

## ***Business Presentations Course Results***

ビジネスプレゼンテーションコースの効果

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現代社会において、人々の活字離れが進む一方で、オーディオヴィジュアルコミュニケーションは、情報やエンターテインメントを提供したり、説得力を有し分かち合えたりできるといった面で重要な役割を果たしている。

この研究では、学部生対象のプレゼンテーションコースについて述べている。学生によるフィードバックを基に、(1)情報源 (2)新しい経験 (3)新しい知識 (4)将来に向けて、といった4つのエリアに分けられる。またその結果を受け、本研究ではこのコースの長所を評価し、改善すべき分野について提案している。

キーワード

プレゼンテーション、視聴覚コミュニケーション、同輩評価

### **Introduction**

This is a report based on an elective one-semester course conducted for English Department undergraduates at Doshisha University between 2011 and 2014, and it contains the findings from the students' evaluations of the 2013-14 course. Teachers at Kansai University can use the information in this paper to help design and modify their own presentation courses.

### **The audiovisual progression in society**

Reading for pleasure has seen a steady decline in developed economies. For example, a report in the US by the National Endowment for the Arts stated:

1. Only 30 percent of 13-year-olds read almost every day.
2. The number of 17-year-olds who never read for pleasure increased from nine percent in 1984 to 19 percent in 2004.
3. Almost half of Americans between ages 18 and 24 never read books for pleasure.

4. The average person between ages 15 and 24 spends two to two-and-a-half hours a day watching television and seven minutes reading. (Mehagan, 2007)

It's clear that technological progress has contributed to the decline in reading: "A hundred years ago, on days when no circus was in town, people looking for entertainment had three alternatives: fulfilling biological needs, talking or reading. Those looking for information were restricted to the latter two" (Stephens, 1997). Writing in 1997, Stephens noted that "Movies, recordings, radio, telephones, computers, photocopiers and fax machines" contributed to the decline in reading, but noted that the "largest threat" came from television. In 2014, there are more challenges to distract people from books: high speed internet, video games and the constant stream of data from smartphones and tablets all demand people's time. As the media has become more sophisticated, so has the marketing. Therefore, huge amounts of audiovisual information compete for the attention of potential consumers. Although this change to a multi-tasking lifestyle has been criticized for undermining people's abilities to concentrate and recall information (Merrill, 2012), we need to accept that audiovisual communication is a key part of modern life. People who master audiovisual communication will find it easier to grab people's attention. In other words, used correctly, audiovisual communication is an effective way to inform, persuade and entertain. One of the most successful audiovisual communicators is Steve Jobs, whose keynote presentations inspired audiences and helped to make Apple into the most profitable consumer electronics company in the world (Epstein, 2013). The presentation course in this report drew inspiration from the style of Steve Jobs, and Garr Reynolds (an ex-Apple employee).

## The Course

This was an elective one-semester course for advanced students (recommended for students with TOEFL ITP scores of 550+). The intake was limited to 20 students and the course was conducted entirely in English. Students could increase their awareness of good speeches through analysing the style of Barack Obama during his iconic "yes we can" concession speech at New Hampshire (Obama, 2008), and increase their awareness of good presentations from seeing the unveiling of the first iPad (Jobs, 2010). They could also compare and contrast the styles of Jobs and Obama to the popular *Presentation Zen* approach (Reynolds, 2008).

Following awareness-raising discussions about the styles of the professionals mentioned above, the students negotiated presentation assessment categories and agreed on the criteria and score weighting, which the teacher then organized into peer evaluation sheets (see

Appendix). The peer evaluation sheets also contained an open section for students to highlight presentations' strengths and areas in need of improvement. The students then made individual expository presentations (limited to five minutes) and formed groups of 2-3 members for problem-solution presentations (limited to 10 minutes). After each presentation, the teacher discussed the strengths and weaknesses with the speaker(s), while classmates completed the peer evaluation forms. This approach allowed the presenters to get individual detailed feedback from the teacher and their peers.

Table 1. Assessment

Assessment	Percentage of grade
Individual expository presentation	40
Group problem-solution presentation	40
Classroom participation	20

As shown in Table 1, students' peer evaluations constituted 80 percent of the grade. The teacher decided the remaining 20 percent based on attendance and English participation in the class discussions.

## The Course Evaluation Questionnaire

At Doshisha University, each semester, teachers can volunteer to give an anonymous paper-based feedback questionnaire to the students from one of their courses in the penultimate class. The questionnaire contains two sections. In the first section, there is a list of 14 statements where students can indicate their degrees of agreement on a 6-point Likert Scale. This report focuses on the second section, which contains two open-response questions for students to (1) write about what they liked about the course and (2) suggest areas for improvement.

## The Students

Out of the 17 students who completed the course successfully, 14 were present on the day the questionnaire was circulated. All 14 students completed the questionnaire and are labelled for citations as students A-N. The course contained a mixture of students from first year through to final year. Five of the respondents were "returnees" who had lived for at least one year overseas. They were told that they could write their responses in the language that they

preferred. H, I, L, M and N wrote in English. The other nine students responded in Japanese. An independent bilingual Japanese native speaker translated their responses into English.

## Findings

The students' comments centred on four main areas: (1) sources of knowledge, (2) new experiences, (3) new knowledge and (4) the future.

### *Sources of knowledge*

As expected, the students noted the knowledge that they gained from watching the experts at the beginning of the course: "I could get some ideas from the presentations by Steve Jobs and Obama" (K) and "I learned the effective PowerPoint layout from *Presentation Zen* and I used it for my own presentation" (D). N added "The knowledge I've learned [from *Presentation Zen*] definitely sticks in my mind". However, it was interesting to note that more students noted the value of learning from others in the classroom.

Students felt that individual feedback received after their presentations helped them to improve. While student A commented on teacher feedback and E focused on the peer evaluations, K noted both sources: "It was good to get the peer evaluation feedback from other students and from the teacher". Reflecting on the different ages of the students in this elective class, B felt gratitude due to advice from seniors: "I'm not very good at speaking and listening to English, but I could learn positively because older students and the teacher taught me nicely".

Students noted also that they learned through watching presentations from their peers. "At the beginning, I was worried because there were many second and third graders and many returnees but I found that it was actually good for me. It was a good chance to listen to the older students' experiences" (E).

Another perspective centred on the new methods that could be derived from watching other student presentations:

It was interesting to see many different presentations. You can learn how to make a good presentation from learning the techniques; however, to see presentations and learn from them is I think one of the best ways to learn how to make good presentations. There were a variety of presentations and I was able to learn a lot from them (I)

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Regarding suggested improvements to the course, despite the variety of information sources noted above, some students felt that the course could contain a greater range of input. Recording and replaying the student presentations is a good way to increase self-awareness, which was noted by K: “I wanted the chance to see my own presentation on the video”. J noted that we could also learn from seeing mistakes: “I wanted to see examples of bad presentations”. In addition, L suggested that it would be helpful to see a presentation from the teacher:

I don't have many opinions about improvements, but it would be good if you could actually do a presentation and give us a few ideas. We watched presentations by Steve Jobs and some other presenters, but it was a little bit hard to follow and I felt a bit of distance from them.

Despite the use of authentic materials — spoken by native speakers of English and targeted at native speakers of English — Student I wanted to increase the difficulty level:

This class seemed like an introduction to how to make presentations, by all means knowing it was the class intention, but there were many who were skilful and if we were able to try more difficult and challenging materials, I think it would have benefitted many of us as well.

Students had the freedom to choose their own groups for the presentations; however, this caused an unexpected disappointment. Just as Students B, E, K and I noted the benefits of learning from their peers, C and E lamented that they missed the opportunity to join groups containing seniors. “In the group presentations, my co-members were the same age. I think that I could've learned more about ways of presenting if I could've joined older students” (C).

### ***New experiences***

Students C and M commented that they felt inexperienced at giving presentations before the course: “It was good to give presentations using PowerPoint because I hadn't used it much before” (C). N felt that he or she benefitted from the experience of working with others: “Since I usually prefer to do a presentation on my own, this class definitely helped me to improve my teamwork”.

Students also noted how experiences helped them to grow emotionally. “At first I was embarrassed because others were good at speaking English, but it was good for my motivation” (C).

N also reflected on his/her increase in confidence:

*Presentation Zen* was definitely a new thing for me. I found it not only interesting but also useful for other situations. It gave me more confidence to stand in front of people and talk or even present my own opinions in a better way.

Despite the comments above and feedback such as “I enjoyed the class because it was varied” (E), H said “I wanted to have more chances to practise making presentations and speaking”. Moreover, F and G wanted more presentations and more variety in the make-up of the presentations. “In the second half of the semester, we gave presentations mostly but I only gave two presentations. This differed from my expectations at the beginning … I think it is better if we can give more individual presentations” (G).

One way to increase the number of presentations would be to reduce the time dedicated to preparation, as N suggested below:

Even though I learned that presentations are not only about presenting but also about preparation, I thought it would be interesting if we could have “non-prepared” presentations since this was an advanced class. This would be sort of in the middle between presentations and discussions.

### ***New knowledge***

Apart from one student who suggested reverting to the traditional audiolingual method — “it would be good to practice the tone of voice in the class” (D) — other students noted how they expanded their knowledge or changed their perspectives. D wrote: “I found out how to make a good presentation. Especially, I learned the effective PowerPoint layout from *Presentation Zen* and I used it for my own presentation”. N and G echoed this opinion regarding the use of PowerPoint and visuals.

Two students noted how they increased their awareness of the audience. “I could learn what makes it easier for the audience to listen and the use of good visuals from watching Obama and Steve Jobs” (E). In particular, L discovered how to connect better with target listeners:

This class was really meaningful for me. I've done presentations in the past but I could tell that people weren't really enjoying them. However, from this course, I've learned

tips to do a presentation; e.g. how to make clear PowerPoint visuals, structure of the presentation, the importance of preparation (the more and more that I practised, I could feel confidence and could give the presentation smoothly) and lots more useful things.

Two students noted how this course challenged their preconceptions. H moved from a traditional view of presentations for English classes toward a more holistic understanding:

It was good for me to realise that enthusiasm is an important component of presentations. This is because I thought that speaking good (fluent) English is important for good presentations before I took this class, but that is wrong. I could realise that thanks to what I learned in this class.

Moreover, J stated, “I learned the importance of preparation” and explained “I was surprised to hear that Steve Jobs rehearses his presentations many times. (At first, I thought that clever people could present without preparation)”.

In addition to the comments above regarding preparing and delivering presentations, one respondent noted how he or she became a more aware member of the audience: “When I watch other presentations, I think about what I learned in the class, so I feel that what I learned in the class was practical” (G).

### ***The future***

As explained earlier, this course was created to meet the demand for effective audiovisual communication—in particular, business communication—in today’s society. A number of students commented that they thought they would use approaches learned during the course in the future. However, only M thought that he or she would use the presentation skills during employment:

During my freshman year, I did not get many chances to give actual presentations but through this class, I gained a lot of experience and knowledge to improve my presentation skills, and I’m sure that they will help me a lot when I study abroad or when I work in the future.

In contrast, L said “I probably won’t need to do any presentations in my future job, but this

course also taught me how to convey my opinion in a clearer and more persuasive way!! So this course was very meaningful for me” and added “I would definitely use these tips to do presentations in other classes”. B agreed: “I’d like to use what I learned in this class for other classes”.

## Conclusions and recommendations for future courses

Students increased their awareness of the approaches of effective presenters. They learned the value of preparation, visuals, connecting with the audience, and showing enthusiasm. After seeing many dull presentations at conferences where slides are too text-heavy, I was pleased to watch student presentations during this course, which were entertaining, persuasive and informative.

The peer evaluation is an important aspect. It was clear that the presenters aimed their presentations at their classmates using suitable content and English, and employing creative approaches to the use of the presentation software. Moreover, the process of evaluating their peers encouraged the students to think deeply about the aspects of good presentations and a positive collaborative atmosphere developed.

For future presentation courses, I can implement some improvements. In order to increase the amount of presentations that the students experience, (1) I can give a sample presentation and (2) introduce a *kaiten* presentation style. According to Simon Stevens (personal communication, June 8, 2014), *kaiten* presentations get their name from the *kaiten sushi* shops where sushi rotates on a conveyor belt for customers to select. Several pairs of presenters present simultaneously to several pairs of listeners then, every 15 minutes, members of the audience rotate and listen to a different presentation. Halfway through the class period, they switch — listeners become presenters and vice-versa (Boon & Stevens, 2010).

Watching bad presentations is also a good way to learn. In one of my new presentation courses at Kansai University, we use *Lecture Ready 3* (Frazier & Leeming, 2013). From the video that accompanies this textbook, students find it entertaining to watch samples of bad presentations and discuss how they can improve.

On a more general level for any elective class containing a range of students from different grades and backgrounds, it is clear that Japanese students respect the opinions of their seniors; therefore, rather than always working in their friendship groups, it is good for the teacher to distribute older, advanced or returnee students into groups containing less confident younger students.



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Appendix: Peer evaluation sheet

Speaker's name \_\_\_\_\_

Content (Theme, uniqueness, enjoyable, memorable, persuasive)	/30
Organisation (Logical, clear and easy to follow)	/15
English (Punctuation, spelling, grammar, pronunciation)	/10
Delivery (Volume, speed, rhythm, enthusiasm, well-prepared)	/30
Visual aids (body language, pictures linked to message, correct slide timing, not much text)	/15
Total	/100
Comments (1. Positive comments - what areas were strong? 2. Suggestions for improvements)	