

ICB Serial Textbooks :
International Education Programmes

Presentation and Communication Skills: An Activity Sourcebook

■ Edited by Fanxi Meng

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An Activity Sourcebook***

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this sourcebook is to provide students and teachers of English presentation and communication skills with a range of classroom activities. Many of these activities are adapted from drama and performance games and techniques. They aim to help students to develop their full range of communication skills: thinking, speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Presentation and Communication takes a deeper look at the importance of good presentation and the different aspects of human communication.

A Dramatic Approach looks at how drama and performance techniques can be used to develop these various aspects of human communication in a well-rounded manner that also instills confidence in the student.

Facilitating Active Learning encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning and development, and also seeks to help the teacher devise methods of assessment. This section also recapitulates some of the very basic foundations of classroom teaching, as encouragement. Even the most seasoned teacher can benefit from these quick reminders.

The Classroom Environment aims to help the teacher prepare a classroom environment that is conducive to working through the range of activities contained later in the book. In order to fully benefit from the activities

suggested in this guide, teachers and students must start off with a sense of adventure.

This sourcebook aims to help teachers jointly craft a presentation and communication classroom that will:

- Be much more spontaneous and open than other classes.
- Provide an atmosphere in which students feel free to move about, laugh, make huge mistakes and exercise all of their communication skills.
- Serve as a workshop or laboratory in which students are encouraged to use and practice the information they learn in their reading, writing, listening, grammar, and non-language classes.

Whether used on its own or as part of the ICB University English series, this sourcebook should also provide opportunities for students to:

- Become active, responsible and engaged learners in general and not simply of a new language.
- Gain personal confidence as young adults and as speakers of a new language.
- See the importance of good presentation and communication in life on the whole.
- Learn to be resourceful, inquisitive, responsible and adaptable human beings.

In the interest of flexibility and adaptability, the section **Outline of Activities** provides a general outline of the games, tricks, activities and exercises used in this guide. A teacher may choose to adapt any one of these activities to any one of the topics at any level. This section also

outlines the function of each activity, suggesting which areas of learning each activity helps to develop.

Each of the fifteen **Chapters** is a collection of suggested practical adaptations of these activities. While following the topics as outlined in the three ICB University English Readers, activities are not linked to specific readings.

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PRESENTATION AND COMMUNICATION :

A Dramatic Approach

Presentation and Communication

Good presentation and communication require more than the articulate use of correct vocabulary, grammar and syntax. These skills depend on good listening, on the ability to think on one's feet, on confident and natural self-expression, and on being resourceful, inquisitive, flexible and thoughtful enough to deal with the various human interactions we face each day.

Students of drama and performance learn to communicate using a full range of communication skills: verbal, physical and emotional. They learn to observe and mimic, reflect and respond, imagine and pretend, act spontaneously but also deliberately. Students of drama and performance learn to use their instinct and intuition and to become fully aware of their own communication skills and methods. These are skills that individuals can adapt and apply to various situations.

There are many exercises and activities that professional actors and performers engage in everyday as part of a regular routine to maintain their abilities to communicate and present themselves convincingly. Like an athlete who must train her muscles by working out everyday, a perform-

er must exercise and be aware of her face, voice, body, mind and environment.

The activities in this sourcebook are of course not intended for the actor or performer, but for the language student and anyone else who wants to communicate and present themselves well. By bolstering academic skills with confidence and adaptability, students will be better prepared to cope with and succeed in life.

The Body

Learning a second language requires that we learn to understand non-verbal, physical cues, as well as vocabulary, grammar and usage. We learn from a teacher's gestures, body language and facial expressions without even being aware that we are doing so. Students should be encouraged to observe and to be aware of the teacher's idiosyncrasies and should also be encouraged to ask questions about involuntary phrases, tones, gestures and facial expressions. To have a mirror held to your every move can be very daunting for a teacher, but this is an important aspect of teaching presentation and communication.

Speaking a new language also requires that we use different facial muscles, gestures and body language. Learning to feel physically comfortable with a second language will help us to feel more comfortable in speaking. The aim here is to engage the student's entire mind and body in the learning of a new language. The activities suggested here do not aim to teach specific physical language but rather to make students aware of the importance of physical language. We must become aware of our own innate communication skills and learn to adapt them to a new language. In this way we develop more naturally, as we did when learning

our first language.

The Voice

Most of us depend on and even take our voices for granted. For the actor/performer the voice is of course very important. The actor's voice must sound clear and distinctive, and must easily change to suit a variety of roles. It is important to be aware of how we sound not only to be understood but also so that we adopt the appropriate, easily heard tone for any given situation.

Different languages require us to use different facial muscles. It is therefore important to exercise these muscles and be conscious of their development over time. In order to articulate the words of a new language, or even of our native language, we must learn to move our lips, jaws, tongues, cheeks, brows, heads and our bodies to communicate what we want to say.

If we learn a language alone and in our heads, we may not learn to listen and respond, but we may develop the bad habits of mumbling and mispronunciation, which are later hard to break.

Idiosyncrasies

Idiosyncrasies are material for actors and performers; they are what convincing performances are made of. The actor or performer observes life; each idiosyncrasy communicates something different. When developing a character or a dance, the actor will study the individual habits of speech and movement, each individual intonation, gesture and the expressions of a variety of people and even animals. The actor will also observe her

own habits, becoming familiar with them so as to control and change them.

Each individual develops his or her own idiosyncrasies of communication as a child when learning the first language. Our muscles remember. We are aware of how much time dancers, actors and athletes rehearse and practice; through conscious and repetitive effort our muscles become accustomed, habituated to new tasks. It is therefore important to be aware of and attentive to the development of the various aspects of learning to communicate in a new language. It takes diligence and focus to develop a good habit, but it takes even more grueling and tedious work to break an old habit and replace it with a good one. Language students, like actors and performers, should aim to develop good habits from the start.

Spontaneity and Preparation

It may seem that these two terms-spontaneity and preparation-oppose one another. However, if students learn to feel and act spontaneously, if they are resourceful, flexible, observant, and able to think on their feet, they will be well prepared to act spontaneously when the situation demands it.

It is important to be spontaneous and to make mistakes, never being afraid to appear the fool. In speaking practice, it is important that students feel free to express their own personalities, recognizing and adapting their own idiosyncrasies to develop a natural and proactive approach to learning. Learning to feel physically comfortable concurrently with learning spoken language will also provide an outlet for the nervous energy that builds up, as we sit still and push words into our heads and out of our mouths.

FACILITATING ACTIVE LEARNING :

A Note to the Teacher

Developing a Course

This sourcebook aims to provide ways that any teacher may incorporate more action into presentation and conversation courses. Teachers are encouraged to be as creative as possible in their use of the sourcebook. Teachers are discouraged from relying solely on this sourcebook. The teacher is also a role model and when he or she is engaged, active and confident in the classroom, the students will follow suit.

Teachers who are proactive and creative, and incorporate these suggestions into their lesson plans will be more spontaneous, engaged and active in the classroom. They will therefore be better equipped to help the students become more confident at speaking spontaneously from what they know.

Any syllabus devised on the basis of this sourcebook should be detailed enough to provide students with a roadmap but not so rigid that there is no room for change and spontaneity. Perhaps several activities can be outlined, giving students indication of what they will need to prepare, but not mandating a fixed order in which the activities will be introduced.

In general, give students ample time to gather their materials and con-

duct any necessary research. Be empathetic, reminding them that you are aware how much work they have for other classes. By this means you make it difficult for them to give excuses later if they are not prepared.

Know Your Students

Assessment is of course up to each individual teacher. In a conversation class, assessment can be difficult, as marks are often determined on the spot when a student speaks. But what of the student who does not talk? Be aware of the student who is simply too shy to speak unless asked to do so, but who is more than likely paying very close attention. Be aware also of the student who will speak whenever he or she can get a word in but perhaps does not really understand what is going on. He or she may be able to grasp bits and pieces and to throw in a comment here and there, but does not or cannot fully engage in the task at hand.

Working out the method of assessment is an essential part of the preparation and development of any presentation and communication course. The teacher should know in advance how exactly how she plans to assess each activity. Make provisions for the various forms of communication, rather than simply assigning points when a student speaks or presents correctly.

Understanding the Nature of a Problem

It is difficult, often for the teacher as well as the student, to know the nature of a communication problem in class. When a student is unable to speak or answer a question, the teacher should ask if the student first understands the task at hand, second if he or she is having difficulty saying what he or she wants to say, and third if the student simply does not

have anything to say.

It is useful to encourage and remind students to clarify what kind of problem they are having. In each case a teacher's guidance will be different, and discerning what kind of problem the student is having will make it easier for the teacher to do her job. At the same time, the student and the rest of the group will remain involved in the learning process.

First Impressions

It is worth remembering that all teachers are role models and the teacher of presentation and communication is no less so; in this course, students are not only collecting information, but learning how to make it part of themselves.

This book assumes teaching experience; please accept any reminders of what you already know in the spirit of reinforcement and inspiration.

- Speak clearly and at an even pace.
- Share what you know and give your personal story rather than make sweeping generalizations. Encourage students to always do the same.
- Be aware of and attentive to each student, recognizing that each has her own needs and idiosyncrasies.
- Speak English only, even if you run into a student outside of class.
- Know your students and choose appropriate material. Ask them for input to help you plan the lessons; make them take responsibility for their own learning.
- Remember how old they are; you were that age once!

- Be honest if you do not know something. This lets them know that there is no shame in not knowing something, only in not trying to find out.
- Keep corrections subtle and to a minimum. It is important that students become comfortable with each aspect of communication. As long as you and other students understand do not focus on small mistakes. Or course, if a student gets stuck and is unable to say what he or she wants to say encourage them to use examples, to ask for help in English and if all else fails to use the native language to ask others for help.
- Don't be afraid of silence and calm.
- Be yourself but be the teacher.
- Be friendly but don't aim to be a friend.
- Be humorous but not laughable.
- Be firm but not rigid.
- Be unpredictable but not confusing.
- Be active and keep yourself and the students on their toes.

Continually encourage your students to

- Listen and continue to listen, even if only to understand the gist of what is being said.
- Ask questions and always be inquisitive.
- Ask for and provide help when it is needed.
- Fail and never be afraid to make mistakes.
- Challenge authority and be resourceful.
- Act rather than let an opportunity pass by.
- Use the information as it is learned.
- Consider different points of view.
- Reflect and write in a journal often.
- Read.

- Invest in a good English-only dictionary.

Journals

Students should be encouraged to keep a process journal. This can serve as a vocabulary notebook, for students to note any new word they encounter in daily life, as well as words they think of in their native language and want to look up. This should also be a process journal with regular entries recording the student's thoughts, difficulties, achievements, favorite new sayings, questions to ask later in class, and observations made in and out of class.

The journal should be an ongoing assignment and some can be collected and reviewed periodically throughout the term. Journals should be assessed as only a small percentage of the overall class grade, and students should be reminded that the main benefit is personal. Keeping a learning journal also reminds students that their various classes are related, even if only because their disparate classes are all part of their life; keeping a journal helps students to create a center, encouraging reflection and hopefully also responsibility.

If it is feasible, it might be a nice thing to provide notebooks for each student's journal. Choose a neutral style and make sure it has enough pages. To get students started, give them a few minutes at the end of the first class to respond. Do not be prescriptive about entry length; remind them that quality is preferable to quantity.

Recording Student Work

For any of the presentations that mock television programs, such as the