


Giving Academic Presentations, Second Edition

August 2015 - Volume 19, Number 2

Giving Academic Presentations, Second Edition		
Author:	Susan M. Reinhart (2013)	
Publisher:	Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press	
Pages	ISBN	Price
185 pages	978-0-472-03509-0 (paper)	\$24.95 USD
		

This classroom textbook is part of the Michigan Series in English for Academic and Professional Purposes. While advanced, nonnative English speakers are the intended audience, the author suggests that the text may be effectively adapted for native English speakers as well. The goal of this textbook is to prepare students in universities for the myriad oral presentations that will become part of their academic careers.

In total, Reinhart presents six units in this textbook, five of which outline, exemplify, explain, and culminate in the performance of a different type of speech. The sixth unit, called, "Putting It All Together," applies the learning to other presentations common to academia. The units are arranged in a logical and syllabus-friendly order that progresses from less to more complicated speech type. Moreover, each unit builds on the previous one such that following the units in the order presented will give students the most effective path through the material. For example, students will want to practice stress in pronunciation in "Unit 2" before they move on to practicing intonation in "Unit 3." In addition to the material contained within this volume, a *Notes to the Instructor* link is provided in the "Introduction." Upon visiting this web site, teachers are directed to a free PDF download of forty-nine pages in length. For teachers who may be new to the field, this document provides guidance in terms of classroom arrangement and task execution. Furthermore, for each unit the PDF contains detailed notes on the contents, a list of

additional activities, tips for using the text with Teaching Assistants or Graduate Student Instructors, and ideas for using the unit with native speakers.

Having encountered this textbook in the past spring semester as a prescribed curricular tool at the university level in China, with nonnative English speakers at the intermediate/high intermediate level, it is to be expected that my students had some difficulty with the language of the sample speeches presented in this text (e.g., *turbine*, *dehydrated*, *evolution*, etc.). Moreover, the embedded cultural content of this text favors students studying in the U.S. or, at least, students who are familiar with American customs and culture. For example, the sample narrative about a pizza delivery driver (p. 115) proved particularly challenging for these students. Nevertheless, what made this text a tool with which students could still engage in a significant way is the easy-to-follow layout and simplification of integral concepts such as organizational strategies, gestures, and elements of pronunciation.

It is essential that a presentation textbook for nonnative English speakers include work on pronunciation, and this is one of the strong points of Reinhart's text. Each unit except the last contains pronunciation work, and each of these focuses on a different aspect of pronunciation. Because this is for advanced English language learners, basic features of pronunciation such as individual phonemes are not highlighted. Rather, the focus is on larger features of spoken English, such as pausing and unstressed words. In other words, my students learned how to sound more comprehensible through the flow and rhythm of their speech rather than how to pronounce every single sound correctly. I might only add here that my students would in fact have benefited from having more than five pronunciation lessons spread out over the units.

Another noteworthy feature of this text is its use of corpus excerpts, which are taken from the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English*. Besides accommodating the current call for more authentic examples within textbooks, the use of corpus excerpts, I have found, gives nonnative English speakers a glimpse into the way speakers "really" talk. For example, when learning about fillers, it is useful for students to look at excerpts from native speakers whose speech is often filled with so many stops and starts that, on paper, it appears messy and disjointed (e.g., p. 99). For my learners especially, who held themselves to such high standards and strove for "perfection", it was useful for them to have a textbook which presented them with proof that academic spoken English, while structured and focused, is still far from perfect.

Reinhart has not neglected visual aids, a key component to any presentation, whether given by a native or nonnative speaker. As a teacher, I appreciated Reinhart's detailed exercises geared toward making/modifying visual aids in "Unit 2" so that students do more than present someone else's visual with no thought to its key components or explanation thereof. Further, she provides tips throughout the text for using visuals and technical equipment, which students at the beginning of their academic careers desperately need (e.g., "Stand to the side of information on the board, not in front of it," [p. 83]). While there are no practice tasks included with these, it is easy to extend the text in the classroom to allow students to then practice applying these techniques with their own visual aids prior to the unit presentation.

For the benefit of both students and teachers, Reinhart ends each unit with an evaluation form. Students can use these to gauge their own level of expertise related to key criteria culled from the unit material. Teachers can either use the evaluation form as it is, that is, without a numerical rating scale, or they may, as I did, adapt the content of the evaluation forms to make an analytic rubric for unit speeches. The benefit of the provided forms is that they leave out none of the key unit components. As a result, teachers working from them, whether in exact or adapted form, can be certain to assess all components of the unit.

If there is one element of this textbook that could have been more user-friendly, it is the presentation and arrangement of some of the discussion tasks. Multiple discussion questions/tasks sometimes accompany a single essential exercise, such as explaining graphs during presentations, and these questions/tasks are presented in paragraph rather than bullet or numerical format (e.g., “What do they reveal? What general statement would you make about the information? Would you introduce the data before or after this statement? Practice presenting one of the graphs.” [p. 138]). This makes them overwhelming to students. Additionally, this presentation makes it difficult for teachers to assign, for example, numbers one and four. Given the confusion that this can create for students, as well as the difficulty for teachers in pointing to a specific question(s) or task(s) embedded within the prompt, I would like to see some exercises such as this broken down to be more user-friendly.

Overall, as a guidebook for undergraduate students new to the world of academia, this textbook is a solid introduction to the foundational components of presenting in an audience-friendly and engaging style. The organization of the units, sample speeches, corpus excerpts, and pronunciation work make this a textbook that ESL teachers, especially in the U.S., can use, adapt, and appreciate.

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