselves experientially.

**Exercise 1: “Give Yourself A Hug”**

It’s sometimes simply amazing to be a teacher. Ask people to stand up, for no apparent reason, and they do! In this exercise, after your group is standing, ask them to fold their arms. Most people will simply fold the right over the left (like I do) without thinking. Even if they fold the left over the right, it doesn’t matter because after a few seconds of feeling powerful, protected, and comfortable, you ask them to switch the orientation of their arms. You will be surprised by how people “struggle” to follow such a simple command.

Here, you might elicit a few responses from your group by asking them how they felt at first contrasted with how they felt after they switched their arms to a more uncomfortable position—a gesture they are surely not used to using on a daily basis. Next, ask them to begin clapping together. Most people will clap with their right hand on top (as I do) without thinking. Then, ask them to switch so that they are now clapping in a way that they are not accustomed to (i.e.-left over right). You will be surprised to hear how the volume of clapping drops when they switch hands.

What’s the purpose of this simple demonstration? It shows that people get used to doing things in ways that we normally don’t think about. Habits are formed or “fossilized” over time that may then be hard to “unlearn” or change. Learning a new language, experimenting with ways of presenting (such as using eye contact in a different way, or changing your speaking voice to make it either more powerful or attractive, or using diverse gestures in a different fashion) that may seem odd or “foreign”, or simply starting out the day on your left foot rather than your right, are all potentially uncomfortable yet mind-expanding activities. Even now, after many years of intensive training, I
still wonder how I can manage to kick a soccer ball accurately and powerfully (though that is often not the case!) with my “wrong” or left foot.

**Exercise 2:** “The Subway Stance”

No, this is not the stance that you adopt while waiting in line to order a sandwich at your local “Subway”! Rather, the trainer might begin by asking the student audience to stand as if they were preparing to give a presentation. What standing posture would the students adopt, or recommend to another? If the students ride the subway or bus, for example, they would want to maintain a stance that afforded good balance, and allowed them to move easily. Their legs would typically be spread about shoulder width for better balance. If you ask the audience then what they would do with their hands, you might be greeted with a variety of answers. (Raising one hand to grab the train’s handhold is not a presentation option!)

While we’re on the topic of standing up, we might ask the student audience if they prefer presenting while standing up or sitting down. It makes sense to stand up when you present to a group of people, but what about when you’re simply presenting to another single person, or perhaps to an audience of only two? David Peoples gives some compelling evidence that supports always standing and presenting: “If you stand up and give a presentation, your customer, client, or prospect will be willing to pay 26% more money for the same product or service! Furthermore, a study done at the University of Minnesota revealed that if you stand up and present using visual aids, your audience is 43% more likely to be persuaded!”

Listeners find it extremely distracting to watch speakers nervously twirl strands of hair with their fingers, fiddle with earrings, necklaces, or other items of jewelry, or constantly push slipping

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eyeglasses up on their noses. While speaking, don’t hide your hands in your pocket and jingle your keys or loose change.\textsuperscript{18} It may be seen as impolite, or informal, to jingle your keys or change, depending on your perspective. But most would agree that it is simply an unnecessary distraction that will take away from the presenter’s desired message. We will look at distractions further when we discuss the use of the pointer.

One of the best ways to make presenters more aware of their own body language is to ask them to adopt certain postures, and discuss how they feel, and how they look, with their buddy, or in a small group. Ask the class to try some of the following:

\begin{itemize}
\item[a.] Cover your mouth with your hand while speaking.
\item[b.] Sway back and forth on your feet.
\item[c.] Cross your arms in front of you.
\item[d.] Wrap your arms around your body.
\item[e.] Tilt your head to one side or the other.
\item[f.] Twirl a strand of hair (if you have enough!) around your finger.
\item[g.] Play with a button or an item of jewelry.
\item[h.] Shake (or nod) your head excessively while speaking.
\item[i.] Cross your legs.
\item[j.] Look down at your feet, or look at the ceiling (as if the magic answer is there waiting to be read by you!).\textsuperscript{19}
\end{itemize}


k. Hold your hands in the “fig leaf” position. I will leave this exercise to the trainer’s discretion. Normally, I give a quick demo here of visiting the public baths in Japan, and how the small towel can be strategically placed…

Exercise 3: “Reach for The Stars”

“The importance of natural gestures, uninhibited by anxiety, can’t be overstated. Too often anxiety holds back this critical channel of communication. We use gestures for emphasis in normal conversation without ‘thinking’. If you learn to gesture in front of an audience exactly as you would if you were having an animated conversation with a friend—nothing more, nothing less—you’re on your way,” says Peoples. There are two simple exercises that help people “reach for the stars” (or use big, slow, descriptive gestures, as listed in our assessment criteria for body language).

a. “Pantomime”: Ask the individuals in your group to think about how they would show an audience what their favorite hobby is—without speaking (i.e.-through “mime”). The main point here is not to make the audience guess quickly what the individual’s hobby is, but rather for each individual to make a series of gestures for at least thirty seconds (even longer is preferable!) that will graphically show the individual starting and thoroughly getting into their hobby. Therefore, it’s paramount that the instructor not allow the class or small group to shout out the hobby they have successfully guessed before a certain time interval (or else the individual will surely stop acting, thinking the objective of the activity has been reached).

b. **Teach A Skill To The Group****: Some of you may recall the famous slogan of the Peace Corps: “Give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he will eat for a lifetime.” This activity allows the individuals to teach the class or a small group therein how to do or accomplish a specific task or skill by following a set of steps and making slow and clear (descriptive) gestures all the while. Once again, the aim is to slow down the gestures and make them as specific as possible to aid in the learning process of the audience. It may be helpful for some groups to have a list of possible activities that they can teach to the group (for example, how to hit a golf or tennis ball, how to start and begin to drive a car, or how to make an omelette). You can brainstorm a list of activities that are complex enough, sequential, and active (which means they require gestures to be used). Once again, teaching skills that require the presenter and her group to stand and learn side by side are preferential.

**Exercise 4: “The Gesture Paper”**

While it may seem simple and easy to make gestures that are related to specific physical tasks such as hobbies, it becomes more difficult to gesture naturally when we talk about things which are more abstract and conceptual. “The Gesture Paper” (see page 51) is simply a list of sentences with phrases underlined for gesture practice. It’s “a work in progress”, as we say in the industry, meaning that we are always on the lookout for better sentences that will lead to more creative and confident gesturing! Here, you may ask the participants to experiment with gestures (rather than just the simple use of the index finger to symbolize “number 1”. Ask one participant to go first, and then ask the buddy to try something different. And be ready to demonstrate if the participants are stuck!
DRAMATIZE WITH YOUR HANDS & BODY

Practice Gestures with the following:

(1) Your audience is 43% more likely to be persuaded if you present with visual aids. U. of MN. Study

(2) Your customer is willing to pay 26% more money for the same product or service if you stand up and present.

(3) The ability to communicate well is ranked the #1 key to success in Business, Politics, and the Professions.

(4) "The thinking human being, not able to express himself, stands at the same level as those who cannot think." Pericles

(5) Before I care how much you know, I want to know how much you care.

(6) "A person usually has two reasons for doing something. One that sounds good, and a real reason." J. P. Morgan

(7) The person who wants to do business with you can justify anything.

(8) “Justify on facts, but buy on feeling. Justify with business reasons, but buy for personal reasons. Justify with logic, but buy on emotion.” David Peoples

(9) The 10 Worst Human Fears in the USA (Forbes Survey):
Exercise 5: “Show Me The Money!”

Most businesspeople are preoccupied with presenting numbers, trends, and charts showing correlations regarding profit and loss that may confuse the audience, if they are not properly oriented. In Module 6, we will talk more about using visual aids that add to the presenter’s message and overall impact, rather than detract from it. While we are on the subject of gestures, it may be useful to allow the participants to practice in conjunction with one or more graphs that require them to orient the audience to the material shown. In other words, since the audience will take a brief time to look at the next graph as it is shown by the presenter (during which their attention will stray from the words the presenter is using to the graph in question), it makes sense that the presenter should use this interval to briefly explain, with appropriate gestures, such things as the vertical and horizontal axes of the graph, and what the key message is at a glance.

At this time, it would be useful for the trainer to introduce some of “the language of charts” which can be found in any number of good business English texts (such as the “Market Leader” series from Longman21). With this exercise, then, there are two possible variations. The trainer can prepare two “generic” slides for the entire group to practice with (although this can be time-consuming), or the individuals can provide two of their own slides in sequence to use for such gesture and orientation practice. The question we must ask here, with a group of 12 participants, is do we actually have the time for everyone in the group to move through what can be a three to four-minute “mini” presentation at this stage in the training. The trainer must also consider the equipment available: If an overhead projector is used as in “the old days”, then the time it takes to move from one presentation to the next is relatively quick. Changing disks or pen drives or notebook computers will take more time.

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Some of the individual points or sub-skills that can be practiced and discussed with this exercise are:

a. **The Use of Pointers** (collapsible or laser): There was a time when every presenter I watched would automatically grab whatever pointer was available in the classroom and clutch it throughout, whether they were using it or not. When “used” (actually held) in such a way, we might look at the pointer, or a pen, or whatever fits neatly in the hand, as a “crutch”. This leads again into the territory of what serves as a distraction and what serves as an aid to understanding in a presentation. If the pointer is used as it is meant to be (that is, to briefly highlight a point that is either difficult to see because of size or light conditions), then it is not considered a distraction.

b. **The Use of the “P.T.S.” Technique**: “P.T.S.” refers to the presenter’s ability to use his own natural built-in pointer (his arm and hand!) to point out something important on the screen, and then to turn to the audience and deliver the message related to it. Thus, the abbreviation, “P.T.S.”: “Point, Turn, and Speak”. What often happens in presentations is that, especially when the presenter is not so comfortable with English, she literally speaks to the screen at length rather than to the audience. Even worse is when the presenter stops presenting but actually reads verbatim what is on the screen to the audience.

At this point, it is worth asking the group how fast “native speakers” of English speak as opposed to how fast they read. Doubtless, you will hear all kinds of intriguing guesses. Some studies suggest that average American speakers speak roughly 125 words per minute, whereas a college graduate can read at least 250 words per minute, if not 500 or more. Therefore, every presenter needs to know that reading to her audience is a colossal waste of time. The audience would much prefer sitting on the sofa at home with a mug of steaming coffee reading the presentation material rather
than be read to. The audience expects the presenter to provide insight and expertise, not simply to be a reading machine.

One way the trainer can help the presenter is to remind her to face the audience when presenting. That is, the presenter can look at her slides at the screen by turning her neck, rather than her whole body. Once the whole body turns toward the screen, the tendency is for the presenter to continue to face it.

c. The Use of “P.D.R”: Given the risk of inundating your group with excessive abbreviations and acronyms, the idea of “Preview-Deliver-Review” will be mentioned again in Module 6 (“Outline and Visuals”). Simply speaking, many texts on presentation skills repeat: “First, tell them what you’re going to tell them. Next, tell them. Finally, tell them what you told them.” This can be applied to your presentation as a whole, and to every single slide that has a message complex enough to require such organization. This typical pattern of organization makes communication easier to follow, and also allows the presenter to digress if need be, and get back on track with a brief summary of the topic at hand, before moving on.

Thus, with the two slides the individual in your group has chosen, we attempt to practice “P.D.R.” with each slide, making sure to “orient” the slide after the preview and before the delivery of the message. If the slide in question is straightforward enough, the “review” step can be skipped. At the same time, the presenter is encouraged to move comfortably about the “presentation arena”, perhaps experimenting with techniques of audience interaction (see Module 5: “Analyze Audience”), using P.T.S, and certainly trying to use gestures more naturally and in a synchronized way with the visual aids on display. Using video at this stage can also clarify if we have “a dancer” on our hands.

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Though this may be subjective, in the world of professional presentations, someone who moves too much (to the point of distraction)—especially their feet—may be referred to as “a dancer”.

**Exercise 6:** “Are You Giving Me The Finger?”

Gestures are also a culturally specific topic. I will never forget one presentation given at IBM-Japan where the students’ assignment was to talk about one thing they liked and one they didn’t like about their current jobs. Mr. Tanaka (the names have been changed to protect the innocent) bowed deeply to the audience and me, and exclaimed, “Beebe-san, there’s one thing I really don’t like about my job: I need to speak English every day!” As he spoke, he held up the middle finger on his right hand and wagged it at me in a gesture any American would immediately recognize.

Needless to say, I decided it was high time to have a demonstration (which had been aptly begun by Mr. Tanaka) and discussion on “symbolic” gestures in different cultural contexts. I had by then also discovered that the gesture in Japan where the hand was extended, palm down, and waved so that it appeared to an American that you wanted him to go away was exactly the opposite there: come hither! When presenting in a cross-cultural context, it pays to know what gestures are commonly used, and how, to avoid embarrassment and possible harm!
CHAPTER 7

P.U.S.H. MODULE 4—“IS IT A MESSAGE, OR A FACT?”

What’s the difference between a message and a fact, and does it really matter, you may ask? In this module, I would like to briefly explore the difference between what is known as a “message-based presentation” and a “fact-based” one. According to Ellen Finkelstein, “For a presentation to be effective, you need to consider three components—content, design, and delivery. Each of these components has to be of the highest quality, and they all have to work together as well. Good content is the core of an effective presentation. Start by reducing your content to two or three main points and then expand on those points, making sure that all you write is directly related to those points. Write clearly, logically, and simply.”

We have so far looked at delivery skills, and in Module 6 (“Outline & Visuals”), we will delve into design. If we want our listeners to remember our messages, and later act on them (preferably in the way we want!), then we must craft our “content” in memorable and compelling ways. This is sometimes referred to as “strategic storytelling”.

Everyone likes a good story. Yet, somehow when people present in business, they often move away from good storytelling techniques. When we recall stories and fables from our childhood, we usually think of relatively simple storylines, and perhaps an overriding “moral lesson” or final

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23 Ellen Finkelstein, www.presentersuniversity.com
message that can guide our decisions. People nowadays are inundated with facts and data ("information overload", if you will). Hence, if a presenter simply lists facts, and then lets the audience walk away to form their own conclusion(s), the objective of the presentation may fail.

On the other hand, if the presenter begins his presentation with a compelling message or recommendation, and then goes about supporting it with relevant facts, and ends by reiterating his key message, the chances of the audience acting favorably on his recommendation rise accordingly. The exercises that follow then deal with recognizing the difference between messages and facts, crafting more powerful messages, highlighting two of the most important messages in every presentation (for example, the opening and the closing, alternatively referred to as the introduction and conclusion), and how to be more persuasive in general.

Depending on the English ability of the participants, I sometimes begin this module with a discussion on the difference in meaning of the words “convince” and “persuade”. If we divide presentations into two basic types, informative and persuasive, then it will certainly help to

**Exercise 1: “May I Leave A Message?”**

The instructor prepares several moderately complex messages on strips of paper. The class sits in a horseshoe shape with one person at one end chosen to pick one message from the group of messages lying face down on the table (or in a hat or whatever). When this first “message-bearer” has sufficient time to commit the message to memory, he begins by whispering the message to the person next to him. That person then goes on to whisper the same message (without the paper!) to the person next to her, and so forth until the messages has passed to the other end of the horseshoe.
Then, the individual who received the “final word” is asked to recite what he heard, followed by which the original message-bearer is asked to read his message aloud. Depending on the English ability of the class as a whole, what time of day it is, etc., the written message and the recited one will be vastly (and probably humorously) different. A discussion can ensue which takes into account how messages change depending on the complexity (or simplicity) of language, the perceptions of the receivers, and the “memorability” of the message, among other factors.

**Exercise 2: “Why Should You Buy A Goldfish?”**

This exercise highlights the simple structure of the “message-based” presentation mentioned before. The presentation begins with the presenter’s recommendation to buy a goldfish as “the best pet”, and then supports the message with relevant facts, and sub-facts. Finally, the presentation ends with the urging that the listener should not hesitate to head down to the local pet shop today to buy a goldfish. However, the participants will only know this presentation structure at the end of the exercise.

The exercise is introduced to the participants as a series of sentence strips, mostly about goldfish, but also including some facts that are at closer glance irrelevant (sometimes called “red herrings”). Ideally, the class can be divided into three groups, with each group getting an identical set of sentence strips. Then the groups are asked to put the strips into a “logical” presentation order, while taking out any irrelevant facts that don’t support the key message they have chosen to begin with. Finally, the groups do a “gallery walk” where they look at the presentations the other groups have created with the strips. Any differences are then discussed.

The following three pages show: (1) Instructions for the exercise, and several general discussion
questions that can be used after the sub-groups order their sentence strips; (2) The list of goldfish sentence strips that the trainer can cut into sets (depending on the size of your class—if your class has 12 students, for example, you could divide the class into three sub-groups requiring three sets of sentence strips); and (3) The final summary showing the ordered strips (minus the irrelevant facts).
Goldfish Strip Instructions:

♦ Typically, a message-based presentation begins with **an opinion**, which is then supported by **relevant facts**. Finally, **a recommendation** is given based on these facts.

♦ After looking at the strips with your partner, put them into a coherent order.

♦ **Discuss:** What can we teach/learn from this exercise? As an audience member, are you affected by logic and/or emotion? Why?
Goldfish Sentence Strips: The instructor can cut the following group of sentences into strips to make one set. Three sets will suffice for a group of 12 students.

♦ Goldfish make the best pets for three reasons.
♦ Primarily, goldfish are very quiet.
♦ They don’t bark, howl, meow, chirp, squawk, screech, or race around the house at night while you and your neighbors are trying to sleep.
♦ In addition, they are economical.
♦ You can buy a goldfish at your local pet store for about 50¢, and a small bowl for it costs less than $3.00.
♦ Water is practically free.
♦ Also, they eat only a pinch of dried fish food daily, so their food bill is quite low.
♦ Finally, goldfish are extremely well behaved.
♦ They don’t have teeth, so they can’t chew your furniture or bite your guests.
♦ They don’t ever go outside, so they can’t dig holes in your garden.
♦ Plus, you don’t have to spend hours teaching them commands such as “Sit!” or “Heel!”
♦ If you want a quiet and economical pet that doesn’t cause any trouble, visit your nearest goldfish store.
♦ The Hiroshima Carp are a popular professional baseball team in southern Japan.
♦ Why would anyone want to have a pet at all, when the nature of a fish or an animal is to be free?
♦ Dogs are considered “man’s best friend”, while cats are nocturnal and fiercely independent.
♦ Carp are representative of long life, according to Japanese tradition, and can be easily kept in small pools.
♦ Goldfish are considerably less exciting than dragonfish or piranhas.

At last, the instructor can give the participants the three-paragraph summary on the next page (see page 57), and ask if there are any comments or questions.
Goldfish

Goldfish make the best pets for three reasons. Primarily, goldfish are very quiet. They don’t bark, howl, meow, chirp, squawk, screech, or race around the house at night while you and your neighbors are trying to sleep.

In addition, they are economical. You can buy a goldfish at your local pet store for about 50¢, and a small bowl for it costs less than $3.00. Water is practically free. Also, they eat only a pinch of dried fish food daily, so their food bill is quite low.

Finally, goldfish are extremely well behaved. They don’t have teeth, so they can’t chew your furniture or bite your guests. They don’t ever go outside, so they can’t dig holes in your garden. Plus, you don’t have to spend hours teaching them commands such as “Sit!” or “Heel!” If you want a quiet and economical pet that doesn’t cause any trouble, visit your nearest goldfish store soon.
**Exercise 3:** “How Can We Differentiate Between Facts and Opinions?”

As readers and listeners of English, we are bombarded on a daily basis by a variety of advertising, political, newsworthy, and just plain humorous materials that we quickly sort through, and get on with our lives. By allowing our students to examine some of these materials in a more critical light, we can simultaneously help them understand the power of crafting credible, memorable messages that can be harnessed for presentations.

The following exercise is adapted from a text called “Raise the Issues: An Integrated Approach to Critical Thinking”, designed for “very advanced students”. According to the text, each unit presents an authentic reading selected from current periodicals and journals. The students are asked to identify the author’s thesis. In the process of selecting the main idea statement, the students need to separate essential ideas from those less relevant or extraneous (similar to the aforementioned “Goldfish” exercise). They may also be asked to distinguish between the author’s opinions and the opinions of others discussed in the text.²⁴

Continuing in the Parker Palmer vein of “teaching who we are”, I also believe every teacher should choose materials he truly cares about, and would like to see discussed in an open forum such as a classroom. I am particularly passionate about environmental preservation, sustainability, and the use of English by non-native speakers for advocacy and political purposes. As a business English teacher, I sometimes feel guilty about helping multinational companies that are obviously treating our beloved Earth with less than the respect she deserves. This and the following exercise (Exercise 4) are an attempt to bring some of these issues into the open.

I hand out the following text, “All Creatures Great and Dying”, give the students time to read it, discuss which sentences on page 60 are facts and opinions (and how we can determine which is which), and how their selective use affects presentations.

“All Creatures Great and Dying”

When the dinosaurs were killed off 65 million years ago, flowering plants survived. Today dozens are being eradicated weekly, many before they can even be named or studied.

The tragedy in their extinction is that many hold potential cures for everything from cancer to AIDS. 25% of the pharmaceuticals in use in America contain ingredients originally derived from wild plants.

But aren’t there plenty of shrubs and vines to go around? Who’s going to miss an odd thousand or so of the 30 million different kinds of insects that crawl the face of the earth? Certainly evolution will continue even as we pave and pollute the planet. Unfortunately, as man’s technology weeds out the survivors in the plant and animal world, those that survive are hardly the most biologically diverse, or necessarily the most beneficial.

What is wrong with the current rate of extinction is its chilling acceleration. According to the World Wildlife Fund, thousands of existing species may be extinct by the end of this century.
Listening / Reading for Fact vs. Opinion

In developing critical thinking skills, it’s necessary to distinguish facts from opinions. In Bowermaster’s article, both facts and opinions are used to support the presenter’s main idea.

Which are Facts (F) and which are Opinions (O)?

___1. “When dinosaurs were killed off 65 million years ago, flowering plants survived.”

___2. “Unfortunately, as man’s technology weeds out the survivors in the plant and animal world, those that will thrive are hardly the most biologically diverse, or necessarily the most beneficial.”

___3. “Certainly evolution will continue even as we pave and pollute the planet.”

___4. “What is wrong with the current rate of extinction is its chilling acceleration.”

(Adapted from “Raise The Issues: An Integrated Approach to Critical Thinking”, p. 78-80)
Exercise 4: “Why You Shouldn’t Cut Down A 100-Year-Old Tree”

It seems that there would be no better way to look at what makes an effective presentation than to examine what is really happening in the world around us, in particular things that affect us emotionally. How many of your students have been involved in a protest to save something truly dear to them? Here I would introduce a true event that my sister Susan and her friends helped organize. It’s an event I proudly participated in (to a limited degree, compared to my sister and friends)—one that caused me to honestly think about what kind of a “presentation” could be used in “the real world” to help save some wonderful old trees, and moreover a way of life.

I begin by asking the students if they have ever been involved in any sort of protest, or if they know anyone who has. I then briefly explain the situation in which my sister and her friends found themselves. The event happened in the beautiful small town of Camden in midcoast Maine where the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) decided to widen the shoulder of the road running through town at the expense of numerous old-growth trees valued by residents and visitors alike for their canopy of shade, stunning visual beauty, and their powerful link to the past.

I would then pass out copies of the flyer shown on page 68 which is again a mix of facts and opinions. The exercise could continue by asking the participants to differentiate between the two. To further analyze word choice would allow the students to look more at nuance and connotation in English (such as the emotionally charged choice of “destroy…the heritage” in the headline versus the possible choices of “cut” or even “trim the trees”). In the interest of fairness, the MDOT’s point of view should be put forth. They claimed that the shoulder would improve safety (while many believed it would in fact do the opposite by allowing motorists to drive faster
through town!), and that the trees would “soon” recover. They also claimed that while “some” trees would necessarily be cut, “many others” would be spared.

The exercise can continue by dividing the class into two groups, asking one to brainstorm the side of the MDOT, and asking the other to represent the side of the tree lovers, or “tree huggers”, as you will. Ask the two groups to brainstorm as many reasons as they can think of to justify their actions: Removing the trees by the DOT to widen the road on the one hand, and saving the trees by those who suggested an alternative to such drastic cutting. Then, have each group elect a spokesperson to present their relative causes. To continue, you could also have an individual from each group “face off” with an individual from the opposite and have a healthy debate about the options.

To adapt this exercise to take advantage of a divisive local issue where you are working as a teacher would be most useful. You could bring in political flyers, and have a lively discussion about what makes a message “stick” (in other words, what makes some messages more memorable than others).
Citizens and Visitors:
Do you know about the tragic tree cutting set by the Maine Department of Transportation to destroy Camden’s cultural and natural heritage?

Check out my sister Susan Beebe (wearing hat with arm raised) rallying the citizens of Camden, Maine!

Two years ago in Warren, contractors for the Maine Department of Transportation (DOT) and Central Maine Power (CMP) cut down over 85 trees, including a century-old horse chestnut tree known as the "Elephant Tree." Starting on Labor Day 2004, DOT plans to cut 170 trees along Route 1 from the Camden Public Library to Camden Hills State Park. The DOT claims that everyone is happy, and that all interests have been reconciled.

We citizens of Camden are not happy. Maine citizens and visitors alike have never approved this needless cutting. The cutting of the trees will only increase pollution and traffic bottlenecks in Camden. Can we stand by and watch the magnificence of our beautiful trees taken from us? Let’s not allow this to happen!

Join us to fight for a moratorium on quick DOT cutting. Save Camden from the DOT chainsaw massacre. Show you care for Camden and her irreplaceable trees. It's true the trees will recover—in one hundred years. Sure, more blue sky will be seen over Camden—after DOT hacks away the protective tree canopy. Is this ill-timed degradation what we really want for classic Camden? Stop the DOT destruction NOW.

Please visit: www.camdentrees.org
Exercise 5: “You Are The Director Of A TV Commercial”

In his book, “The Tipping Point”, on how social epidemics work, Malcolm Gladwell speaks of this exact quality that a message needs to be successful, referred to as “stickiness”. He continues, “Stickiness sounds as if it should be straightforward. When most of us want to make sure what we say is remembered, we speak with emphasis. We talk loudly, and we repeat what we have to say over and over again.” Gladwell however argues that stickiness is in fact related to subtler adjustments to the message, and that there may be ways to systematically engineer stickiness into a message (of obvious importance to marketers, managers, and teachers!).

In short, Gladwell points out that in significant studies done on the hit TV show Sesame Street, it was determined that kids don’t simply watch the program when they are stimulated, and look away when they are bored. Rather, they watch when they understand, and look away when they are confused. Furthermore, new research suggests that children actually don’t like commercials as much as we thought they did because commercials “don’t tell stories, and stories have a particular salience and importance to young people”. Granted, we are teaching presentation skills to adults in the business world, rather than to children. Yet, if we avoid the “flash and dash” (a topic coincidentally that we will touch on in Module 6 related to visual aids), as Gladwell calls it, of big-time advertising, and focus more on storytelling, the “stickiness” of our messages should improve.

Speaking of “stickiness”, whenever any participant makes a presentation in the classroom, a question that can always be asked of the observers or audience members (immediately after the


presentation is finished) is: What do you remember of the presentation you just observed? We then can ask why they think they remember what they do. From that, we can move into a discussion of whether or not the audience members would act on what the presenter recommended (if anything).

I always think of stickiness when I recall my father’s friend Mr. Stevenson coming to pick us up, along with his son Philip, after elementary school. Invariably, he would ask, “Well, what did you learn in school today?” Hopefully, after six hours of classes that day, something stuck.

a. **First Variation:** “Direct A TV Commercial”

Even though most children may not be developed enough to understand the storyline of a typical commercial (as we saw with the *Sesame Street* research), adults will usually agree that most memorable commercials seen on TV involve some sort of story, or some background that is related to a story. Ask your group what TV commercials they readily remember. Ask them to describe the story in or behind the commercial. Then you can briefly discuss why they think these memorable commercials are “sticky”.

Next, ask the participants to get together in small groups, and think of a product or service (whether related to their company or not) that they are going to design a 30-second TV commercial for. You may go as far (depending on time) as having the group actually create a “storyboard” where they show the progression of the commercial in panels. But the basic objective is for the group to first create and then act out a 30-second commercial, advertising their product or service, and finally to have the group as a whole vote on which campaign is the best and why. You are virtually guaranteed of seeing some hilarious commercials.
b. **Second Variation**: “What’s The Moral Of The Story?”

Related to storytelling ability and comprehensibility, we know that everyone has a story (or two) to tell. In fact, one of the simplest and best exercises I have used in the past as a teacher is to ask an individual or a group, “Tell me a story.” In this case, we will first ask the group to write on a slip of paper or an index card a simple message or “moral” that they believe is important, either in their country or culture, or in the world of business, or the world at large. The teacher may decide that it would be easier or more time-efficient to bring in ready-made messages for the group to use. Some examples might include:

- “Honesty is the best policy.”
- “You must be assertive to succeed in business.”
- “Time is money.”
- “You reap what you sow.”

After each participant receives a card (and understands it!), then they will have five minutes to think of and make notes on a story from their own lives which will best exemplify this message, without specifically stating the message itself in the story. Finally, each participant will have the opportunity to relate their personal story to a buddy or a small group, after which the group decides together what the intended message of the story is.

**Exercise 6**: “The 60-Second Pitch”

If somebody told you that you had a mere 60 seconds to deliver an important pitch or message, would you be able to do it effectively? The answer is yes, if you had some idea of how to organize and deliver what is also called “The Elevator Pitch”. For example, imagine you are waiting for the elevator in a modern office building that would whisk you 25 floors up in only 60
seconds, and you suddenly encounter your boss in front of the elevator door. This is just the person you have been dying to talk to about a deserved salary increase. Is it realistic or appropriate to ask your boss for a raise during a 60-second elevator trip, possibly in front of other curious onlookers? Probably not, but your students will get the idea.

This may be the best opportunity you will get. You’ve got to make a “60-Second Pitch”—a description of your idea which is easy for anybody to understand, and doesn’t take longer than 60 seconds to deliver. That’s time for about 150-225 words. This exercise, developed by Jeremy Taylor and Jon Wright, can be found in the In-Company Pre-Intermediate Teacher’s Book. They provide the following warm-up activity about introducing a customer loyalty scheme, and ask the students to put the sentences in the correct order. Numbers 1 and 10 have already been done for them.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>competitors. Second, we can attract new customers by offering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>introduce a customer loyalty scheme. First, it’s very simple and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>quantities. It will also discourage many customers from going to our</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>1. There are a number of reasons why I think it would be a good idea to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>of-mouth recommendations from our existing customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>our products, and it should mean they buy more often and in larger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>attractive benefits such as discounts, exclusive offers, and guaranteed price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>effective way of encouraging our existing customers to continue to buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>matching. In turn, this will bring in more customers through word-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>with their loyalty card, details of the purchase can be stored</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the trainer’s information, the correct sequence is:


We can see from this sample that the clues to completing the exercise lie in finding the “number or reasons” (i.e.- first, second, third, and finally) the presenter mentions in his first message, as well as other collocations which add order to overall text (i.e.-“in turn”, and “from this”). The “freestyle” portion of the exercise comes next: Choose a topic, prepare some notes, and deliver a similar “Elevator Pitch” to your very own CEO. Some potential topics include:

- How your company could further cut costs
- Setting up a new branch of the company
- Introducing a new product or service
- Changing the company name or logo
- Increasing the research and development budget
- The need to recruit more qualified staff
- Using TV advertising to promote the company
- Introducing a company newsletter to customers
- Why staff need more English or presentation skills training!
- Choose your own topic

**Exercise 7:** “We Are Now Open For Business”

According to our old friend David Peoples, the most important part of any presentation is the close. It has often been said that people remember best what they hear (or see) last, and Peoples emphasizes this by including a Henry Wadsworth Longfellow quote: “Great is the art of the beginning, but greater is the art of the ending.” Dave goes on to say that it is at the close where you either accomplish your objective or not. Does the audience believe? Do they agree? Will they commit? Will they act? Will they order? The objective is a statement at the beginning of the presentation, and the audience gives you their answer at the end. And, bear in mind, you have only one chance at a professional close, to paraphrase Dave.²⁸

You may also try a simple test with your group by showing them a slide with a list of 15 to 20 numbers vertically arranged. Ask them to look at the slide for a minute. After you have clocked a minute on your trusty stop watch, turn off the slide, and ask the individuals to write down as many of the numbers as they can remember. You may be surprised at how many (or how few!) of the numbers some brilliant individuals can recall and write down. But the point is to show that the majority of individuals will remember the first and the last on the list, reiterating our point that the opening and closing “messages” (in this case numbers) are memorable.

Thus, if we look at the opening and the close of our presentations as the two most important messages that we deliver, then we should give special consideration to how they are crafted.

That is why I include both opening and conclusive messages in my “rating criteria” for student presenters shown back on page 13:

- **Opening**: Greeting / Topic & Hook / Name & Position / How Long? / When to Ask Questions?
- **Summary**: Summarize Key Points / **Conclusion**: Final Message + Call for Audience Action

Although there are numerous ways to open a presentation, I have found that with business English students, it helps to share a standard opening with them. Such an opening includes several items that are generally considered useful for an audience to hear at the beginning of any presentation. These items are a simple greeting, the presentation topic, the so-called “hook” (a brief statement by the presenter to pique the audience’s interest in the topic—we will look more closely at this in Module 5 on audience analysis), the presenter’s name and position (if the audience does not already know him or her), how long the presenter plans to speak (as business people always claim to be pressed for time, and may need to plan their getaway!), and when the audience should raise questions (typically either at the end of the presentation, or at any time throughout).

Many students of English as a second language may not be entirely clear on the difference between “a summary” and “a conclusion”. A summary is also referred to as a recap of the main points made in the presentation (once again, to help the audience remember), whereas a conclusion necessarily should be more powerful, and in the case of a persuasive presentation, will probably include “a call for audience action” when the presenter will clearly state what he recommends the audience does next, such as vote, support, or take out their checkbooks at that moment, and buy something—all are concrete actions, not merely wishful thinking.

For the sake of simplicity, we could consider the close or conclusion as simply a reiteration of what the presenter has already stated in the opening, with the addition of the final “call to
action”. After all, our job as trainers is to provide more complex materials for those who are ready, and to simplify things for those who may not be ready, or for those that need to step back from complexity so that they are better heard and understood. To make our student presenters’ lives simpler may also be of great help so that their own presentations will be simpler for them to remember, rehearse, and deliver, and their confidence will increase in turn.

Chris Murray developed an exercise called “Patently Absurd” which first looks at several common styles of presentation openings, and then asks students to match them to the techniques they exemplify.\(^{29}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation Opening</th>
<th>Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. “How many of you here today have ever been in the situation where you wanted to get cash from the bank on Sunday?”</td>
<td>1. Making a topic statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. “I remember the time when I was asked a difficult question in an interview and had no idea what to say.”</td>
<td>2. Giving an amazing or surprising fact or statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. “What’s the biggest problem that car drivers face today?”</td>
<td>3. “Visualization” of statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. “We’ve found that four out of every five homeowners don’t have adequate insurance coverage.”</td>
<td>4. Personalization through rhetorical or genuine questions about the audience’s experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. “With this product, you’ll quickly be able to slash 35% off your fuel bills.”</td>
<td>5. Personal anecdote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Today I’m pleased to talk to you about the new staff program.</td>
<td>6. Stating a problem or personalization through questions about general issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. “Did you know that Americans on average eat 18 acres of pizza every day?”</td>
<td>7. Showing the benefits and opportunities of your product or service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The answers, in case you were wondering, are: a-4, b-5, c-6, d-3, e-7, f-1, g-2.

As always, the trainer must be ready to illuminate certain essential vocabulary such as “an anecdote”. The trainer may even be asked to put 18 acres of pizza into local terms, depending on

where she is teaching (in my case, that’s a little less than the size of my mother’s property on an island off the coast of Maine which takes 20 minutes to walk around, at a leisurely pace!).

Now that the participants are familiar with some standard ways of opening a presentation, they need to practice. Chris Murray tells us we need look no further for presentation topics than a web site full of some of the most “patently absurd inventions” you will ever hear of. Some of the more useful inventions that can be found at www.totallyabsurdinventions.com include:

- The Insomniac Helmet
- The Instant Face Lift
- The Jet Propulsion Golf Club
- The Neck Fanny Pack
- Sled Pants
- The Sleep Sponge.

A typical description for one such invention can be given to help shape a practice presentation by participants: “The Ski Propeller—For independent skiers. Rucksack unit with small petrol engine (i.e.-chain saw motor), and propeller for thrust. Throttle control on ski sticks or on supports attached to motor unit. No more expensive ski passes or lift queues!”

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30 www.totallyabsurdinventions.com
**Exercise 8: “Write (Present) for The Ear”**

On page 12, I briefly discussed the problems that may occur when speakers try to use “written English” for spoken presentations (that would seem to call for the simpler, more direct form we call “spoken English”). When I recently shared this exercise with a manager working at the Central Bank of Brazil who was assigned to make a lengthy technical presentation in Peru, I was surprised by her strong reaction. She was absolutely certain that this was the best exercise she had ever done. She kept repeating, “Oh, my goodness!” as she reveled in the newfound freedom of simplifying her long-winded, complex statements.

It was difficult for me at that point to do any significant “contrastive linguistic analysis” as I was only beginning to learn Brazilian Portuguese (BP). However, I began to understand through conversations and work that Brazilians learn that academic work in general necessarily includes difficult vocabulary, jargon, complex logic, and lengthy (even run-on) sentences. Since they are not taught about oral presentations per se, they automatically transfer this sophisticated sense to their speeches. All of this seemed the opposite of what we are taught in American schools where we learn that there is a clear distinction (a different time and place, if you will) between the form and the use of written and spoken English. In fact, speakers who can exemplify, clarify, and especially simplify complex arguments are lauded. On the other hand, due to the overwhelming influence of TV, we perhaps now live in an age of “sound bites”, where beautiful prose has gone by the wayside. But this requires further discussion.

Therefore, we see more than ever that language and culture are hopelessly intertwined. Again, as we teach the language that we grew up with, we also teach the culture that the language springs from, and is regenerated by. Hence, as an American, I cannot help but teach something about “the American way”, whether I fully embrace it or not. The next exercise then
is about the skill of editing and simplifying, as well as looking at (and listening to) what an American business audience prefers to hear. At this moment, I cannot afford to go into the argument that globalization in fact equals Americanization, as some would have it. But I can help my students and clients use simpler, more straightforward and understandable English that should benefit them as presenters, and their audiences too.

This exercise comes from a reference that I have quoted before, “Speech Communication Made Simple”, written by several teachers at Miami-Dade Community College. If we analyze the following statement, we might ask whether this is true for all cultures, or just the American one that it seems to be derived from. “The language and style you use when making an oral presentation should not be the same as the language and style you use when writing. Well-written information that is meant to be read does not work as well when it is heard. Good speakers are much more informal when speaking than when writing. They also use their own words and develop their own speaking style. Whenever possible, they use short words. Listeners appreciate it when speakers use simple everyday words in a presentation.”

An alternative to the following exercise would be to prepare similar sentences to those found on page 80 (i.e.-both the complex and simple versions of each sentence), lay them out on the table as a set, and then ask students to match them. Alternatively, one student could write the complex version and another the simple version, and compare.

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Write (Present) For The Ear

“The speech delivery style of some Europeans and Asians tends to be very formal. Speakers of these cultures often read oral presentations from carefully written manuscripts. On the other hand, American speakers are generally more informal relative to speakers in other cultures. American audiences prefer a natural, spontaneous delivery that conveys a lively sense of communication. They don’t relate well to speakers who read from a manuscript.”

Which would you rather hear?

a. “The facilitation of a listener’s comprehension of information can be better accomplished by the speaker’s utilization of succinct words.” (or)

b. “Listeners understand information more easily when a speaker uses short words.”

Good speakers use short sentences. Unnecessary words detract from your message. Long sentences are difficult for listeners to follow and hard for you the speaker to say.

Activity

The following sentences are full of unnecessary words. Rewrite them, using as few words as possible (but maintaining the meaning!).

Example:

: “The rights for distribution of the book in 30 countries had been sold by him, as well as the rights for distribution in 12 different languages.”

(Rewrite) “He sold rights to distribute the book in 30 countries and 12 languages.”

1. It is unfortunate that the number of students enrolled at the college this year has been reduced.

2. It was our travel agent who recommended that we go through the process of changing our plans and visit Spain in addition to the rest of our travel itinerary.

3. There is a tendency for teenagers and their mothers and fathers to be in conflict about their curfews.

4. It is my understanding that the students and faculty members are not in agreement about the scheduling of final exams.

From: “Speech Communication Made Simple: A Multicultural Perspective” by P. Dale & J. Wolfe; p. 28
If you traveled to a foreign country, you would most likely do some research into the culture before you go so that you could “get along with” the locals better (regardless of the language), or at least avoid any major embarrassments (like the first time I walked out of someone’s apartment toilet in Japan still wearing the rubber toilet slippers). Similarly, when you present to an audience, you would try to find out about that group of listeners so that you could attempt to customize, or personalize, the presentation to fit that particular group of individuals. Such personalization would include the careful consideration of personal taste(s), if possible, the country or corporate culture in question, the level of formality, the use of appropriate humor (which we will look at in more detail in Module 9), and the amount of background knowledge that the audience has regarding the field in general, and the topic in particular.

One of the most valuable pieces of advice I ever received about presenting was: “Don’t tell them (the audience) what they already know; rather tell them what they need to know to make a good decision.” How many presenters have you heard who begin their presentations with the history of a given situation, and then move into current circumstances? Certainly, if you were already familiar with the history, you wouldn’t want it repeated. As an audience member, you are probably thinking to yourself: How is this information useful to me, or how can I benefit from this information? Naturally, presentations involve much more than a simple provision of benefits. But if you are to accept the presenter’s recommendation, and heed his final “call to action”, then you must first be persuaded of the benefits to you and your group (or constituency).
Our mentor David Peoples mentions one of his mentors, Aristotle, who in his book “Rhetoric”, written approximately 2,400 years ago, described what is needed to persuade another person to a course of action we would like them to take: First, we must appeal to “logos” (logic), while we must also appeal to “pathos” (human emotions). Here Peoples quotes another famous presenter, Dale Carnegie: “When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but with creatures of emotion.” Aristotle continued by saying that the third requirement for persuasion is “ethos”, a Greek word meaning “disposition or character”, and that people tend to conduct business with people they like, trust and have confidence in.32

How then can we deal with all three of these in a presentation? Again, Peoples introduces an acronym that he believes every audience member has in mind, and that the presenter needs to begin to answer from the very beginning of his presentation: “What’s In It For Me?” or “W.I.I.F.M.”. I often think about it in terms of baseball where the pitcher’s job is to strike out the other team. If his pitches are successful, he will “whiff ‘em (them)”, as we often cried out in the neighborhood as kids praying for the Boston Red Sox to obliterate the New York Yankees. The audience is therefore thinking along fairly selfish lines. They clearly want to know what the benefits of the presentation idea are, and thus why they should bother to pay attention. Like the list of “Most Persuasive Words in English” on page 41, Peoples says to make sure to include a sprinkling of the following as sure attention-getters33:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Money</th>
<th>Safe</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Unique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>Trouble</td>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Pain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


Can you think of any more (like integrity, skill, confidence, maturity, ease, risk, qualifications or credentials, and numerous others) that directly appeal to our “pathos”?  

The reader may also ask at this point: Why wouldn’t the presenter first analyze his audience and then, based on this analysis, develop an appropriate message (or series of messages) that would appeal to the audience in question? In other words, why wouldn’t the trainer invert Modules 4 and 5? Naturally, whatever seems most logical and effective to do with the group or individual you have at hand is the best way to proceed. In my experience, it seems easier to work with the general objective and key message(s) that the presenter wants to deliver first, and then tweak or tailor the message to appeal to a particular target audience next.

**Exercise 1**: “Picture Yourself On A Beach…”

All my life, I’ve bought, sent, and collected post cards (and the stamps that stick to them). If I find out that one of my students is going on a business trip to another city or country, I ask them to kindly bring me a post card. I even tell them that they don’t have to take the trouble to write it and send it; just deliver it to me by hand when they return, to add to my ever-growing collection. The next time you travel, dear reader, why don’t you grab me a colorful card or two?

The idea of this exercise is to spread out a large number of post cards (or pictures cut out from travel magazines) on a central table in the classroom. Ideally, the post cards will show some brilliant attractive scenes featuring exotic locales that almost anyone would like to visit, but at the same time they will show a wide diversity of locales and activities. With a buddy, each member of the class is asked to briefly interview his or her partner, and try to ascertain what
exactly they are looking for in their next vacation. The more questions they ask each other, the better. It’s important to point out before the exercise that the purpose is not just to simply survey their partners (and that how much they can afford to spend is not important). Rather, the objective is to “get under the surface”, if possible, to find out why their partners want what they do in a vacation. Thus, the more in-depth the audience analysis is, the better. Some possible questions:

- Would their partner prefer a city or the countryside? Why?
- What kind of weather / climate do they or don’t they like?
- Do they want simply to relax, or participate in activities? Cultural or adventure?
- Do they prefer individual travel, or guide-related services? Why?
- What would be the best / worst thing that could possibly happen on this trip?

After the participants quiz each other, they are ready to go to the table to select two or three post cards that they think will fit their buddy’s bill. The exercise finishes with each participant briefly introducing the cards they have chosen for their partner, and why they think these locales in particular will help their partner realize their “dream vacation”.
Exercise 2: “Put Yourself In Their Shoes”

Of course, a simple exercise that can always be done is to ask participants to fill out a worksheet that will help them analyze the audience they will soon present to. If they will present internally (inside their own company), it should be relatively easy to ascertain who will attend, what their positions are, and how they will react to certain ideas and arguments. It may not be so easy on the other hand to persuade members internally if there is a previous history of disagreement. According to Steve Mandel in his book, “Effective Presentation Skills”, there are three items to consider:

a. What are the values, needs, and constraints on your audience?

b. What is the knowledge level of the audience?

c. What will work with this audience, and what won’t work?

Regarding the first question, Steve believes it is possible to provide more in-depth analysis with smaller groups since you know more about the individuals involved, whereas with larger groups, you may have to consider more general concepts. Concerning the knowledge level, if the presenter has any doubts about using abbreviations, acronyms, or technical terms that may be unfamiliar, it is best to assume that the audience does not understand these specialized terms, and provide a brief explanation of them in simple terms following your introduction. Finally, you need to ask yourself what types of arguments and evidence will gain the most favorable reaction from the audience. Conversely, what types will gain an unfavorable reaction?

Mandel provides a standard form to “help you plan more efficiently for any presentation”:

1. My objectives in relation to my audience are:

2. Values that need to be considered with this particular audience are:

3. Special needs of this particular audience:

4. Constraints that must be recognized with this audience are:

5. I would rate my audience’s knowledge of the topic and technical terminology as:
   
   High __ / Low __ / Mixed __ / Unknown __

6. My assessment of the audience’s willingness to accept the ideas I present is:
   
   High __ / Low __ / Mixed __ / Unknown __

7. My audience has an opinion of me as a speaker prior to the presentation of:
   
   Good __ / Poor __ / Mixed __ / Unknown __

8. Examples of supporting ideas and arguments likely to work well:

9. Examples of supporting ideas and arguments likely to cause a negative reaction:

   Normally, it would be wise to have a case study or a personal story prepared with examples of values, constraints, special needs, and favorable and unfavorable arguments for the participants to work with. In the following exercise (where I detail various targeted questionnaires that I have sent to specific audiences prior to presentations I have made), I hope that you, my dear reader, will get the idea.

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**Exercise 3: “Prepare The Objective”**

As a presenter, if you ask yourself, “What do I want to accomplish by delivering this presentation?”, you should begin to visualize the ideal outcome of the presentation. Once you have the objective of your presentation in mind (i.e.-to inform, to entertain, to persuade), then the rest of the presentation is designed to support it. One approach to formulating a clear-cut statement of your objective is to think in these terms:

- “By the conclusion of this presentation, the audience will __________ (what?).”

Stating an objective in this way focuses attention on what you want your audience to do with your message. Typically, presentations are aimed at getting people to: Understand something, be able to do something, or do it.  

One obvious way to determine the objective of your presentation is to ask the audience what they want or expect, related to a certain topic, by sending a targeted questionnaire in advance which will help you both include what they want, and avoid what they don’t. Here I will include two targeted questionnaires that I designed and sent to two diverse audiences. Both groups were to receive a training session in the P.U.S.H. system. Besides different time lengths for the two groups (which obviously affected how much material I could include, and how I conducted the respective training sessions), the major difference between the two audiences was that one was a typical group of business people who had to routinely give presentations in the context of a multinational company, while the other was a group of fellow teachers in Brazil (most of whom had some experience teaching presentation materials to business people, but all of whom wanted to improve their ability to understand and teach such materials).

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a. Questionnaire for “Company A” Participants: Professional Presentation Skills  
May 4, 2006

We would appreciate your frank feedback to make this training as beneficial and interesting for Accenture as possible. Kindly write as much as time allows!

(1) What experience do the intended participants have with English presentation skills? For example: To whom do they present? What types of presentations do they make (informative, persuasive, other)? How often do they present in English? How large are their audiences?

(2) In your opinion, what’s the most difficult thing about making presentations in English?

(3) In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of Brazilians when presenting? What are the challenges for Brazilians presenting in English?

(4) Are there any particular cross-cultural issues that you or the participants would like covered in this seminar?

(5) What would you like to improve to make yourself a better presenter?

(6) What do you expect from this training seminar?

(7) What do you think the participants would like to do / not like to do in this seminar?

Thanks for your time.

b. Questionnaire for Teachers: Teaching Presentation Skills  
February 1, 2006

We would appreciate your frank feedback to make this training as beneficial and interesting as possible. Kindly write as much as time allows!

(1) What experience do you have teaching presentation skills?

(2) In your opinion, what’s the most difficult thing about teaching presentation skills?

(3) How would you like to improve your teaching of presentation skills?

(4) What kinds of problems do you think Brazilians typically have when presenting?

(5) What would you like to improve to make yourself a better presenter?

(6) What do you expect from this training seminar?

(7) What would you like to do/not like to do in this seminar? Thanks for your time.
Exercise 4: “I’m Here Today To Tell You…”

In order to get the participants to think further about personalizing their presentations, we can ask them to present the same topic to several diverse audiences which would require the presenters to “package” their ideas differently in order to achieve their desired objective. There are numerous topics that would be of interest in such an exercise, but why not choose something local and controversial? Recently in Brazil, there was a massive outcry over a potential gun ban.

Everyone weighed in with their opinion, and eventually the ban was defeated, much to my dismay. But rather than weigh in with my own opinion (or at least heavily weigh in with it), I tried to elicit the pros and cons from as many of my clients and friends as I could in the hope of making something educational come of it. From the following table (see page 89) we can get some idea of how the exercise could be set up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Suggestions for Tailoring Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Gun Control | a. High Schoolers  
b. National Rifle Association  
c. Liberals From Vermont | Q1. What would you include?  
Q2. What would you omit?  
Q3. How would you open?  
Q4. How would you close?  
Why? |
| 2. Why Smoking In Public Should Be Banned / Allowed | a. High Schoolers  
b. Bar Owners  
c. Cigarette Company Executives | |
| 3. Why (Car) Gas Consumption Should Be Limited | a. Environmentalists  
b. First-Time Car Owners  
c. Car Manufacturers | |

One way to start the exercise would be to use a “Values Clarification” warm-up where the participants are asked to discuss some general questions regarding the topic in small groups. For gun control, some questions might include: What is your personal view on gun control? Should people be allowed to own guns? Why or why not? Do you believe that allowing normal citizens
Exercise 5: “How To Make A Storyboard”

What is a storyboard, and how does it apply to practicing presentations? A storyboard is a visual script designed to make it easier for movie directors and camera technicians to "see" shots before executing. Furthermore, it saves time and money for the producer (and it saves headaches for the presenter!). It is commonly used for movies, commercials, and animation. Storyboarding can be used as an effective exercise in at least three modules: Module 5 (“Analyze Audience”), Module 6 (“Outline and Visuals”), and Module 7 (“Questions & Answers”), as well as for rehearsal. I introduce the exercise here because at this point in the P.U.S.H system, making an initial storyboard can help each student design the answers to potential questions from his audience into his presentation.

When a student presenter decides in his mind the main message he wishes to convey, and the sub-messages that will help convey the main message, he starts to visualize a flow of messages that can be tweaked for diverse audiences. Thus, the idea of this exercise is to show his partner or support group the series of messages he has envisioned, and ask them to step into the shoes of the target audience (after he gives them a brief of who exactly this audience is, what there concerns, constraints, and desires are, etc.). At this point, his partner or small group will help
him brainstorm questions and doubts they may have about the messages themselves and the flow. A simple way to conduct the exercise is to use hard copies of the slides the student expects to use laid out on a table in sequence, tacked up on a wall, or mounted on a whiteboard with magnets.

Since the “Question and Answer” session that most presenters save for the end of their presentation can be the most nerve-wracking, often wildly unpredictable part, the storyboard is a way to design answers into the presentation, and hence avoid an avalanche of tough questions at the end. Thus, the objective is not to answer the questions and doubts that come up during the storyboard exercise, but rather to jot them down, and then attempt to include them in the content. As we will soon see, the storyboard concept is an excellent one to use when looking at visual aids (Module 6) to determine individually and as a whole if they are well designed and appropriate. It can also be used to practice question-handling (Module 7) as the presenter can be asked to present any individual slide or any part of the presentation for practice, and then field and handle questions based only on a segment of the presentation, rather than the whole thing.

**Exercise 6: “Send A Summary”**

Recently, I had a lively discussion with a high-intermediate level English student of mine over lunch regarding his presentations to foreigners who visit Brazil in search of tasty real estate opportunities. I asked him how he went about “analyzing” the foreigners who came from the USA and the UK to listen to his pitches. First, he told me he assumed that they were skilled and trained in the real estate profession, and that they had a “mandate” to make decisions based on the information they got from local providers such as himself. He went on to acknowledge that
he knew they had other options in the market besides his team, so he wanted to do his best to
distinguish himself.

He also knew that they wanted “expert” local analysis which he thought he and his team
could provide. One way he felt he could distinguish himself from the other providers was to get
straight to the point (not wanting to waste the visitors’ time) by answering the simple question: Is
it a good opportunity to buy real estate in Brazil, or not? And of course, why (not)? He told me
he would try to find out whether the visitors were emotional, technical, skeptical, or objective
before they arrived (I was pressing him to tell me how exactly he got this precious information in
advance when our lunch ended!).

The secret he said was to send a summary of his upcoming presentation, along with two or
three questions, to the target audience before their visit. He would hope for some response
before they arrived so that he could fine-tune his presentation. If not, he would include
information that investors in general would ask about the “peculiar” Brazilian market such as the
nature of contracts, local legislation and liability, the average rent, vacancy and “absorption”
rates, and the bottom line, how much profit could be expected, and when, if possible. So, there
you have it: customize, localize, and then summarize! Ask your group to summarize their
presentations to each other in a minute or two, or in a short written account. Then, you can also
ask the partner in each pair to summarize their counterpart’s summary.

**Exercise 7: “Work With Other Cultures”**

Probably one of the most difficult aspects of audience analysis to pinpoint and practice is cross-
cultural communication and misunderstanding. Besides generalizations and relatively simple
role-plays, it is a daunting task to determine how best to present to groups from different
cultures. This task is complicated by the sheer number of misunderstandings (also referred to as “cultural missing”) that can occur, from the very first step of P.U.S.H. (eye contact) all the way to the appropriate use of humor—if humor should be attempted at all!

Before moving to Brazil, I tried to read and understand as much as I could about the country and its people, but it could never be enough. Similar to my first visit to Japan when, after studying Japanese for a full year, I was blown away after a single day by my lack of comprehension. Regardless, after long conversations with classmates, I put together three short role-plays to give myself and my Intercultural Communication (ICC) colleagues at SIT a taste of what I might face. Let me share with you the notes I made for that class.

[Role-Play #1]

(Person A)

Think of something that happened to you last week in Orientation (at SIT) that was really important for you. Then talk about it with your partner.

(Person B)

Try to interrupt your partner every five seconds to show your interest. Try to finish their sentences for them to show you’re really following along.

[Role-Play #1 was intended to show that Brazil is what is known as a “polychronic” (vs. “monochronic”) culture where people show interest by actively participating in conversations, even by finishing sentences for others to show their keen interest. In the U.S., this might be viewed as rude, overly aggressive, and difficult to deal with.]
[Role-Play #2]

(Person A)

Try to persuade your partner to join an upcoming political protest about some issue you care very much about.

(Person B)

Try to avoid joining your partner’s protest at all costs. You believe all politicians are corrupt. Show a defeatist attitude regarding political change. Finally, as a last resort, ask if they will “offer cake” at the protest.

[Role-Play #2 was intended to show that Brazilians are cynical and defeatist about politics (rather than apathetic, as can often be seen in the U.S.), and the citizens even “joke” about being paid (sometimes the “currency” is cake and refreshments!) to attend political rallies. Finally, one of the greatest insults to a Brazilian might be an American coming to Brazil and insisting on saving the Amazon rain forest, while doing nothing to address the blatant problems of poverty, lack of education, drugs, violent crime, and unemployment that blight Brazil!]

[Role-Play #3]

(Person A)

You’re a newly hired English teacher in Brazil. You’re justifiably proud of the U.S., but you don’t necessarily agree with your government on all issues.

(Person B)

As a Brazilian, you believe Americans are often arrogant, aloof, and uncultured. You also wish they would admit that Brazil is a great, growing country.
[Role-Play #3 was perhaps the most difficult for my classmates to get into on such short notice, and with such little time to let the role play run its course. The fact that “anti-Americanism” surfaces in many countries struck home with a number of classmates such as Margaret who makes a living in South Africa. The fact that a student would challenge an American teacher in Brazil on the basis of representing a “larger evil”, while simultaneously wearing Nike sneakers, looms as a universal cultural issue.]

In short, role-plays designed to help student presenters would deal with similar cultural issues that might arise with different audiences. There is plenty of information readily available on cross-cultural negotiations and conflict resolution, such as how “you may find your Russian counterpart banging his or her fist on the table or leaving the room (among other tactics designed to make it difficult for you to concentrate)”, or “excessive enthusiasm or compliments are rare in German business; therefore, you should give a thorough and detailed presentation, with an emphasis on objective information, rather than on clever visuals or marketing tricks.”

When discussing and planning for an encounter with cultural differences, it appears easy for some to neatly categorize certain cultures, and equate those groups with specific cultural traits. I struggle to agree that, as many books about multicultural management supposedly suggest, the world can be divided into three distinct geographical groups: (1) North America, (2) Europe,

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Latin America, the Middle East, and (3) Japan, China, and East Asia. My clients in Brazil, though willing to admit the influence of Portugal on their society, would hardly say that they are “like” the Portuguese. Similarly, the Japanese I know would be hard pressed to acknowledge that they are anything like the Chinese, even though the characters they read and write every day came originally from China.38

However, if we momentarily subscribe to the simple cultural classification in the previous paragraph, it can lead to an interesting exercise on cultural differences. We could ask our participants to look at the following three descriptions of how presentations are viewed in different parts of the world, and ask them where they would place themselves, and perhaps others they often present to:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Complicated language may be used to show education. Audience expects formality and a logical structure, but a touch of imagination is also appreciated. May want a personal ‘extra’ talk afterwards where you tell them the “truth”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Indirect, conservative language. Audience appreciates a quiet, formal presentation with visual aids and lots of opportunities to ask questions and check understanding. They expect separate handouts, prepared for different people, by job function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Direct, simple language. Audience expects jokes, modernity, logic, slogans, informality, and a “hard sell”. Audience may ask questions or interrupt while someone is speaking, and will openly question inconsistent facts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several discussion questions could ensue:

1) How do individual countries in your geographical group differ from each other? (Here I would propose that the participants create their own presentation role-plays to highlight

38 Paul Emmerson, Cultural Differences (www.onestopenglish.com).
the differences between neighboring countries in their region. In Brazil, I have already witnessed some informative and humorous role-plays involving Brazilians and their local “rivals”, the Argentines.)

2) In which ways is globalization making business more similar, reducing cultural differences? Which cultural differences remain strong, resisting the effects of globalization?^39

Finally, in my attempt to help participants become more aware of cultural differences and how they affect presentations, I need to clarify that I am indeed an international professional who has been living and working outside his homeland since 1988. Yet, I am and always will be an American who was brought up in a leafy northeastern American suburb and attended American schools for the first quarter century of his life. While teaching presentation skills, I try to touch on some of the things that I was taught about successful presentations (such as directness), which are necessarily part of my cultural background. I also touch on some parts of my personal and cultural orientation, including such concepts as “win-lose” (versus the ubiquitous “win-win”), “getting results”, “lay your cards on the table”, “reading between the lines”, dealing with issues one at a time, the values of equality and informality, individualistic decision-making, and “playing the devil’s advocate”^40. By illuminating such idiomatic expressions (and the thinking behind them) in exercises and role-plays, I hope that my student presenters will become more flexible and impactful—wherever they present.

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^39 Paul Emmerson, Cultural Differences (www.onestopenglish.com).

After a presenter decides what his main message is, he usually goes about collecting all the information necessary to support this message, after which he typically designs visual aids (nowadays seen often in the shape of PowerPoint slide shows) that help the audience visualize and remember. Hence, it would be useful at this point to look at some basic ways of organizing information (outlining), followed by some guidelines on what make some visuals work well, and others not. I have already shared several exercises related to the organization and ordering of information, including “Goldfish” (pages 53-57) and the “60-Second Pitch” in Module 4 (pages 66-69), along with “Storyboarding” (page 85-86) in Module 5.

It seems like ages ago, but I will always remember a typical elementary school assignment I was asked to do: “a book report”. Are kids still required to do “book reports” in this day and age? It happened especially during those halcyon summer months when the thought of writing a report on a book you had read over vacation was hard to swallow. But the concept was priceless for a school kid: writing an outline of a story. Kids quickly learn that simple stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. In the U.S. school system, as we move up into secondary school, the ability to outline material is then taken for granted. If we are training people to make better presentations, then we can quickly check to see if they use outlines or not (that is, if outlining is taken for granted in their cultures and schools as well). In my experience in Japan,
Taiwan, and now Brazil, business people often start their presentations with an agenda or preview slide (or a verbal explanation) to briefly let the audience know the structure and lead them into the topic. Thus, I do not spend an overabundance of time working on outlines.

**Exercise 1: “How Do You Outline?”**

If we look at and practice some common organizational patterns, we can next choose the best pattern for an individual topic. Here are eight standard patterns:

a. **Past-Present-Future**: Used to show how something once was, how it has changed, and how it will be in the future.

b. **Time (Chronological)**: Used to describe how processes, personal experiences, events, or activities happen in discernible units of time. Also used to explain the steps in a process.

c. **Problem-Solution**: Used to describe a problem and potentially how to solve it. It’s important to point out that a “problem” isn’t always negative (like crime or drug addiction). This type of outline can also be used to describe a “challenge” (like changing careers, or deciding where to go on your next vacation).

d. **Location**: Used to divide a topic into different geographical locations. Also used to contrast customs or ways of doing something in diverse locations.

e. **Cause-Effect**: Used to define a particular situation and its effects (for example, the effects of smoking).

f. **Effect-Cause**: Used to define a particular situation and its causes (for example, the reasons for smoking or drug addiction).

g. **Related Sub-Topics**: Used to divide one larger topic into different parts or sub-topics.
h. **Advantage-Disadvantage**: Used to discuss both positive and negative aspects of a given topic in a balanced, objective fashion.

Most teachers will already be familiar with the choice we often make between teaching a topic “inductively” (where examples are observed first, and from these a general rule can be determined) as opposed to “deductively” (where a general rule, or set of rules, is looked at initially, followed by a deduction of examples that fit the rule in question).

In this exercise on outlining, I prepare eight slips of paper (hopefully we will have exactly eight participants, or a neat multiple of eight, in our group!) with the organizational pattern listed on the front (and perhaps a brief example), and a topic on the back.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Front) a. <strong>Past-Present-Future Outline</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. The History of the World Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. The World Cup Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. The Future of The World Cup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Back) Topic: Introduce Your Company (3-5 minutes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the participants should look briefly at the type of outline they are required to follow, and then come up with a brief presentation on the topic shown on the back of the strip which highlights their outline structure. When they finally make their brief presentation, the members of the class at large, or a smaller group, will “induce” the outlining rule from the example given.

Other topics I have used to highlight the remaining seven outline types are:

b. **Time**: “How To Prepare A Successful Business Presentation”

c. **Problem-Solution**: “Moving To A New Country”

d. **Location**: “How To Handle Business Lunches In Three Different Places In Your Country” (This stems from the idea that efficient business lunches in São Paulo are
entirely different from the long, drawn-out affairs that one encounters in Bahia in northeastern Brazil where it typically takes 45 minutes just to place your order!)

e. Cause-Effect: “Effects Of Stress In The Workplace”

f. Effect-Cause: “What Makes Your Customers Happy?”

g. Related Sub-Topics: “How Does Your Company Spend Money?” (Some hints here are: Training & Development, Research & Development, Marketing, Maintenance, Salaries, Benefits, Bonuses, etc.)


(choose one)

Another related exercise is to prepare eight strips, each with a short paragraph highlighting one of the organizational patterns previously introduced. For example: “In a speech about a day in the life of a teacher, Fernanda talked about early-morning preparation, classroom teaching, and after-school activities.” Then, the participants are asked to identify the type of outline (in this case, “Related Sub-Topics”).


Similarly to earlier modules on eye contact, voice control, and body language, we can start our discussion on the design and use of visual aids by asking participants why presenters use visual aids. Of course, there are a variety of visual aids that are commonly used (such as more traditional forms like flipcharts and posters, and more modern types like PowerPoint slide shows, with progressive revelation, animation, and sound effects), while the technology of visuals seems to be constantly changing. Does this mean that the trainer needs to be a technical wizard capable

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of putting together the latest in high-tech visuals? I would say no, although it helps if the trainer makes an effort to keep up with some of the developments in the area of professional presentations. I had to laugh the other day when someone helping me pitch this course in Brazil asked the Human Resources manager at a large multinational company to provide us with a “retroprojector” (i.e.-an old-fashioned overhead projector).

Keep in mind that the trainer is not required to teach the participants how to use PowerPoint. There are online tutorials that do this quite nicely, along with a number of web sites and articles about the pitfalls of depending too much on the gadgetry of this powerful software (learn more at http://www.PowerPointLifeguard.com). Our job at the moment is to help the participants understand the why and how of using good visuals. You might elicit some of the following reasons on why visual aids are considered important in presentations:

1. Visual aids make you more persuasive. The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania found that presenters using visuals conduct meetings in 28 percent less time, increase audience retention up to five times, and get proposals approved twice as often.\(^{42}\)

2. People can grasp more information. We have certainly all heard that “a picture is worth a thousand words”. At the University of Wisconsin, students learned vocabulary twice as well when the instructor used visual aids.\(^{43}\)

3. Visuals aids add variety and emphasis to your presentation.

4. Your message is presented both aurally and visually, thus helping audience retention.


5. Visuals help you organize your presentation.

6. Visuals help you be more concise.

7. Visuals help to facilitate meetings. A graphic on a flipchart, for instance, can capture individual and collective thoughts in a dynamic way.

Conversely, you might ask the participants when they would not use a visual aid. Some possible answers:

1. It distracts or detracts from the presentation’s focus.

2. It is poor quality.

3. It is irrelevant (even though it may be interesting).

4. It is only used as a “time-filler”.

5. It is outdated.

6. It doesn’t suit your purpose.

7. It doesn’t suit your audience.  

Thus, for this exercise, we must ascertain what makes a good visual aid in general. Ask your students to bring examples of various visual aids to class. Ask them to bring both “good” and “bad” visuals for analysis. They could be visuals they or their colleagues have made or used in real presentations, or they could be taken from sources such as company brochures, or even popular magazines. Of course, knowing that your students may be “too busy” to do such homework, make sure you bring some examples yourself.

From these examples, we can attempt to make a list of guidelines for good visuals. You may have already heard the acronym “K.I.S.S.” which can be applied to presentations as a whole, as well as individual visuals. You will have a good time eliciting the exact meaning of the acronym

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1. Keep it simple. Simpler is better, according to our old pal Peoples. Lincoln’s Gettysburg address was a mere 262 words, 202 of them were one-syllable. If you can get your visual to look like a billboard on an interstate highway that people are going to read flying by at 65 mph (95 kph), then you should have it just right.45

2. Leave lots of white (blank) space. Try to bunch things together, leaving plenty of unused space around them.

3. Keep it organized (by lining things up along the left side of the frame).

4. Create a path for the eye to follow. You can do this by organizing most important items to least important, from left to right, and top to bottom (the way English speakers read—again, related to “audience analysis”—if we are presenting to English speakers, that is!).

5. Make something dominant. The audience should be able to pick out your most important element immediately, because it is biggest, boldest, or brightest.

6. Divide space in an interesting way. Then again, here we start to get into subjective territory where different people find different things “interesting”.46

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You may finally ask (or be asked) how much information is too much information to include on one slide or transparency? According to Raines, “The Rule of Six” is based on reading research that asked a similar question: “How much information can a person visually absorb at one time?” Based on the results, “The Rule of Six” states that a presenter should strive to use no more than six lines of text per slide, and no more than six words per line. Will you ever break this rule? Sure, if you’ve got a proposal that has seven points, then you probably want a visual that lists the seven points.47

**Exercise 3: “What Makes A Good Headline?”**

As a trainer, you will witness enough presentations to see that business people often stick a “title” (like “Sales”) at the top of their slides. The basic difference between a one or two-word “title” and a “headline” is that the latter is more complete, and hence makes the emphasis clearer. Headlines are also related to message delivery (Module 4) in that they give a more complete picture of the presenter’s focus, and also are helpful for people who arrive in the middle of a presentation, or those who perhaps take a quick mental trip to the beach, and then tune in again.

The best way to start this exercise is to bring in several copies of the local English newspaper, and briefly examine some “good” headlines (usually the front page will suffice with headlines

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about the “hottest” news) to see how they contain few words, but are generally specific, clear, and typically contain an action verb. Next, you can prepare some short articles from newspapers or the Net that are missing their headlines. Ask the students to provide headlines, and discuss their effectiveness. Yet another variation is to ask students to prepare several slides without headlines (or with the headlines masked with masking tape). In small groups, decide on the best headlines for the key message contained in the slide. Thus, the title “Sales” may become the more emphatic and message-oriented headline, “How Can We Improve Sales—Now?!”

**Exercise 4: “Color My World”**

In the past, when people used overhead transparencies for presentations, they often printed out slides in simple black and white. Trainers like myself and my cohorts in Japan and Taiwan brought along sets of transparency markers, and gave the participants time in our workshops to “spice up” such slides with splashes of color. Nowadays, the other extreme may have been reached with PowerPoint software where so many colors are at our immediate disposal, and some colors look gorgeous on the computer screen but may be hard to see when projected onto a screen in a darkened room, or the colors may generate a negative response, depending on individual and audience orientation or culture.

Color has been described as “the powerful persuader”. *The Board Report for Graphic Artists* listed several advantages to using color: “We can expect color to effect responses…Color appeals to emotions…The right colors can promote attention, evoke moods, create desire, and generate favorable responses.” According to the Board Report, we associate the following meanings with different colors:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Meanings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>authority, death, strength, loyalty, mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Faith, cold, award, truth, tenderness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Action, earthiness, autumn, fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Envy, health, friendship, leisure, youthfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Passion, heat, excitement, love, fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Warmth, action, power, valor, aggression, fury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Dignity, royalty, frugality, melancholy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Holiness, cleanliness, purity, professionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Confidence, knowledge, esteem, playfulness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this point, the trainer might also want to introduce some common color-related sayings in English, such as “I’m green with envy”; “We’re in the red (black)”; “You’re looking at the world through rose-colored glasses”; and “I feel blue lately”. Naturally, it would be interesting here to elicit color-related phrases from the students' culture. A short exercise that could follow is to ask the participants to choose some of the following businesses and discuss what corporate color(s) would be most appropriate for them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment Fund</th>
<th>Courier Service</th>
<th>Waste Disposal</th>
<th>Beauty Salon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Goods</td>
<td>Health Food Products</td>
<td>Clothes for Teens</td>
<td>Toy Store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Food Restaurant</td>
<td>Real Estate Agency</td>
<td>Energy Supplier</td>
<td>Airline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upmarket Restaurant</td>
<td>Fitness Club</td>
<td>DIY Company</td>
<td>Advertising Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car Rental Agency</td>
<td>Music Shop</td>
<td>Supermarket</td>
<td>Language School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the discussion, real corporate examples could be provided. In the Far East, red symbolizes good luck, and is consequently used by many Asian companies (such as Canon, Sharp, and HSBC). Green’s money connotations are used by Britain’s biggest bank Lloyds TSB, while its environmental connotation had led to its adoption by petroleum giant BP, of all companies! The intellectual power, trust, and dependability associated with blue makes it appropriate for IBM, GM, Ford, Pepsi, and Microsoft. Brown’s solidity and straightforwardness makes it perfect for UPS (whereas the company first used the color in 1917 for the simple reason that brown vehicles didn’t show the dirt picked up from dusty roads). Confectionary giant Cadbury apparently originally chose purple because it was Queen Victoria’s favorite. Obviously orange catches the eye, as was chosen by pharma giant GlaxoSmithKline, and Pentium.49

**Exercise 5:** “Storyboard, Again?”

We already looked at the “storyboarding” technique in Module 4 and Module 5 as a way to show message flow, and to analyze different audiences and their potential reactions to presentation material. Again, storyboarding can be used to look at the flow of visual aids in a presentation, and to highlight individual visuals. Storyboarding helps you to see if material is sequenced logically, and if visuals are consistent. It also helps to pinpoint spelling and grammar mistakes. Ask your students if they think an observer would notice and remember a mistake that they made while speaking, or a written one such as on a slide, and it becomes clear that written mistakes are much more telling. Mistakes on slides or handouts remain in plain sight for longer, and have a greater chance of leaving a bad impression on the audience than verbal mistakes (I know this from first-hand experience after having a student point out an embarrassing typo on my handout in front of all his colleagues—at least he smiled when he did it).

Typically, I ask students to work with their buddies, or in small groups as they look at each other’s storyboards. Of course, depending on their English ability, they may or may not be able to pick out spelling and grammar mistakes. However, they can certainly comment on color, design, and readability (as all slides should be readable from the back of the room where presentations take place). I also ask them to serve as editors for each other. It is said that 75% of all visuals consist only of text, and when the text is too complex, the natural tendency of the presenter is to read the slides verbatim (which we agreed before is a waste of the audience’s time). Thus, the job of the buddies or fellow editors is to help the presenter “distill the message to its absolute essence”. One final addition to this exercise is to ask the editors to look for “parallel construction” in their buddies’ slides. A simple example of the need to make items match grammatically will probably suffice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Parallel:</th>
<th>Parallel:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With your Benefits Package,</td>
<td>With your Benefits Package,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You may be facing:</td>
<td>You may be facing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plan participation that is too low</td>
<td>• Low plan participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frequent changes in carrier</td>
<td>• Frequent carrier changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor claims service</td>
<td>• Poor claims service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do you spend too much time administering the program?</td>
<td>• Too much administration time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are inclined you can come up with a set of slides, all of which highlight problems of grammatical parallelism, for the participants to look at in greater detail. Be aware that presenters who don’t speak English as their native language often use lengthier noun forms in their slides when simpler verb forms will suffice.

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Presenters can rehearse until the cows come home, but still not be completely prepared for the “Question and Answer” (Q. & A.) session that comes at the end of most presentations. In Module 7, we will discuss exercises that are designed to help presenters prepare for questions better, and then to handle the questions they receive, no matter how sticky, with more clarity and confidence. As I mentioned before, the presenter has two basic choices as to when he handles questions. As teachers, most of us are accustomed to taking questions and handling interruptions at any time, even if they disrupt the flow of our classes. As presenters, we can tell the audience at the beginning of our presentations whether we prefer to handle questions at any time, or specifically at the end in a “Q & A session”. Common wisdom holds that if we are trying to be persuasive in our presentation, then we would like to handle questions at the end so that our most persuasive arguments are not disrupted in midstream.

With the people we are training, who are typically not native speakers and therefore not as adept at handling questions (or thinking on their feet, or “flying by the seats of their pants”, as we might also put it), we should first consider two normal situations. How will they deal with a question when they don’t understand it, and how will they deal with one they don’t know the answer to? I usually start this module by mentioning the first situation and asking what the participants would say or do. Naturally, they will say something like, “Could you please repeat
your question.” While this response may work, I write the word “rephrase” on the board, and explain the difference between it and “repeat” (which could simply lead to the questioner using the exact same unknown vocabulary or phrasing in his follow-up question).

In the second scenario where the presenter simply does not know the answer to the question at hand, I ask them again what they say or do. In my mind, if the question is related to the topic and they should know the answer but they don’t, they need to be sure to stress that they will do their best to follow up and get the answer to that person later (rather than “bluffing”). Yet, the presenter should also know that if the question is unrelated to the topic, there are ways to politely heed the questioner, and keep the Q & A session on track simultaneously. You may have noticed that I did not include a specific section in my assessment criteria (see page 13) to rate visual aids in Module 6. I do however look more closely at the way student presenters handle questions as I believe this skill is more important for success. The sub-skills, if you will, that I examine are:

- **Handle Questions & Presentation Arena:** Focus on Questioner / Rephrase / Answer to All / End on Someone Else / Handle Equipment & Space Smoothly

Granted, there are a variety of ways that presenters handle questions effectively. Once again, I defer to David Peoples’ “proven techniques”\(^ {51} \) that have been borne out in the thousands of presentations I have observed over the last 17 years of teaching abroad.

The participants in your group will have no trouble imagining how important it is to be able to answer questions confidently, but they may differ as to how. The sub-skills above are based in part on common courtesy, and in part on helping yourself handle questions which at first may seem debilitating. The first point is to focus on the questioner and listen carefully—to the entire

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question. Ask your group how they feel if they start to ask a question and the presenter cuts them off before they finish, and begins to answer the question. Out of politeness, the questioner wants his entire question heard, as well as the audience.

The second point is for the presenter to “rephrase” the question, and then begin to answer. Primarily, this is to benefit any audience members who may not have heard the question completely or clearly (often when the question comes from the front of the room, those in the back may not have caught it). Second, it buys the presenter a bit more time to think of an adequate answer while she rephrases. Third, it is a surefire way to practice English by asking the presenter first to listen to a question, and then to rephrase or paraphrase it completely in her own words. One of the things I request when I teach business English is that my students answer all questions with complete sentences. I point out that this may not happen in the “real world” where people are busy, and one-word answers often suffice, but that in class, it can only help them speak more, and use grammatical structures that will prove important in the development of their speaking ability.

**Exercise 1: “Say What?”**

Based on this suggestion to rephrase, we have our first question-handling exercise. I ask the students to prepare a list of five (tough in terms of wording) questions that they would like to have answered as they look around at the other members of the class. Then, I ask the students to get up, move about the classroom in order to pick a new partner, and ask their partner the first question on their list. The object is not to have their partner answer the question at that point, but simply to rephrase it to the questioner’s satisfaction. Then, the partners change roles. After the first question is done, I ask the members to find a new partner, until their lists of five questions
have been exhausted. Generally, the “tougher” (longer and more complex grammatically) the questions are, the better it is for rephrasing practice. The teacher can choose whether to “check” these first to offer wording and language advice, or to simply go with what students write.

**Exercise 2: “Answer To All; End On Someone Else”**

A typical tendency of presenters, noticed especially in cultures where seniors are treated with much deference (such as Japan), is to field a question, and then answer entirely to the questioner. Not only does this lead to a feeling of exclusion on the part of other audience members, but it also usually leads to the questioner (receiving all the attention) asking another, and perhaps another, question. If the presenter says, “Does that answer your question?”, the most common response is another question. Peoples recommends that we simply offer to speak with that individual at the end of the program, break eye contact, and move on. To help presenters avoid focusing on the questioner, and to keep the entire audience involved, we may also ask them to end their answer on someone else besides the questioner. As with many types of training, it is useful to point out that this is but one system of handling questions.

Therefore, the exercise proposed here is to ask each participant to think of a “one-sentence” presentation (something simple like, “Soccer is the world’s most popular sport”, or “I always go to the movies on weekends”, will do quite nicely). Presenting to a group of at least three audience members, they will then field questions on their topic. The purposes of the exercise are first to answer to everyone in an equitable fashion by sharing eye contact, and second to practice ending their answer on someone else, before moving on to further questions. Similarly to our eye contact practice back in Module 1, we can ask the observers to raise their hands any time

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they feel they are not receiving adequate contact. I also ask the presenters to field at least one question from each audience member, and when they have fielded enough questions, to repeat their preliminary message as a kind of conclusion.

Answering questions to everyone in the audience is also referred to as “the 25%-75% rule”.\(^{53}\) If you direct 25% of your eye contact to the questioner and about 75% to the rest of the audience, it will help you stay in command of the situation, and keep the audience involved. Of course, you don’t ignore the questioner (even if it is a “hostile” question, or worse, a dissenting opinion), but you don’t ignore the rest of the audience either. David Peoples has an entire section in his book on dealing with various types of troublemakers, including “know-it-alls”, “loudmouths”, “interrupters”, “interpreters”, “latecomers”, “early-leavers”, and “whisperers”\(^{54}\) (unfortunately, my paper will not cover all the details of dealing with these sensitive populations).

**Exercise 3:** “You Are The Devil In Disguise”

Is it true that Americans ask a lot of questions? I remember as a kid how I could quickly make my father frustrated by continuing to ask him innumerable pesky questions (especially “why” questions). He would finally snap, “Because I’m your father, that’s why!” I agree that many Americans I know want as much information as they can possibly get on a subject of interest or concern. We also frequently ask a lot of questions simply to keep a conversation moving. When we ask a question, we expect an answer right away. If we don’t get a relatively rapid response, we may assume that the person is angry, bored, or simply has nothing to say. Therefore, we


incorporate a certain number of “hedging” devices into our normal conversations to give some indication that we are at least forming a response:

- “Let me see…”
- “Hold on for a second…”
- “Let me think about this…”
- “How can I say this best…”

This exercise has two versions:


On strips of paper, we prepare a series of tough (in terms of content) questions. Some examples might include: Q1. Why are we here on earth? Q2. What is the meaning of life? Q3. What is your perception of life after death? Q4. How can we truly know happiness? Q5. Why are you involved in the career you are in, and not something else that would benefit mankind more? Q6. How can we prove there is a God (Buddha / Allah / etc.)? Q7. Ask the students to write several of their own tough questions.

Having already briefly introduced the aforementioned types of hedging, we then ask the students to practice handling such questions by beginning to answer their partners as quickly as they can.

b. “There’s No Way!”

The second version of the exercise is more closely related to the business and debating practice of “playing the devil’s advocate”. Many executives (and debate team members) are well versed in the art of trying to poke holes in an argument, disagreeing wholeheartedly and presenting

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counter-arguments, if only to make sure an issue has been fully explored, before a critical decision is made. In this version of the exercise, we ask each presenter to prepare one “recommendation” related to their business (ideally, they can prepare a recommendation slide) which they will briefly present to a small group. The group’s responsibility is not only to think of tough questions to make the presenter defend his premise, but to actively debate the recommendation, to the point of even “taking over” the presentation itself from the presenter.

At this point, it may be useful to introduce what is known as “the loaded question”. People sometimes ask loaded or trick questions—possibly out of spite, or to see what the presenter is made of. If a man were asked, “Why are you always late?” He should know that it is permissible to disagree with the implied premise. He might say, “I have a different view of your implied premise, and therefore, I can’t answer your question as stated. If, on the other hand, what you mean is……, then my answer is……”56

As the trainer, you may find with this exercise that certain student presenters, due to their excessive politeness (or perhaps to their ever-battling nature!), will not know when to cut the Q. & A. session off. They may need to be reminded that every presentation must come to an end, much to the relief of many of the audience members. If they continue to meet intense

disagreement, they may simply say, “We have time for one more question, and then I will be happy to continue talking with any audience members who wish to stay behind.” This is where the final element of our rating criteria for question-handling comes in: The ability “to handle equipment and space smoothly”. Typically, the ease with which a presenter handles the equipment and the space (or presentation “arena”) has to do with arriving early to check and test the equipment, organize the space according to the presenter’s wishes (if this is indeed possible), and to have a contingency plan in case the dreaded “Mr. Murphy and his law” come to visit (i.e.-some piece, or all, of the equipment breaks down unexpectedly!).

**Exercise 4: “Questions for Audience Involvement”**

The final exercise dealing with questions does not so much help the presenter answer thorny questions as it helps him involve or interact with the audience more. Naturally, certain presentation situations will lend themselves better to audience involvement, such as educational ones, or presentations where the objective is to help the audience use or get used to a product or a system. The techniques that follow then will be of particular interest to educators (pay attention, teachers!).

There are several common types of questions that the presenter can use to involve the audience. They have been given specific names by David Peoples:
a. “The Rifle Shot Question” is when you make eye contact with a specific individual, call her by name, and then ask the question to her.

b. “The Time Bomb Question” is when you ask the question of the audience as a group, then call on a specific individual to answer, only after you have finished asking the question.

c. “The Ricochet Question” is used to redirect a question that has been asked of you to another audience member. It is surely a good technique if you want a little more time to think about your answer to the question at hand, and can also help assess the audience’s level of understanding about the topic.

d. “The Rebound Question” is when the presenter rephrases the question and then redirects it to the same person who asked it in the first place. This question type may be useful in handling certain “troublemakers”, and it also may help reduce irrelevant questions.57

The exercise then is to first introduce the question types to the group, either on the board or on a handout. After that, you can split the larger group into smaller ones in order to give them a chance to practice the techniques. One of the best ways I have found to generate topics that allow student presenters to make short presentations in class so that they can practice such techniques is to ask their colleagues to either look at the group as a whole, or specific individuals in the group, and then list topics that they know their colleagues are familiar with or are passionate about, and that they would like to hear more about. From these lists, you can then assign topics which will be more relevant and fun to that group.

One last type of question that we all use and hear every day is the “rhetorical question”. I will include this type of question in the next module of P.U.S.H. on “language devices”.

(See also Appendix Two for “The Baseball Game”, an exercise developed to encourage rapid question-handling.)
CHAPTER 11

P.U.S.H. MODULE 8—“LANGUAGE DEVICES”

Depending on where you try to employ the P.U.S.H. system, you will surely encounter individuals (especially those “hot-shot” executives who have tons of experience presenting) who seem to know it all. What they need, or believe they need, is simply help with the English language. They want and need to know some effective English “language devices” that will help their presentations be more memorable, and help them sound more fluent and professional.

Most of us have a speech that affected us in a profound way stored in our memory banks. In mine, I have bits and pieces of Martin Luther King Jr.’s classic civil rights speech, “I Have A Dream”. I’m not sure where and when I first heard the speech, although I was alive at the moment he delivered it in front of the Washington Monument on a sweltering August day in 1963 to hundreds of thousands of curious listeners. Long before M. L. King Jr. Day was declared a national holiday in the U. S., I remember listening to the taped speech with a “revolutionary” colleague of mine, Tom Rawson. I have used the speech often in class as an example, and every time I do, I become hopelessly choked up. I realize then that rather than commenting on the speech myself, and the deep-seated emotional meaning it holds for me, it is better to let my students listen to and look at the text of the speech themselves, and make what they will of it.
Some of the reasons that the speech stands today as one of the most famous in American history is its use of simple language, vivid imagery, and the language device we call repetition. In his inimitable voice, King proclaimed,

“I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal.” I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.”

King’s use of repetition painted a picture of hope for the American people. But without going into the politics of that day and age, we can look at the use of repetition by King, and the poignant phrase itself—“I Have A Dream”—as a way to introduce such a powerful language device to our student presenters. “Language devices” deals with more than simple words and phrases (which we already looked at in Module 2 on pages 33, 35, and 36). Rather, this module deals with devices that are used on the “sentential” and “suprasentential” (otherwise known as discourse) levels which should make advanced learners of English more intrigued. On the other

58 Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream* (www.usconstitution.net/dream.html, 1963)
hand, English language learners at more basic levels may not be ready for this module, or for that matter, the one that follows on humor.

**Exercise 1:** “Could You Repeat That Please?”

The use of repetition is all around us, in every language. We could begin the module by asking the participants to recall incidents of the use of repetition from their own schooling, or from examples of memorable speeches that they have heard, seen, or read about. I find that some of the best discussions arise when I ask participants to give their opinions on the best (and worst) speakers in their countries (and companies). Regardless of the language, why do they believe they are the best? What language devices do they use that make them memorable? Effective repetition is bound to rank high on their lists. If we ask the participants to speak briefly about local advertising as well, whether it occurs on TV, radio, or some other mass media, they are bound to recall slogans which are memorable due to their catchiness, as well as their constant repetition (however mindless it may be!).

For the rest of my life, no matter how hard I try to forget, I’m afraid I’m doomed to recall the slogan used by Bill Savitt Jewellers in Springfield, MA. Whether the business still exists to this day, I don’t know. But as a child watching a black-and-white TV (can you modern readers even imagine that?), I was forced to hear Bill’s promise of “P.O.M.G.—that’s right folks—‘Peace Of Mind Guaranteed’ when you purchase a diamond ring from us” more than a thousand times. I was far from the target audience Bill was searching for on the airwaves, but he had me hooked, so much so that I even repeated the inane saying to my childhood friends (who had heard it too), and pretty soon we had applied it to all facets of our lives, like when we made a good pass in a soccer or basketball game.
Since this module on language devices has to do with language on the sentential and discourse levels as I mentioned, I have yet to come up with many exercises completely on my own. In this particular case, I often use Mark Powell’s excellent resource on presentation skills, “Presenting In English: How To Give Successful Presentations”. Mark has numerous lucid examples, primarily for business people, on effective openings, signposting, exploiting visuals, articulation, chunking, pacing, scripting, softening, creating rapport, and clarification, among others.

a. **Repetition 1:**

Powell points out that repetition is one of the best presenter’s most powerful techniques. He asks students to look at the kinds of words that are most effective when repeated:

**Ex.1:** “The overall response has been **much, much** better than anyone expected.”

**Ex.2:** “It’s always **far, far** easier to identify a gap in the market than it is to fill it.”

Based on these examples, he asks students to look at several presentation extracts and highlight the word or words that create a stronger effect when repeated:

1. “It’s way too soon to say how successful this initiative has been.”

2. “There are many reasons why it’s very important to get the go-ahead from New York.”

From there, he mentions that another common technique is simply doubling meaningful words: “bigger and bigger”, “better and better”, and “stronger and stronger”. The next task is for students to determine what kinds of words they are (whether comparative adjectives or adverbs), and again to look at presentation extracts and highlight the words that could potentially be doubled:

(1) “It’s getting harder to make money and easier to lose it.”

(2) “More people are fighting over fewer jobs for less money.”

Powell asks his students to present each extract several times while experimenting with doubling of one, two, and even three words. He asks students which they like best. I would go on to make my students look at their own notes, and develop a paragraph on an index card (I always carry a stack of these for such happenings!) using any of these types of repetition to present to their buddies or a small group.

b. Repetition 2:

In his second exercise on repetition, Powell introduces another common technique where a statement is made by the presenter, then repetition is used, followed by a brief explanation:

Ex.1: “We didn’t go AHEAD….We didn’t go ahead—because we weren’t READY.”

He asks students to notice which words are stressed, and emphasizes that pausing before the statement is repeated gives it extra impact. Based on this example, he asks students to apply the same techniques to the following:

(1) “Sales—up—we spent more—advertising.” (“Sales are up….Sales are up because we spent more on advertising.”)

(2) “Profits—down—costs—risen.”

If we subscribe to the simple teaching model of “P-P-P” (“Present-Practice-Produce”), once we have presented such a technique involving repetition, and had the students practice it with some

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simple examples, then we need to ask them to produce something on their own, related to their business or their lives, that will help make the technique stick.

**Exercise 2: “Rhetorical Questions”**

As I discussed briefly in the module on questions, the use of rhetorical questions has long been a favorite technique of presenters, both to grab the audience’s attention, and to keep them guessing as time goes by. Since questions are typically used in conversation, then using them often in a presentation makes the presenter sound more conversational. But first, it’s important to ask the group of students if they are familiar with rhetorical questions.

I typically start by asking a few to see if the group can then define what type of question a rhetorical one is: “Who knows what the future may bring?” or “Why are we here today?” Thus, I define a rhetorical question as one that makes a statement without an answer expected (the former) or one that may be met with several answers (the latter) at the same time, but which will then be clarified by the presenter (of course the presenter may first choose to elicit various answers from the audience so that they warm to the topic).

If we are serious enough, we may even want to look into “rhetoric” itself in greater depth to reveal some of the actual techniques that such great rhetoricians as Plato and Aristotle used once upon a time. Since the P.U.S.H. system is by definition “a work in progress”, this is a step I have yet to undertake! Who knows when this will be done? Bear with me, my dear reader.

a. **Rhetorical Questions 1:**

Powell claims it is often more interesting to present your ideas as questions than direct statements. Often a good way of introducing a statement you want to stress is to ask a rhetorical question first.

Ex.1: “So, how big IS the market?………. eNORmous.”
The adjective in the question can be reinforced with a stronger adjective in the answer. Notice that the verb and strong adjective are verbally stressed (shown by the use of capital letters).

**Match the rhetorical questions on the left with their one-word answers on the right:**

1. So, just how bad IS the situation? a ………. POsitive.
2. So, just how difficult IS it? b ………. unPREcended.
3. So, just how sure AM I that we can do it? c ………. imPOssible.
4. So, just how competitive ARE we? d ………. specTACular
5. So, just how good ARE the results? e ………. STATE-of-the-ART.
6. So, just how unusual IS this trend? f ………. unBEAtable.
7. So, just how small IS the risk? g ………. catasTROphic.
8. So, just how new IS this technology? h ………. NEGligible.62

**b. Rhetorical Questions 2: Left Unanswered**

Another effective technique is the use of rhetorical questions that are left unanswered, or you intend to address in the upcoming body of the presentation. Sometimes you can simply state the topic of your presentation as a question (“What can be done about this situation?”). Other times it is more effective to state the problem first, and then add a rhetorical question.

The rhetorical questions below can be used in many different situations. Complete each of them using the following pairs of words:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>where + did</th>
<th>where + go</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>how + working</td>
<td>how + do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what + attribute</td>
<td>how soon + seeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how long + making</td>
<td>how come + feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what sort + looking</td>
<td>how much + is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what + waiting</td>
<td>what + take</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1. “For the fifth year running we’ve managed to increase sales volume. So ......................
did we ....................... it?”

2. “The opportunities in Eastern Europe are better now than they’ve ever been.
So ......................... are we ......................... for?”

3. “We’ve lost ground to the Swedes both in Scandinavia and at home.
So ..................... do we ......................... from here?”

4. “We’ve spent the best part of a year plowing money back into R&D.
So ..................... can we expect to start ............... results?”

5. “This is the third time we’ve launched a new product, only to have to withdraw
it within the first six months. So ............ do we have to go on ....................... the
same mistakes?”

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Exercise 3: “Dramatic Contrasts”

It’s easy to find examples of dramatic contrasts in everyday life, thus leading us to another
language device presenters often use to reinforce their points. Powell reasons that people are
always aware of simple opposites—“good and bad”, “past and present”, “us and them”, “The
Evil Empire and The Red Sox Nation”, etc. If you can make your point with two strongly
opposing ideas, you will immediately get the attention of your audience:

        Ex.1: “Ten years ago, we had a reputation for excellence.
        Today, we’re in danger of losing that reputation.”

63 Mark Powell, Presenting In English: How To Give Successful Presentations. (Hove, England: Language
Based on this introduction, Powell asks students to match up the two halves of the contrasts below:

| 1. If we don’t take care of the customer, | a. or we’ll be downsizing by 50% in six months time. |
| 2. Remember, it can take years to win new business, | b. but we went ahead and did it anyway. |
| 3. Asking difficult questions now is a lot easier | c. someone else will. |
| 4. Everyone said we’d never do it, | d. but it only takes seconds to lose it. |
| 5. Either we downsize by 25% now | e. than correcting stupid mistakes later. |

Powell asks us to look for patterns in the dramatic contrasts above, for example:

“If we don’t....., someone else will.”

Notice how many of the extracts above rely on simple opposition:

- **We – someone else**
- **Nothing – something**
- **Now – later**

Notice also how the voice tends to rise on the first half of each contrast, and fall on the second.

Famous quotations are a fine way to witness dramatic contrasts in action. Powell gives several examples such as: “The difficult: That which can be done immediately. The impossible: That which takes a little longer.” (George Santayana), and “Everything has been thought of before. The problem is to think of it again.” (Goethe) He then asks his students to try to complete some others (with an answer key provided in the back of the book): “If you owe your bank a hundred pounds, you have a problem. But if you owe it a million, ……” (“it has.”—J. M. Keynes)\(^64\)

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Naturally, at this point, we want our participants to practice what they have just been exposed to. We could ask small groups to first brainstorm as many dramatic contrasts as they could, and based on these, make short presentations using our ubiquitous index cards. Some prompts might include: “Yesterday / Today”; “Either we / or we”; “It’s not a question of / Rather it’s a question of”; “We / Our competitors”; “North America / South America”. The trainer should busy himself checking in on the small groups to make sure the concept is understood and applied.

**Exercise 4: “It’s Time To Triple”**

We have already seen how important points are often “chunked” in threes. I typically start the discussion on the “tripling” technique by asking the participants the three adjectives which best describe the esteemed P.U.S.H. system that they are now quite familiar with. I was surprised to find that the system could be described in a variety of ways, and almost all of them good. In my mind, the way the P.U.S.H. system would ideally be described is: “Effective—Adaptable—and Fun!”

Powell asks his students to look at the following examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th></th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex.1: “Our service is</td>
<td></td>
<td>swift,</td>
<td>efficient,</td>
<td>and professional.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex.2: “What’s needed now is</td>
<td></td>
<td>time,</td>
<td>effort,</td>
<td>and money.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He then requests that they match up the statements below:
David Peoples also highlights studies that have been done of great speakers throughout recorded history. One common denominator that stood out was called a “three-part list” or simply “speaking in threes”. Some famous examples:

- “Government of the people, by the people, for the people.” (Abraham Lincoln)
- “I came, I saw, I conquered.” (Julius Caesar)
- “Friends, Romans, Countrymen: Lend me your ears.”
- “To be, or not to be: That is the question.” (Shakespeare)
- “Tell me and I forget; show me and I remember; involve me and I understand.”

(Ancient Chinese proverb)

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Or for the cleverest of speakers like Winston Churchill who was able to combine threes with the aforementioned dramatic contrast: “Never in the field of human conflict has—so much—been owed by so many—to so few.” And David Peoples, obviously considering himself a smart cookie, “We’re not here today to talk about hardware, software, or applications. What we’re here to talk about is: Money, fame, and glory.”

**Exercise 5:** “Machine-Gunning”

Not to sound overly violent, but we have seen that three is a number that the human brain seems comfortable with. Once the presenter lists four or five important points, the audience will typically start to forget some of them. However, if the presenter makes six seven or even eight relevant points to support an argument, though the audience will be hard-pressed to remember them all, they will most likely be impressed with the strength of the overall delivery. Powell gives the following example of the technique:

**Ex.1:** “It’s cheaper, newer, faster, bigger, cleaner, safer, AND better designed than anything else on the market. What more can I say? (or: It’s as simple as that!)”

Powell asks student presenters to notice how the points can be delivered at speed with each point emphasized “to create a machine-gun effect”. He asks students to pay attention to the last statement in the list, claiming it is usually the most powerful remark. Finally, he presents several other examples of the technique for students to rehearse and play with:

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Ex. 2: “In terms of performance, we’re more motivated, more productive, more profitable, more efficient, more quality-conscious, AND generally more successful than ever. And that’s all there is to it.”

At this point, I would ask my group to help me market my P.U.S.H. system. I would ask them to generate a quick list of dynamic adjectives that could be used to describe the system, in addition to the three we have already used in our “Tripling” exercise: “Effective, Adaptable, and Fun”. Some of the descriptors that have come out of this exercise: Professional, Dynamic, Funny, Revolutionary (!), Creative, Innovative, and Nice (but certainly not Cheap!). You get the idea.

Exercise 6: “I Get Knocked Down, and I Get Up Again!”

Two other salient techniques that Powell describes are “build-ups” and “knock-downs”. Since the build-up technique is quite similar to the “60-Second (or Elevator) Pitch” that we used back on page 78, I will not dwell on it too much. Suffice to say, Powell defines a build-up as an effective way of emphasizing a point by presenting several connected pieces of information which build up to a short, simple conclusion:

Ex.1: “As far as this contract in Rio is concerned, we’re tied up with a lot of other projects at the moment, so there’s no way we could meet their deadlines. We have very little experience with this type of work anyway. And to be honest, they’re not prepared to pay us what we’d want…..BASICALLY, it’s out of the question.”

(Notice that the last sentence is a simple summary of the situation in a word or phrase. The main message is clearly delivered after a short pause.)

“Knock-downs”, on the other hand, will be something new for most student presenters. A popular technique with presenters who want to sound provocative is to carefully build up a series of points which seem to oppose their main argument, and then knock them all down in a single-sentence conclusion:

**Ex.1:** “Of course, the experts said that a palm-top computer could never succeed. They did market research which showed that people would just see it as a gimmick. They said its memory capacity would be too limited for serious business users. What’s more: they did feasibility studies which showed that the keyboard would be too small for even the fingers of a five-year-old! **So, how come it sold more than a million units in its first year?**”

(Of course, Powell leaves a space to show that the presenter would pause before delivering the final “knock-down” in a slightly raised voice.)

Presumably, the presenter would then go on to show how the research was proven wrong, and then highlight the actual reasons behind the million palmtops sold.

As with every exercise that contains some level of difficulty, the trainer must be ready to offer several other pertinent examples of the technique, or create some “scaffolded” examples (where

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the students are guided through some similar models by filling in the blanks, and choosing among appropriate knock-down conclusions). A final example from Powell illustrates this:

**Ex.2:** “The introduction of the new __________ took the market by __________. It received some of the best __________ we’ve ever had in the __________ press. And, in terms of technological innovation, it left the __________ standing. We were expecting great things.”

The students are then asked to choose from a list of words to fill in the blanks (including: model / storm / reviews / trade / competition), and a list of appropriate knock-downs (including: “And yet, all we did was reduce the market share of our existing product.”).⁷⁰

Now it’s time for the group to create their very own knock-downs. Here, a list of possible topics which could be adapted to their own companies or countries is useful. The list could include “how a new product (system or service) failed to live up to expectations” or “how a new product exceeded all expectations”. If you allow the students to present their knock-downs to each other in small groups first, and then ask them to vote for (nominate or “volunteer”, as we often say in the industry) “the best” or “the most interesting” or “the most faithful to the technique” in their group, you allow several presenters to showcase their ideas to a larger audience. In the end, this kind of simulation can be the most helpful. Other ways of “choosing” one or two individuals to present at the end of an exercise to the larger group is to roll a pair of dice you just happened to bring along as the trainer, choose from a deck of cards, or play the universal game of “paper-scissors-stone” (the winner gets to present, of course).

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Exercise 7: Dealing With Corrections

This is not an exercise. But at some point, I wanted to discuss how I as the trainer deal with student presenters’ mistakes, primarily with the English language. We know that any kind of correction by a trainer or teacher depends entirely on the context in which it occurs (i.e.-if you are dealing with a student one on one, then it’s easier to point out and discuss mistakes—both major ones which affect meaning, and minor ones which do not). Possibly one of the most useful things that came out of my studies at SIT is the concept of asking students for feedback on course content (the “what”) and process (the “how”)—before, during, and after the course itself.

As a teacher, you are doubtless already familiar with different ways of making corrections, as well as the method(s) you prefer. Hopefully, as a language learner, you are also familiar with the method(s) you like and dislike. To ask the students themselves before the course begins what kind(s) of correction strategy(-ies) they are familiar with, and that is most beneficial to them given their situations and goals, can be an eye-opener. Typically, if you stop a presenter every time he makes a mistake, then the flow of the presentation is hopelessly disrupted. I make a note of what I consider to be “major” mistakes along with my feedback sheet (see page 13) for each presenter, including mistakes with pronunciation, word order and choice, and other grammatical points, and discuss them with the individual or group at the end of the presentation. After all, that is one of the reasons I believe I’m there, and they want me there—as a native speaker of English with 16 years’ experience teaching presentation skills overseas.

One of the valuable things that was pointed out to me in Taiwan during my “Interim Year Teaching Practicum” with Dr. Susan Barduhn was the benefit of pointing out student “successes”
with the language, rather than only dwelling on mistakes. Thus, this is something I always begin
my feedback session with—an example of each student’s mastery of the language, or a complex
structure therein. Indeed, part of my feedback sheet for each presenter is one of the final points:

➢ **Exude Overall Confidence**: Maintain Poise / Recover from Mistakes / Smile!

In my mind, the ability to “recover” successfully from mistakes in a presentation is vital. I will
discuss this further in the final two modules (“Humor” and “Manage Anxiety”). At the end of
the day, presentations in international business are more about delivering valuable information
and recommendations than being completely correct in the application of the target language.
Therefore, I strive to help the students in my groups to become more fluent first. Hopefully, they
will also commit to longer-term training where we can work more on accuracy as well.
CHAPTER 12

P.U.S.H. MODULE 9—“WHAT’S SO FUNNY?” (HUMOR)

While I don’t believe that you can necessarily teach people to be funnier, understanding humor better and practicing it can aid in the development of the delivery skills (such as eye contact, voice control, and body language) central to all presentations. Looking at different types of humor and their applicability to presentations can also help students deal with cross-cultural issues (as previously discussed in the audience analysis module starting on page 88). While I treat the teaching and learning of presentation skills with the utmost seriousness, I also believe that students relax and learn more in an environment where they are encouraged to laugh. I also like to laugh, both as a teacher and a language learner. Not all teachers will agree, nor will all feel comfortable with this approach. Because of this, I will try to focus on humor here as a skill, similar to presenting, that can be trained and improved.

Once upon a time, I met a gentleman named Ian in Taiwan. He typically began a conversation by asking you if you had recently heard any new jokes. When you said no, he would launch into a solo joke-telling performance that could go on for hours (depending on how many beers were available at the time). What I learned from Ian was that the ability to tell jokes could be practiced, and that rehearsal led directly to “memorization”, and that all efforts were appreciated. Thus, when we went on soccer tours, each member of the team was required to bring at least one joke and one song to share on the long bus trips. As a team with a good number of individuals from a variety of countries who were not native speakers of English, you
can imagine how amusing the bus trips turned out to be (especially with a particular French
captain who became quite adamant when an individual tried to get out of telling a joke or singing
a song).

Many presenters, like comedians, are paid simply to entertain. Most business presenters
would admit that they use humor to relax their audiences, and to take their minds away from the
seriousness of their jobs and lives for a short time. When I begin a presentation class or course, I
try to show from the outset that I appreciate appropriate humor, and that I am completely capable
of laughing at myself. Luckily, as a language teacher and learner who has had the good fortune
to be out of his element in several countries, I have an abundance of humorous material, mostly
involving my own foibles and humiliations with foreign cultures and languages. Humor serves
as a bridge between people and cultures, and I want there to be a strong bridge between myself
and my students, and myself and my audience. It’s been said that laughter is the shortest
distance between two people.

As one of my students in Japan once quipped, “Beebe-san, we study hard, and we forget
hard.” By asking students to rehearse humor, I may not get them to remember every joke. But
after rehearsing, they will remember how important timing is, and what word play and irony can
be, and how pauses affect delivery of any verbal message. They will come to understand that
telling a longer joke is much like making a presentation in that both feature a beginning, a
middle, and an end. So, let’s tell a few, shall we?

Exercise 1: “If You Laugh, You Tell”

One of the simplest exercises that I use in this module is to ask the group if they can agree to a
simple condition: If they laugh at the next joke I tell them, then they have to tell the same joke
again to their partners. If they agree (they do), then I have several jokes prepared (or committed to memory), usually related to language learning, which have several stages that will “test” transitions, timing, and the delivery of the all-important punch-line. I encourage the students to take written notes as I believe that such note-taking helps them practice a skill they need in business, and that it will aid memory. But this is another topic.

After I tell my joke, someone will invariably laugh. After they meet their end of the bargain, I seize on the opportunity for them to practice a few simple jokes which I have prepared on cards that I scatter on the table. The next part of the assignment is for them to pick up a card, read the joke, and if they think it’s funny, tell it to a partner. If they pick up a joke on a card that they don’t think is funny, then they continue looking for a joke on the table that is funny.

Where do I get so much funny material? I have an eye for humor, especially that involving the clever use of the English language (such as word play) which can often be used in the classroom. I keep a “humor log”, both jotting down funny things, and collecting humorous articles and clippings. In Taiwan, I was given the perfect opportunity when I was asked to “roast” various individuals who chose to leave our soccer team over the years. Before the roasts occurred, I would go about compiling an array of hilarious stories about the individual in question from the other team members. At this point in my classes, I mention the worldwide organization known as “Toastmasters” which allows individuals around the world the opportunity to hone their speech-making skills in English (as well as to network) while being critiqued by experienced speakers. According to their web site: “Toastmasters is the leading movement devoted to making effective communication a worldwide reality.”

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71 [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)
Humorous material is in every bookstore, every office, and every classroom. Lucky for us in Brazil, we have two monthly magazines dedicated to “mastering English for the whole life” (my translation!): “English2Go” and “Speak Up”.

The “English2Go” magazine features a whole page of “Jokes They’re Laughing At in the U.S.A.”. Since they are relatively short, and tend to focus on word play, I typically bring several copies to add to my cards on the table in this exercise. A typical work-related joke that made a group of managers laugh in a recent seminar was: “Two men and their boss were on their way to lunch. In the taxi, they happened to find a lamp. The boss rubbed the side of the lamp, and a genie appeared. “I’ll grant you one wish each,” the genie said. The first man shouted, “I want to be on a boat in the Bahamas.” And poof: he was gone. The second man exclaimed, I want to be on the beach in Miami, surrounded by beautiful people.” And poof: he was gone. Finally, the boss made his wish: “I want those clowns back after lunch.”

Exercise 2: “Tell Me A Funny Story”

Yet another simple joke-telling exercise is to ask the group, either as homework or on the spot, to think of a funny story that happened to them. First, I usually tell a funny story of something that happened to me during my travels to set the tone. I always end this type of story with a message condensing what I learned from the experience. This is a useful time to introduce what “an anecdote” is: a short narrative that is amusing, interesting, or biographical, and which carries a

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connection to some other matter of larger importance. This is a springboard to how humor is used effectively in presentations.

This exercise can also lead to a humorous analysis of language mistakes, as well as common cultural misunderstandings. We assume that a common type of acceptable humor is the self-deprecating (or the self-depreciating) variety, but it may not be appropriate in every culture. In my training sessions, I am quick to point out situations where I have made mistakes with the local language (such as recently when a woman stopped me on a local street and asked me directions, presuming I was Brazilian; I simply told her to walk ahead four “squares” (“quadrados”) rather than four “blocks” (“quadras”)). I want to let my audiences know that laughter is encouraged, and by setting the stage for fun, I hope that I will save myself the embarrassment of laughing alone.

Whatever medium of humor is used, I naturally simplify my stories and remove colloquial phrases that prove hard to translate. I also try out my stories with smaller groups or individuals to see whether they will “fit” before using them with larger groups of important business contacts. As Art Gliner warns, some international listeners will take jokes literally: “A Midwestern executive sent a cable to one of his Peruvian managers: send me office and factory headcount broken down by sex. The reply from Peru: 249 in factory, 30 in office, three on sick leave, none broken by sex—our problem is alcohol.”

**Exercise 3: “What’s The Punchline?”**

Another standard exercise is for you to prepare some jokes with obvious punchlines on cards. Each joke should be numbered, and the punchlines are identified by letters on separate cards.

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The students must pick out a joke card first, read it, and then look for the corresponding punchline. A handout with all the complete jokes serves as a neat summary at the end of the exercise.

This exercise allows students to work at telling jokes. They can experiment with what is called “the set-up” that leads to the effective delivery of the punchline. Since the “facts” of the story set-up should be logical and realistic, they can experiment with “personalization” (using local names, locations, and activities) that makes stories warmer, more interesting, and appealing. Yet, a truly good story explodes into the punchline (which is usually nothing more that some unexpected truth that slightly twists reality). Here, the trainer needs to listen in to make sure that students don’t fade on the most important part of the delivery—the punchline! A good set-up makes the surprise possible; a strong punchline makes listening to the set-up worthwhile.74

The only potential drawback with this exercise, and with humor in general, is that the students might not “get it” (or even if they do get it, they might not think the joke is funny!). Therefore, the trainer has to be ready and able to explain jokes, and why they are intended to be funny. Most people would agree that once you explain a joke, it surely loses its humor. In the end, if you explain it, and they still don’t get it (or they still don’t laugh), then move on. Keep the pace up, and “cut your losses”, as they say. Teaching humor in the classroom is not for the faint of heart.

**Exercise 4: “ Recover With Humor”**

It’s important to discuss how presenters can recover from mistakes, whether they are related to language, spilling a glass of water during the presentation, tripping on the stage, or fumbling with the equipment—all mistakes I have firsthand experience with. I would start this exercise by asking my would-be presenters what they would do or say if they made such mistakes. Many say the best action is to simply apologize, and move on. I let the students know that humor is another alternative to help them recover from such mistakes. In his excellent resource, “Making Humor Work: Take Your Job Seriously and Yourself Lightly”, Terry Paulson points out that when comedians use humor we ask, “Is it funny?” When we use humor in the world of business, we tend to ask, “Does it work?”

Paulson includes a section in his book on “cover-ups” and “savers” which he explains as two types of “ad-libs” or come-backs that professional comedians in fact memorize. “Cover-ups” are used to soften common problems that all speakers experience. They may seem spontaneous, but they are actually planned and practiced until they become automatic. Such “cover-ups” include:

**Ex.1:** If the lights go out, the speaker might say, “Would someone tell the power company that the check is in the mail?”

**Ex.2:** After a mistake during a speech, a presenter might pause and say, “Wouldn’t it be great if speeches came with erasers, or delete buttons?”

**Ex.3:** If the speaker hears loud applause from an adjoining room, he might remark, Thank you—I appreciate your support.”

“Savers”, on the other hand, can help when attempts at humor fail. Paulson says that if one of your most humorous stories “bombs”, it is better to acknowledge the fact than to simply move

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on. He also claims that perhaps some of the following savers can take the terror out of storytelling:

**Ex.1:** “I just threw that in. I should have thrown it out.”

**Ex.2:** “I thought that would be a biggie.” (The speaker here takes his index card and tears it up.)

**Ex.3:** “That’s the last time I buy a joke from __________.” (The speaker inserts the name of a key staff member who he knows can “take a joke”.)

**Ex.4:** After picking up a typing mistake on a slide, the speaker quips, “We added that so you perfectionists in the audience would experience joy finding it.”

The hardest part of such an exercise is how we trainers can make the students “own” the language or the humor so that it will seem relevant, and can become a normal part of their language repertoire. We can ask our students to make up three “cover-ups” or “savers” that they could use on their jobs. These could be based on common distractions or common errors. The difficulty also lies in walking some students through such exercises while others sprint through them. Some trainers will be more comfortable with this than others.

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**Exercise 5:** “Thank God It’s Friday”

According to Dr. Harvey Mindess, “You don’t have to teach people to be funny. You only have to give them permission.” With this in mind, our job as presentation skills trainers just became a bit easier. There are lots of statistics to prove that humor is valuable in business (along with all other social settings), that humor helps determine a person’s business success, that personnel directors feel employees with a sense of humor do a better job than those without, that humor helps companies sell their products and services, that humor helps people be more creative, and that humor is in fact “the best medicine” (it has been proven to interrupt illness and promote healing).

The last exercise is based on a company which started a “TGIF-joke-network” that ended every week. Every Friday at 4:45 PM, a person would start the chain with a joke, and the others would follow by calling their chain partner with that week’s joke. Our exercise begins by splitting the class into two smaller groups. Hopefully, we have already been able to assign two trusty individuals to bring in two good English jokes to class. Each of the assigned joke-tellers then begins the chain in their group. After the chain is finished in each group, we count off in each group so that those with the same numbers can join those from the other group to exchange their jokes. Naturally, if you have assigned two individuals to bring jokes to class for this exercise, and they do not, you have a few cards prepared for this eventuality.

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CHAPTER 13

P.U.S.H. MODULE 10—“ARE YOU READY TO JUMP?” (MANAGE ANXIETY)

We reach the end of the P.U.S.H system with a module on how to manage anxiety. But in fact, we have been dealing with anxiety in every module dealt with thus far, from the absolute beginning while practicing eye contact. Anxiety takes many names, including “fear”, “resistance”, and “reservation”, and I believe it spans languages and cultures to become the bane of presenters everywhere. Fortunately, if we cannot completely rid ourselves of “the butterflies”, at least we can attempt to get them all to fly in a similar direction. There are numerous tips, techniques, and exercises (a few of which are included in this module) to help presenters recognize and overcome anxiety.

Speaking of beginning your presentation with a joke as some would recommend, I typically start with a quote from Jerry Seinfeld who got a laugh when he cited a survey that found that the fear of public speaking ranks higher in people’s minds than the fear of death (see page 46). “In other words,” he deadpanned, “at a funeral, the average person would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy.” It turns out that short-term stresses like speaking in public boost your immune system in ways that tend to keep you out of the coffin, not put you in it. That’s one of the findings that emerged from a study of 30 years of stress research.

To put it in perspective, I ask the audience what is the worst thing that could happen to them if their presentation is an abject failure. The participants usually mention that they could lose business, make enemies, or even get fired. I then show the following picture of a man preparing
to sky dive while I talk briefly about my own experience learning to drive an articulated city bus in Seattle that carried 75 people at a time. What was the worst thing that could have happened if I had crashed the bus on those steep, rain-slickened Seattle hills? Certainly, getting fired was the last thing I was worried about. I talk about the anxiety I felt at that juncture in my life, and how I somehow once slid down an entire city block covered with ice and snow in a runaway bus without crashing. I would love to make a presentation in public any day of the week rather than drive a bus.

**Exercise 1: “The Fear Factor”**

When I decided to take a break from living in Japan in 1994, I persuaded myself to overcome a long-standing fear I had of deep water. After having almost drowned on three separate occasions as a kid and a teen, I went to the Philippines where I managed to get a PADI “Open Water Diving Certificate”. As I walked along the beach on my first day there, I came to a shop called “Cocktail Divers”. Needless to say, my fears were not assuaged. I finally came to a place called Asia Divers, met a wonderfully calm and friendly instructor named Dave, and before I knew it I was a meter under the warm waves taking my regulator off, and experiencing a brand new world. As I write now, I have been underwater for a total of 21 hours and 34 minutes. My deep respect for the ocean, and its powers and mysteries, remains. But my fear is now a figment of my former imagination. This is my lead-in to the following exercise, adapted from “Speech Communication Made Simple: A Multicultural Perspective”.

You can also see that another fear I have is going to the dentist which is the reason I include the picture at the top of the exercise on page 145. Without going into detail about my fear of the dentist, I ask the students if any of them fears a trip to the dentist.
The point is to lead into the following exercise which states that everybody is afraid of something, and bringing these fears into the open (in this case, student presentations to each other) helps to overcome the fear, as well as giving students presentation practice. These types of presentations can be emotional, and some students may not care to present their “deepest” fears. If this happens, I ask them to choose a less emotionally-charged topic.
You Can Overcome Presentation Fear

Everybody is afraid of something. Anybody who says, “I’m not afraid of anything”, is simply not telling the truth. Being able to talk about something you’re afraid of, and to share your feelings with a group, is a good way to gain confidence when speaking before an audience. And gaining confidence will go a long way in helping you overcome your fear. Also, you might be surprised to learn that others are afraid of exactly the same things as you!

For example, many people are afraid of:
- Flying
- Public Speaking
- Meeting New People
- Taking Tests
- Being In The Dark
- Going To A New Country
- Interviewing For A Job
- Going To A Hospital
- Large Dogs, Snakes, and Spiders

Your assignment is to give a speech to the group describing a fear you have.

Assignment
1. Choose a specific fear that you have.
2. Using the “Specific Fear Speech Preparation Worksheet”, prepare notes for a speech about this fear. Be sure to include all information that will help your audience understand your fear, and the reasons for it.
3. Give a two to three-minute speech to your group about your fear.
**Example:** “Fear of Flying” Speech

**(Introduction)**

The earth was far below us. The weather was very bad. I looked at the instrument panel of the plane and saw a red warning light flashing. The pilot was obviously nervous. Just then, the engine of the plane became silent!

**(Body)**

This happened to me last year when I was flying from Cancun to Cozumel in Yucatan, Mexico. I will explain exactly what happened so you can understand why I now have a great fear of flying in small planes.

Right after we took off from the airport in Cancun, the weather turned bad. There was a lot of thunder and lightning. It was raining extremely hard. It was impossible for the pilot to see out the windows of the plane. I was the only person in the plane with the pilot. After being in the air for fifteen minutes, the plane started to shake and make strange noises. All of a sudden, the engine just stopped.

When the red warning lights started flashing, I became very afraid. I began to tremble and was quickly soaked with sweat. I remember thinking that my life was about to end. I thought about how young I was, and how I didn’t want to die. All of a sudden, the engine started to work again. The pilot turned to me, and smiled, and said, “*No te preocupes!*” (that means, “Don’t worry!”)

My mother and father do not want me to fly in small planes ever again. They say I should fly on the big airlines, or take a boat! I promised myself, from now on, I’ll do what they tell me.

**(Conclusion)**

I don’t think I’ll ever fly in a small plane again. I get upset every time I think about it. I know that I may never be able to overcome this fear.
Speech Preparation Worksheet: Specific Fear

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>What is the nature of your fear?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>When did the fear develop or start?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Where did it develop?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Why do you think it developed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>How do you react when faced with this fear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>How do your friends and family react to your fear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>What have you done, and what will you do, to try and overcome this fear?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: “Speech Communication Made Simple: A Multicultural Perspective” by Paulette Dale and James C. Wolfe; p. 15-16; Longman; 1988)\(^79\)

Exercise 2: “Deal With Your Anxiety”

It’s important to keep in mind that anxiety is a normal state. Anxiety exists any time we are put under stress (presentations normally fall onto this category, especially when they occur in our second or third languages!). Physiological changes take place that can cause symptoms such as the aforementioned “butterflies” or an upset stomach, sweating, tremors (no, that is not an earthquake under the building), accelerated breathing (or even hyper-ventilating), and an increased heart rate. If our student presenters can learn some techniques to handle these symptoms, then certainly they will be thankful, and better off as presenters.

A starting point is to examine some hypothetical case studies to let students know they are not alone, and to begin brainstorming ways to handle such anxiety. I begin this exercise by giving the following handout, and asking the students to work with a partner to generate a few strategies that each of the individuals can use to handle his or her particular type of anxiety. I find the best way to handle the exercise is to ask students to discuss each case with a partner for two to three minutes, and then open the discussion to the group as a whole. When the group appears satisfied, or has run out of ideas, we move on to the next case.

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Manage Anxiety: Quick Case Studies

1. Marcelo is an engineer with an electronics firm. In two weeks, he has to deliver a major presentation to managers from several divisions on a project he’s proposing. He knows his topic, but his audience will be examining his proposal very closely, and Marcelo is certain to receive some tough questions. Every time Marcelo thinks about planning what to say, he gets too nervous to begin work.

2. Carolina is an account executive with a software company. She’s been asked to present the sales figures for her region at the company’s national sales meeting. Her colleague Rogerio is finishing his remarks, and in two minutes she will have to stand up and make her presentation. She’s experiencing extreme anxiety at a time when she needs to be focused and collected.

3. Alessandro is an accountant with a major financial organization. When he gives presentations, he gets awfully nervous. He sweats profusely, his hands tremble, his voice becomes monotonous (and sometimes inaudible). He also fidgets with items, such as a pen or a laser pointer, and looks at his notes or the overhead projector screen, not at his audience. He can barely wait to finish and return to his seat.

(Adapted from: “Effective Presentation Skills: A Practical Guide for Better Speaking” by Steve Mandel, p. 8-10; Crisp Publications; 1987)\(^{81}\)

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**Exercise 3:** “Hot Drugs for Sweaty Palms”

In the previous exercise, your students will probably come up with a number of remedies for each presenter in question. In the three cases given, each presenter’s situation differs, and the appropriate remedies should too. David Peoples, our presentation skills guru, has his own pertinent section called “Hot Drugs For Sweaty Palms (or Getting Butterflies To Fly In Formation)”. I also give this to my groups as a logical follow-up to the individual cases we have just discussed.

Peoples’ tips are based on three “speaking diseases” that allow us to introduce three lovely Latin words to our classes: “laliophobia” (fear of speaking), “demophobia” (fear of crowds), and “katagelophobia” (fear of ridicule). Some of the techniques here are straightforward. Isometric exercises for alleviating stress (Tips 8 and 9) can be quickly demonstrated in the classroom. Imagining the audience “stark naked” may work for some presenters and not others. Here, I start a short discussion by asking the participants which of the tips will work for them, which won’t, and why (not).
“Hot Drugs for Sweaty Palms”

1. Memorize the first two minutes of your presentation.

2. Preplan the first 3 to 5 words.

3. Create cheat sheets.

4. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

5. Arrive one hour early.

6. Meet, touch, and talk.

7. Deep breathing gets the poison out.

8. Lift up on your chair.


10. Imagine they’re all stark naked.

11. The miracle drug is physical fitness.

12. Persuade yourself:

   • You know 10 times more than anyone in the room.
   • They are here because they want to be.
   • They like you and want you to succeed.
   • You are well prepared.
   • You have a solid case and a strong close.
   • The audience is open-minded and receptive to new ideas.

(Source: “Presentations Plus” by David Peoples; p. 26-34; J. Wiley; 1992)\(^2\)

**Exercise 4: “Impromptu Presentations”**

If someone asked you to present a subject you know well, but were not necessarily prepared to speak about at that moment, could you do it? I hope you said yes, because we will expect our students to do just that in this exercise. When I talked about outlining back in Module 6 (see pages 94 to 96), I mentioned several types of organizational structures commonly used in presentations. But, imagine if you (along with your manager) were invited to attend a meeting of all department heads in your company, and you weren’t planning on saying anything. During your manager’s presentation, a question came up about something that you had been working on. Suddenly, your manager turns to you and asks you to “say a few words on how the project got started, where it stands, and where it’s going”.

You would have to be able to quickly plug into a pattern of organization such as (a) Past-Present-Future, or perhaps (b) the Pros and Cons of the issue at hand, hopefully finishing with one of the advantages to leave a positive taste in the mouths of your manager and the department heads! It would also be useful to plug into the P.D.R. (Preview-Deliver-Review) sequence mentioned in Module 6. You would begin with some introductory remarks (like thanking your boss for the opportunity to speak about a project you’re excited about), develop a clear preview sentence of your main points, deliver the main points themselves, and finally give a brief review (“I’ve tried in the past few minutes to give you an overview of how this project got started, where we are now, and where we think it will go.”).  

In the past, I have done this exercise by having students pick topics from a hat, and asking them to deliver a one-minute impromptu presentation to the group. Typically, I would not

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require all the students to make such a presentation, but would ask for three or four volunteers. Just announcing and explaining the exercise is enough to create anxiety for the class as a whole! I also believe that everyone in the world deserves a standing ovation for a job particularly well done. If you have ever received a standing ovation, or seen someone on TV basking in the warm glow of such an ovation, then you will agree that it is an unparalleled feeling. That is why I prepare several large “Standing O!” signs on cardboard that I hold aloft with a chosen assistant or two at the ends of these presentations. If the students are asked later what they did in class today, they can answer, “I received a standing ovation from my peers!”

Exercise 5: “Put It On My Bill”

In her book “How To Present Like A Pro”, Lani Arredondo introduces a true story that helped put her own fear of public speaking into perspective. She recalls hearing of a world-class figure skater who, despite having the lead after the preliminary rounds, refused to go on for her final skate due to an overwhelming fear that she would fall in front of the large, critical audience. Finally, after pleas from her coach and family fell on deaf ears, a friend was called in. The friend asked her to visualize going into an exclusive French restaurant that doesn’t have prices on the menu. He told her to imagine reaching into her pockets and finding them empty. She would quickly leave the restaurant, ashamed she would be caught. Then he asked her imagine going into the same restaurant again. This time, when she reached into her pocket, she would find a crisp US$100 bill. This time, you will take your chance and order, he said to her, even if you are not sure you have enough to cover the tab.
That US$100 represented her ability, gained through training, practice, and experience. That ability gave her ample reason to go out and give it a try. She would never be completely sure, until she tried, if her ability was enough “to cover the tab”, but it was only nerves—not real fear—the friend assured the skater. She got up, stepped on the ice, and won the gold medal as the audience stood and showered her with applause. The exercise that I have in mind here is not to make everyone go out to the nearest ATM and withdraw US$100 in the local currency. Rather, it is to help them, have a short visualization session so they can imagine themselves walking out in front of a packed auditorium, delivering the presentation as they had planned, handling the audience’s tough questions with aplomb, and then feeling the applause rain down on them (as they had just experienced coincidentally in the previous exercise!).

**Exercise 6: “Do Anything To Simulate Anxiety”**

In the final analysis, the best way that we can help our students experience the anxiety that is sure to arise before a big presentation is to simulate similar conditions in the classroom. Previously in this paper, I have suggested some techniques that could be used to help student presenters feel such anxiety:

a. Setting up a camera in the room (with or without film!)

b. Taping pictures of faces to the backs of chairs to simulate a larger audience

c. Inviting guest teachers, fellow employees, or bosses into the room during the “dry run” or “dress rehearsal” (also known as a “stress rehearsal”)

d. Asking guests to come and go in and out of the room during the dry run

e. Brandishing a stop watch, and making presenters stick to strict time limits

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f. Stopping presenters in the middle of their presentations to ask them what they would do if the lights went out, or if the computer broke down, at that moment

g. Forcing presenters to answer difficult questions during, and at the end, of their presentations

h. Using video as a tool to capture mistakes and successes, and to record progress towards a goal

i. Doing anything you can think of to make your students feel less than comfortable before, during, and after their presentations. What can you think of, my dear reader?
CHAPTER 14

DON’T FORGET THE FEEDBACK!

Naturally, as the trainer, you want to continuously make things better for future classes and groups. Never neglect your feedback forms at the end of a training session! Not only will you be able to bask in compliments and praise that students sometimes heap on you (if you do a good job), but you will be able to glean bits and pieces of valuable feedback that will allow you to tweak your material to make it more user-friendly and more personalized for individuals, individual groups, companies, and cultures.

Here I will briefly share some feedback that I received in my last two months of training. This is the kind of feedback that keeps a teacher-trainer like myself going (to that 7 AM class tomorrow on Monday morning!).

Dear Will,

How are you?

Sorry for not returning earlier about my presentation. I was very, very busy.

Even not having much time to rehearse in Peru, I could give a good presentation (of course, putting into practice your hints). I could also answer questions from a FED representative. My boss and colleagues complimented me a lot after my presentation. They commented that my English and presentation were very good.
I could talk to others (people from Central America, Hong Kong, Spain) in the cocktail as well. I´ve got very glad. I’d like to thank you for all. You´re the best teacher that I´ve ever had. You made me a miracle!
Kind regards, Ana Cristina Sagutti Nakayama

(Central Bank of Brasil) Wed, 8 Mar 2006 12:26:10-0300

Dear Will,
Thank you very much for the unique opportunity (in your “Presentation Training for Teachers” workshop). At the beginning, I was afraid to be on the spot (presenting), but you facilitate our lives.

You have a charismatic way of approaching to your new "audience". I really appreciated that. By the way, if you want to observe one of our groups at Zumbi dos Palmares (Afro-Brazilians), let me know, ok?

Have a wonderful week.

Friendly hug, Rose Iorio
Now, you’ve seen my system for teaching presentation skills, “Present Up The Stairway To Heaven” (P.U.S.H.), in all its glory. As with many things in the fields of teaching and learning, it’s a work in constant progress—I continue to add and adjust exercises to fit both the needs of my clients and the changing times. The beginning of the title of this paper, “Getting Pushy In Brazil”, is aimed at getting student presenters to push themselves to experiment with a system, as well as techniques and structures, that they are not familiar with, and may not be entirely comfortable with. But then, most people would agree that making public and business presentations is never an entirely comfortable experience.

I’ve been called a pushy person, but I approach teaching presentation skills with more of an attitude of “cajoling” and encouraging my students (and getting them to cajole their peers at the same time), rather than pushing them too aggressively. After all, the goal is for students to enjoy presentations more, and to use English more fluently—and enjoyably—than before. Most students in a business context will probably already be convinced of the need to improve both their English and presentation skills. But I believe it should still be fun, as they undoubtedly face enough pressure and demands in their lives without me unnecessarily adding more.
The question with presentations, along with many other things that supposedly can be mastered is: Does practice make perfect? I subscribe to the theory that things can be learned initially the wrong way, and that they can be “unlearned”. However, as teachers, we may face something referred to as “fossilization”, where something has been learned by the student at some point the wrong way, and then has either never been corrected or has actually been reinforced. This is a huge topic better addressed by another paper. However, for my purposes, it's important for students to identify presentation flaws themselves that can be fixed with awareness and rehearsal. This is where the use of video comes in, allowing for self-correction, along with the use of the “buddy system” I mentioned in the beginning of the paper, allowing for peer correction. Finally, the instructor or trainer must be comfortable giving feedback and making corrections, based on a checklist (see pages 14 to16, and Appendix One). The feedback I give, and that I require “buddies” in the course to give, is based on the old adage, “Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative.”

Finally, there are local groups that can help student presenters further improve skills, both presentation and English. One well-known international group is called “Toastmasters” (www.toastmasters.org). “Making a toast” itself could be discussed and practiced within the system, as I will never forget one of the most difficult toasts (it was in reality a carefully-crafted speech) I ever made at my best friend's wedding (in fact, his uncle told me later that my friend shouldn't be marrying his beautiful bride but me instead!). There may also be a branch of the “American Society of Training and Development” within your reach (or at least invaluable information regarding presentation training on their web site, www.astd.org).

I thank you for reading this far, and I look forward to your future comments on how you use the system, and how you've improved it!
APPENDIX
# APPENDIX ONE

## MIDTERM ORAL PRESENTATION SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(4.0 – 3.5)</th>
<th>(3.5 – 2.5)</th>
<th>(2.5 – 1.0)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>I prepared the topic very well.</td>
<td>I read about the topic, but did not prepare enough to talk about it.</td>
<td>I did not prepare for the presentation at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>My presentation had an introduction, development, and conclusion, with relevant examples and supporting details.</td>
<td>My presentation was well organized, but I didn’t include many examples.</td>
<td>My presentation was not very well organized. I did not present enough details to illustrate the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delivery</strong></td>
<td>(4.0 – 3.5)</td>
<td>(3.5 – 2.5)</td>
<td>(2.5 – 1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My presentation was between 5 and 10 min. I established eye contact and kept the audience interested. I only glanced at my notes.</td>
<td>My presentation was not between 5 and 10 min., and not everybody understood me. I read a few parts from my notes.</td>
<td>I didn’t respect the time limit and it made the audience impatient. The presentation was mostly read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar</strong></td>
<td>I used most of the grammar structures learned so far appropriately. I’m aware I made a couple of mistakes, but I was able to self-correct.</td>
<td>I tried to use the structures learned before, but still made very basic mistakes. I was not always able to self-correct.</td>
<td>I had difficulty applying the grammar structures learned before. Most of the time I was not able to self-correct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.0 – 4.0)</td>
<td>(4.0 – 2.5)</td>
<td>(2.5 – 1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>I used adequate vocabulary, and didn’t use any words in Portuguese (or L1—the native language). I pronounced most of the words correctly.</td>
<td>I tried to use adequate vocabulary, but was not always sure of its appropriateness. I was not sure about the pronunciation of some of the words.</td>
<td>I used simple, known vocabulary because I was not sure of the use of new words. I was not sure about the pronunciation of most of the words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.0 – 4.0)</td>
<td>(4.0 – 2.5)</td>
<td>(2.5 – 1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pronunciation</strong></td>
<td>I pronounced most of the words correctly. I focused on the correct use of stress and intonation.</td>
<td>I didn’t feel very confident in the correct pronunciation of some words. I’m not so sure if the stress and intonation were used adequately.</td>
<td>I didn’t feel confident at all in the correct pronunciation of certain words. I don’t know the stress of many words. I didn’t pay attention to the correct intonation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fluency</strong></td>
<td>(5.0 – 3.5)</td>
<td>(3.5 – 2.5)</td>
<td>(2.5 – 1.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My ideas came out naturally. I hardly ever searched for words.</td>
<td>I felt a little hesitant. Sometimes I searched for words.</td>
<td>I was often hesitant. I usually searched for words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One area I need to work on is _______________________________________________________.

(Source: Associação Alumni)
# Oral Presentation Rubric (p. 1)
Rates Nonverbal Skills, Vocal Skills, & Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye Contact</td>
<td>Does not attempt to look at audience at all; Reads notes the entire time</td>
<td>Only focuses attention on one particular part of the class; Does not scan audience</td>
<td>Occasionally looks at someone or some groups during presentation</td>
<td>Constantly looks at someone or some groups at all times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facial Expressions</td>
<td>Has either a deadpan expression or shows a conflicting expression during entire presentation</td>
<td>Occasionally displays both a deadpan and conflicting expression during presentation</td>
<td>Occasionally demonstrates either a deadpan or conflicting expression during presentation</td>
<td>Gives audience clues to what the content of speech is about; Uses appropriate expressions; Never uses a deadpan or conflicting expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gestures</td>
<td>No gestures are used</td>
<td>A few gestures are used</td>
<td>Some gestures are used</td>
<td>Natural hand gestures are adequately demonstrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posture</td>
<td>Sits during presentation or slumps often</td>
<td>Sometimes slumps during presentation</td>
<td>Occasionally slumps during presentation</td>
<td>Stands up straight with both feet on the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>Shows absolutely no interest in topic presented</td>
<td>Shows some negativity toward topic presented</td>
<td>Occasionally shows positive feelings about topic</td>
<td>Demonstrates strong positive feelings about topic during entire presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocalized Pauses</td>
<td>10 or more are noticed</td>
<td>6-9 are noticed</td>
<td>1-5 are noticed</td>
<td>No vocalized pauses are noticed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(uh, well uh, um)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Oral Presentation Rubric (p. 2)
Rates Nonverbal Skills, Vocal Skills, & Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic Announced</strong></td>
<td>Audience has no idea what the report is on</td>
<td>Vaguely tells audience what report is on</td>
<td>Somewhat explains what report is on</td>
<td>Clearly explains what the report is covering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Frame</strong></td>
<td>Presentation is less than minimum time</td>
<td>Presentation is more than maximum time</td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation falls within required time frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visual Aids</strong></td>
<td>Poor; Distracts audience; Hard to read</td>
<td>Add nothing to presentation</td>
<td>Thoughts articulated clearly, but not engaging enough</td>
<td>Visual aids enhance presentation; All thoughts articulated; Keep interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completeness of Content</strong></td>
<td>One or more points left out</td>
<td>Majority of points glossed over</td>
<td>Majority of points covered in depth; Some points glossed over</td>
<td>Thoroughly explains all points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professionalism of Presentation</strong></td>
<td>Mumbles; Audience has difficulty hearing; Confusing</td>
<td>Thoughts don't flow; Unclear; Does not engage audience</td>
<td>Thoughts articulated clearly, though does not engage audience much</td>
<td>Presentation is organized; Interest level of audience is maintained throughout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TCET 2001
# PowerPoint Rubric

**A** = Exemplary: 40-44 Points  
**B** = Proficient: 36-39 Points  
**Partially Proficient or Incomplete**: Needs to be resubmitted - Less than 36 Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Partially Proficient</th>
<th>Incomplete</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research and Notetaking</strong></td>
<td>6 points</td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notecards indicate you accurately researched a variety of information sources, recorded and interpreted significant facts, meaningful graphics, accurate sounds, and evaluated alternative points of view.</td>
<td>Notecards show you recorded relevant information from multiple sources of information, evaluated and synthesized relevant information.</td>
<td>Notecards show you misinterpreted statements, graphics, and questions, and failed to identify relevant arguments.</td>
<td>Notecards show you recorded information from four or fewer resources, did not find graphics or sounds, and ignored alternative points of view.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-Production Plan: Storyboard</strong></td>
<td>6 points</td>
<td>4 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The storyboard illustrates the slide presentation structure with thumbnail sketches of each slide, including: title of slide, text, background color, placement &amp; size of graphic, fonts (color, size, type for text and headings), hyperlinks, narration text, and audio files. All slides are numbered, and there is a logical sequence to the presentation.</td>
<td>The thumbnail sketches on the storyboard include titles and text for each slide and are in sequential order.</td>
<td>The thumbnail sketches on the storyboard are not in a logical sequence and have incomplete information.</td>
<td>There are very few thumbnail sketches on the storyboard, and they do not provide an overview of the presentation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>3 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>0 points</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The introduction presents the overall topic and draws the audience into the presentation with compelling questions, or by relating to the audience's interests or goals.</td>
<td>The introduction is clear and coherent, and relates to the topic.</td>
<td>The introduction shows some structure, but does not create a strong sense of what is to follow. May be overly detailed or incomplete, and is somewhat appealing to the audience.</td>
<td>The introduction does not orient the audience to what will follow. The sequencing is unclear, and does not appear interesting or relevant to the audience.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Content</strong></th>
<th>8 points</th>
<th>6 points</th>
<th>4 points</th>
<th>0 points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The content is written clearly and concisely, with a logical progression of ideas and supporting information. The project includes motivating questions and advanced organizers. The project gives the audience a clear sense of the project’s main idea. Information is accurate, current and comes mainly from primary sources (*).</td>
<td>The content is written with a logical progression of ideas and supporting information. Includes persuasive information from reliable sources.</td>
<td>The content is vague in conveying a point of view, and does not create a strong sense of purpose. Includes some persuasive information with few facts. Some of the information may not seem to fit. Sources used appear unreliable.</td>
<td>The content lacks a clear point of view and logical sequence of information. Includes little persuasive information, and only one or two facts about the topic. Information is incomplete, out of date, and/or incorrect. Sequencing of ideas is unclear.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Text Elements</strong></th>
<th>3 points</th>
<th>2 points</th>
<th>1 point</th>
<th>0 points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The fonts are easy to read, and size varies appropriately for headings and text. Use of italics,</td>
<td>Sometimes the fonts are easy to read, but in a few places, the use of fonts, italics, bold, long paragraphs, color or busy</td>
<td>Overall readability is difficult with lengthy paragraphs, too many different fonts, dark or busy background,</td>
<td>The text is extremely difficult to read, with long blocks of text and small point size of fonts, inappropriate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout</td>
<td>3 points</td>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>1 point</td>
<td>0 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The layout is visually pleasing and contributes to the overall message with appropriate use of headings, subheadings and white space.</td>
<td>The layout uses horizontal and vertical white space appropriately.</td>
<td>The layout shows some structure, but appears cluttered and busy or distracting with large gaps of white space or uses a distracting background.</td>
<td>The layout is cluttered, confusing, and does not use spacing, headings and subheadings to enhance the readability.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citations</th>
<th>6 points</th>
<th>4 points</th>
<th>2 points</th>
<th>0 points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources of information are properly cited so that the audience can determine the credibility and authority of the information presented. All sources of information are clearly identified and credited using MLA citations throughout the project.</td>
<td>Most sources of information use proper MLA citation, and sources are documented to make it possible to check on the accuracy of information.</td>
<td>Sometimes copyright guidelines are followed and some information, photos and graphics do not use proper MLA citations.</td>
<td>No way to check validity of information.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<th>Graphics, Sound, and/or Animation</th>
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Writing Mechanics

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<th>6 points</th>
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<td>The text is written with no errors in grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.</td>
<td>The text is clearly written, with little or no editing required for grammar, punctuation, and spelling.</td>
<td>Spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors distract or impair readability. (3 or more errors)</td>
<td>Errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, usage, and grammar repeatedly distract the reader, and major editing and revision is required. (More than 5 errors)</td>
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TOTAL POINTS __ / 44

* Primary sources can include original letters and diaries, personal observations, interviews, first-hand accounts, newspaper articles, magazine articles, journal articles, Web pages, audio recordings, video productions, and photography.  
  
A+ Rubric: University of Wisconsin - Stout
APPENDIX TWO

The Baseball Game
A Fast-Paced Question & Answer Game

Large Format (A full game of nine innings takes about 45-60 minutes):

1. Divide the class into two teams. Appoint captains for each team, and ask for team names from the participants.
2. Select objects or points around the room to serve as the four bases (first, second, third, and home).
3. Have the teams line up on either side of home base, and flip a coin to see which team bats first. Also have each team choose a scorekeeper to keep score on the board.

Rules:

1. All answers must be in full sentences.
2. Indicate a time limit for each answer (i.e.-15 seconds).
3. Students must answer or say something within the time limit (even if it’s “I don’t know.”). If the student fails to say anything, not only is he out, but also any base runners on his team are out.
4. A team may request “single questions” only twice in a row.
5. Occasionally, when a batter doesn’t answer a single question correctly, refer the same question to a member of the other team. If that student answers correctly, then a “double play” is awarded. If the second student answers incorrectly, it’s an “error”, and the batter advances to first base.
6. The teacher (also known as “the umpire”) may change the rules so as to make the game more exciting—and helpful to learning for her group!
**Small Format** (one-two innings, 5-10 minutes):

1. Divide the class into two teams where they sit. Select a scorekeeper from each team to keep track of the runners and the score.
2. Follow the same basic rules.
3. **Option:** Have the students think up and ask questions of the other team. If this is too slow, then alternate questions (teacher/student).

**Sample Questions**

**Single Questions**

1. Is 17 larger than 50? (No)
2. What is the sixth letter of the alphabet? (f)
3. What is the opposite of ‘dark’? (light / bright)
4. Shake my hand. (A command requiring an action)
5. How old is your wife / husband / father / mother?
6. How long have you worked for __________?
7. What do you like to do in your spare time?
8. What is your boss’s name?
9. Do you have a car / brother?
10. May I introduce myself?
11. Is there a bank near here?
12. Could I borrow your pen?

**Double Questions**

1. Please show me your driver’s license. (A command requiring an action)
2. Show me your wife’s driver’s license. (A “curveball”: the correct response would normally be that he doesn’t have it, or he isn’t married.)
3. With what do you blink? (eyes)
4. What is an antonym of ‘love’? (hate / dislike)
5. What is a synonym of ‘company’? (corporation / firm / organization)
6. Complete this proverb: “Time is __________” (money)
7. What should I do if I say something rude to you? (apologize)
8. Can you read a book with your ears closed? (Another “curveball”)
9. Would you like to join me for a cup of coffee?
10. Do you mind if I __________?
11. What do you see when you turn out the light? (Not a “curveball”, according to the Beatles!)
12. How often do you go to the gym?

**Triple Questions**
1. Sit down, put your right hand on your hip, and your left hand on your left shoulder. (A command requiring an action—good at the regular pace, and as a “fastball”.)
2. Can you read upside down? (If the student says yes, make him or her prove it!)
3. Explain the difference between “prejudice” and “discrimination”. (The former refers to an attitude or frame of mind, while the latter describes an action in favor or against someone.)
4. Is the next sentence grammatically correct: “If I was you, I would buy a computer instead of a car.”? (Technically no, although “was” is sometimes used in place of “were” in casual speech. If the teacher decides to make it more difficult, he or she can ask the student to also correct the sentence.)

**Home Run Questions**
1. Is this room lit by incandescent or fluorescent lights? (An additional question might be to explain the difference between the two.)
2. What is the smallest room in the world? (A mushroom—any riddle fits well here)
3. What is black and white and “read” all over? (A newspaper)
4. What does the proverb, “Don’t count your chickens until they hatch”, really mean?
5. What are the three biggest problems in your company / country / the world?
6. How would you solve one of the aforementioned problems?
Singles:

- Ask me a question.
- When is the best time of the year to view ________? (i.e.- in Japan: cherry blossoms)
- Who is sitting / standing opposite / behind you right now?
- What’s your favorite TV / radio / Internet program?
- When was the last time you played cards?
- Name any three colors.
- Japanese / Brazilians have blue eyes, don’t they?
- How many wheels does a bicycle have?
- What’s the color of the socks you’re wearing?
- Do you have the flu now?
- Have you ever been abroad?
- How old are you?
- Which is larger: 14 or 30?
- Do you usually go out to eat?
- What do you call a person who cuts hair?
- How many wings does a bird have?
- From “City A”, what direction is “City B”? (Use local city names)
- If you have a toothache, who do you go to see?
- Is wood harder than paper?
- What’s the difference between a river and a lake?
- How many tails do dogs have?
- Do fish fly or swim?
- How many people in this room are wearing glasses?
- When did you get up today?
- How many legs do snakes have?
- What is the first thing you usually do when you get up in the morning?
- Can you jump over this building?
- What is the seventh letter of the alphabet? (g)
- How many children do you have?
- What’s your first name?
- What is the opposite of “wrong”?
- How many times do you go to work each week?
- Do you own a car?
- What is 15 minus 7? (8)
- How many times do you ________ (i.e.- play golf) a month?
- How many hours are there in a day?
- Were you at work yesterday at 5 o’clock in the morning?
- How many English teachers does this class have?
- What nationality am I?
- Did you eat breakfast last night?
- How many months are there in a leap year?
- When will you go home tonight?
- What number is between 6 and 8?
- What is half a dozen?
Doubles:

- Where is your home situated?
- What’s the relationship between “right” and “left”? (opposites)
- How many wheels does a tricycle have?
- What nationality is __________? (name of famous person)
- If there were a time bomb in this room, what would you do?
- If you have three and a half dozen eggs, how many do you have? (42)
- What is a prison?
- How many full moons are there in a year? (12!)
- Are you the only son / daughter in your family?
- Have you ever water-skied?
- When were the (winter / summer) Olympic games held in __________? (i.e.-Turin, 2006)
- How many buckles are on your belt?
- Have you ever been to an opera (theater)?
- Give me an example of noise pollution.
- Are you good at crossword puzzles?
- What’s your middle name?
- How many magazines do you read in a week?
- Pickles are sweet, aren’t they?
- Do you have your father’s driver’s license with you?
- What’s the opposite of “sad”?
- What age is the oldest teenager?
- Where does the sun set?
- What is the title of your country’s national anthem? (Obviously, the teacher needs to find this out!)
- A round-trip ticket costs less than a one-way ticket, right?
- What’s your last / family name?
- What kind of car do you dream of owning?
- What do we do with our eyes?
- What is the opposite of “front”?
- Who is your favorite singer (and why)?
- How many people are currently in this room?
- Where is your home located?
- Which season is the rainy / dry season in __________?
- When did __________ (name of famous local person) die?
- What kind of dog do we eat at baseball games?
- Which country is larger in size, China or Canada? (Canada)
- What would you prefer to do tonight?
- You’re not __________ (nationality), are you?
- How many people are there in a couple?
Triples:

- How many states are there in the continental United States? (48)
- How many states / provinces are there in __________? (country name)
- What is one quarter (1/4) of 84? (21)
- How many wings does an ostrich have? (2)
- Why does an ostrich bury its head in the sand?
- Where do chickens come from?
- Where do eggs come from?
- What season is it in __________ when it is spring in __________? (i.e.- fall in Japan when it’s spring in Australia)
- How many nostrils do you have?
- Do you have hair in your ear?
- What’s more expensive: gold or platinum? (platinum)
- How many fingernails and toenails do you have?
- Without looking, how many keys are on your key holder?
- Who was the first president / emperor / king of __________? (country name)
- Where are ambulances usually parked? (at hospitals)
- How many pedals are there on a bicycle?
- What do you call a person who fills cavities?
- What country is famous for its cigars? (Cuba)
- How many humps are on a two-humped camel?
- Who was President / Prime Minister __________’s predecessor?
- Count to 30 by fives. (i.e.-5…10…15…)
- Say the last three letters of the alphabet in descending order (i.e.- Z…Y…X…)
- How many inches are there in a foot? (12 inches)
- When the wind blows in a southeasterly direction, where does the wind come from?
- In what year did Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi die? (1948)
- Where is the Big Ben / the Eiffel Tower / etc.? (London / Paris…)
Home Runs:

- When was the last time you had “athlete’s foot”?
- How many cards are there in a deck? (54: 52 plus two Jokers!)
- How many days are there in a leap year? (366)
- What do you say to a beggar on a street corner? (i.e.-How much do you need?)
- How many cabs are there in __________? (city name)
- Who’s buried in “Grant’s Tomb”?
- Nose is to elephant as neck is to __________. (giraffe)
- Which word does not belong: Anger, hatred, wrath, glee? (glee)
- How many “miles” are there in “smiles”? (One!)
- Where is the world’s largest tree? (The giant Sequoia in central California)
- Which bird migrates the farthest? (The Arctic Tern: 22,000 miles yearly, from the Arctic Circle to the Antarctic)
- Which animal has the most teeth? (The spinner dolphin has 225 teeth or more.)
- Which mammal can stay underwater the longest? (The sperm whale: as long as two hours at a depth of up to 6,500 feet)
- Which river is the world’s longest? (The Nile = 4,160 miles / The Amazon = 3,990 miles / The Yangtze in China = 3,400 miles)
- Which mammal runs the fastest? (The cheetah can accelerate to 70 miles per hour.)
- Which fish is the largest? (The whale shark can weigh as much as 30,000 pounds.)
- Why is the world round? (Or whatever other ludicrous question you can come up with!)

Batter Up!!
Emerson:

"Him we call an artist, who shall play upon an assembly of men as a master on the keys of the piano—who seeing the people furious, shall soften and compose them, shall draw them, when he will, to laughter and to tears.

Bring him to his audience, and, be they who they may, cursed or refined, pleased or displeased, sulky or savage, with their opinions in the keeping of a confessor, or with their opinions in their bank safes—he will have them pleased and humored as he chooses; and they shall carry and execute that which he bids them."
If
Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:
If you can dream - and not make dreams your master,
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:
If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it all on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!
The Crowd At The Ball Game
William Carlos Williams

The crowd at the ball game
is moved uniformly
by a spirit of uselessness
which delights them—
all the exciting detail
of the chase
and the escape, the error
the flash of genius—
all to no end save beauty
the eternal—
So in detail they, the crowd,
are beautiful
for this
to be warned against
saluted and defied—
It is alive, venomous
it smiles grimly
its words cut—
The flashy female with her
mother, gets it—
The Jew gets it straight—
it is deadly, terrifying—
It is the Inquisition,
the Revolution

It is beauty itself
that lives
day by day in them
idly—
This is
the power of their faces
It is summer, it is the solstice
the crowd is cheering, the crowd is laughing
in detail
permanently, seriously
without thought
This Is Just To Say
William Carlos Williams

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

The Blues
Langston Hughes

When the shoe strings break
On both your shoes
And you're in a hurry-
That's the blues.

When you go to buy a candy bar
And you've lost the dime you had-
Slipped through a hole in your pocket somewhere-
That's the blues, too, and bad!
I went down to the river,
I set down on the bank.
I tried to think but couldn't,
So I jumped in and sank.
I came up once and hollered!
I came up twice and cried!
If that water hadn't a-been so cold
I might've sunk and died.

*But it was  Cold in that water!  It was cold!*

I took the elevator
Sixteen floors above the ground.
I thought about my baby
And thought I would jump down.

I stood there and I hollered!
I stood there and I cried!
If it hadn't a-been so high
I might've jumped and died.

*But it was  High up there!  It was high!*

So since I'm still here livin',
I guess I will live on.
I could've died for love--
But for livin' I was born

Though you may hear me holler,
And you may see me cry--
I'll be dogged, sweet baby,
If you gonna see me die.

*Life is fine!  Fine as wine!  Life is fine!*
A Clear Midnight
Walt Whitman

This is thy hour O Soul,
thy free flight into the wordless,
Away from books, away from art, the day erased,
the lesson done,
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing,
pondering the themes thou lovest best,
Night, sleep, death and the stars.

I Hear America Singing
Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be
blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or
beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work,
or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat,
the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the
hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in
the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young
wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none
else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of
young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.


