



Ready to Present: A Guide to Better Presentations

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Ready to Present

A Guide to Better Presentations is, as the title suggests, a presentation textbook that was designed for use by EFL students in university settings in Japan, presumably at the pre-intermediate to intermediate level. After a short introductory section with several warm-up tasks, each of the 8 units in the textbook contains five sections that are structured as follows. First, they begin with warm-up exercises to generate schemata related to the presentation topic of each unit, usually through question-and-answer tasks that can be done in pairs or groups. On the next page of each unit, there are presentation scripts that accompany audio and video tracks that can be played from the Cengage Ready to Present website or from an audio CD and DVD. On the next page, there is a "Language to Be Used" section which features lexical chunks and model sentences, some of which are taken from the presentation scripts, that can be accompanied by audio tracks from the website or CD. The next two pages (except for unit 8, which includes 3 pages) contain a "Plan & Write" section, where students can brainstorm ideas for their topic and presentation, and write a brief outline and first draft of their presentation script. The last three pages of each unit feature a "Presentation Skills" section that provides instruction in areas such as appropriate body language techniques, stressing key words, using tables and charts, and chunking clusters of words in sentences with appropriate pauses between chunks. After the fourth and eighth units, there is a brief review of some of the key themes from the units 1-4 and 5-8 respectively. After the units 5-8 review, there are appendixes which feature vocal warm-ups, consonant and vowel pronunciation practice tasks, tongue twisters, a presentation guide, a guide to using notes, a guide for creating presentation slides, a

warm-up and relaxation guide, and finally, there is an appendix with self-reflection checklists for each unit.

The presentation topics for the 8 units include a self-introduction presentation, a presentation about an important person or thing, a presentation about a place, an opinion-based presentation, a biographical presentation, a story presentation, a problem-solving presentation, and a presentation in which students are encouraged to choose their own topic. The lexical chunks, that are presented in the "Language to Be Used" section of each unit, are roughly organized in a way that reflects "Can Do" statement type language learning objectives that can also be found in the scope and sequence outline at the beginning of the textbook. In addition, each unit stands alone with little recycling of the language or content between units.

The teacher's manual, which can be downloaded from the Cengage website along with other teacher's resources such as grading rubrics and course reflection survey forms, provides sample syllabi for either courses consisting of either thirty 90-minute classes or fifteen 90-minute classes. As for the audio tracks for the textbook, that can also be found on the Cengage website, they have been recorded with native English speakers. However, the model presentation video tracks and video tracks for the "Presentation Skills" sections feature young Japanese presenters that learners can identify with, which is one of the textbook's greatest strengths, assuming that the textbook is used in Japan. As Tajeddin and Pakzadian [1] argue, English language teaching materials should incorporate "other varieties of English...to promote learners' knowledge about intelligible varieties of English" by utilizing

successful English as an International Language (EIL) speakers who can serve as motivators and role models (p. 13). Nevertheless, because the audio tracks for the model presentations were recorded with native English speakers, but the video tracks for the model presentations have been recorded with Japanese speakers of English, the audio tracks can potentially be used to raise awareness of pronunciation differences (and perhaps minor pronunciation errors).

Some features that might attract teachers to use this textbook include the clear and colourful graphics that are generally appropriate to the themes of each unit, the appropriate grading of the language used in the model presentations, the scaffolding provided by the presentation script in conjunction with the lexical chunks presented in the "Language to Be Used" section that can help students write their outline and first draft of their script, and the focus on gestures and body language in the "Presentation Skills" section. In terms of graphics, each unit begins with an appropriate and colourful photo to help introduce the topic or theme, as well as graphics that are embedded in the presentation scripts (which can provide students with appropriate examples of the types of graphics they can include in their PowerPoint or Google Slides presentations). Furthermore, the "Presentation Skills" section includes colourful graphics that highlight the use of gestures and body language and feature the Japanese presenters from the video tracks, as well as graphics that provide students with examples of how to incorporate slides, charts, graphs, and statistics into their presentations. As for the language used in the video tracks, the audio tracks, and the presentation scripts, unlike some four-skill or two-skill textbooks published by major EFL/ESL textbook companies, which rely on the use of TED Talks presentations that are not always edited or graded appropriately for the levels of the students, the language level used in the presentations in this textbook is a good source of comprehensible input for pre-intermediate level students and is generally spoken at a clear and intelligible pace. In terms of the scaffolding provided by the presentation script, as well as the lexical chunks and the model sentences in the "Language to Be Used" section, they provide clear examples of how to use appropriate sentence structures and phrases that can be utilized by the students when they write their outlines and first drafts of the scripts on the pages that follow. In addition, the outlines provide suggestions for students to incorporate specific types of discourse functions in the introduction, body, and conclusion sections, such as "Greet the audience," "Tell the audience what you will talk about," "Give your final thoughts on the topic," and "Thank the audience," etc., which provide clear instructions on how students should organize the sentences in their presentation [2]. Finally, the "Presentation Skills" section provides clear graphic examples and video examples of how to use various types of body language, such as hand gestures and facial expressions. The clear focus on hand gestures and facial expressions provides good examples that can help students understand the meanings of specific extra-linguistic messaging in English, which can help students realize the importance of recognizing that body language can vary greatly between cultures and languages [3]. This focus on extra-linguistic messaging, in addition to instructional materials on to stress, intonation, effective use of pauses, and appropriate use of slides, provide students

with appropriate models that they can incorporate into their presentations to make them more effective and memorable.

It is worth noting that although the number of units in this textbook and the materials provided may be suitable for a 15-week (or 16-week) course, especially with smaller class sizes, for a 30-week (in our case a 32-week) course, some teachers may find that there are not enough materials and useful tasks (especially pair work or group work tasks) to extend the course out for a full year. In our particular context, teachers were advised to add a significant amount of their own material, which may be ideal for teachers who prefer to use textbooks as a springboard for their own activities or materials, or for teachers who like to be given the freedom to improvise and adapt their activities and materials in response to learner feedback or classroom performance. Furthermore, one of the ways to extend each unit over a longer course is to allow ample class time for students to write their outlines and first drafts of the presentation scripts in their textbooks in class, with careful monitoring and individual feedback from the teacher. Not only can this help students who may be struggling with the writing process and assist them in using some of the lexical chunks or phrases from the "Language to Be Used" section more accurately, but also it can help mitigate the problem of students using translation apps or AI apps to write their presentation scripts, which we have found is often the case when script writing tasks are simply assigned as homework.

Ultimately, if teachers are tasked with selecting a presentation textbook, especially for a full year, the Present Yourself series published by Cambridge, which provides an ample number of extension activities and homework options, may be a better choice. However, for teachers looking for a one semester textbook, this may be a reasonable second choice, as teachers, especially those with large classes that may require more presentation time, could have more freedom to pick and choose which units they wish to cover [4,5].

Acknowledgment

None.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

References

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