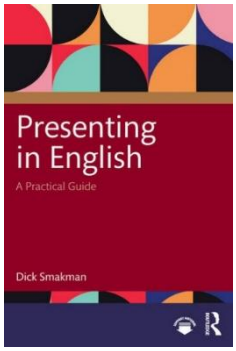
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BOOK REVIEW: PRESENTING IN ENGLISH: A PRACTICAL GUIDE



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Pasan Athapaththu*
University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka
pasan.athapaththu@outlook.com
*correspondence: pasan.athapaththu@outlook.com
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Abstract

Authored cautiously, keeping in mind the individuals who find it challenging to deliver presentations in English, *Presenting in English: A Practical Guide by Dick Smakman* is a potential candidate to occupy space on the bookshelf of any student genuinely seeking straightforward advice for their presentations. As presentations are a powerful persuasive tool (Duarte, 2010) and the most transferable of all other skills (Van Emden & Becker, 2016), a majority of modules in educational programmes have allocated space for a component on presentation skills (Grieve et al., 2021).

Keywords: English language, oral communication, presentaion skill

In academic contexts, students are required to communicate technical concepts and different ideas through formal oral presentation (Tenopir & King, 2004). However, empirical research and core texts on presentation and communication skills continue to reveal that a significant portion of students, regardless of their academic discipline, struggle with presentations (Zaitseva, 2020; Le, 2021). This challenge is particularly evident when they have to deliver presentations in English. There has also been a mistaken line of thinking across a majority of disciplines that tends to emphasise the presentation content over the manner in which the presentation content is delivered. Addressing misconceptions like these and stressing the need to re-examine students' approach to an effective delivery of presentations is, therefore, important. It is in this context that this timely publication becomes an excellent practical guide, especially for self-directed learners. It also provides instructors teaching Presentation Skills,

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Communication Skills, or Business Communication modules for English-medium undergraduate programs with a fresh perspective on reorganising their teaching content.

The text is divided into four parts, each concentrating on a key domain: Part A: The Presentation, Part B: The Language, Part C: The Presenter, and Part D: The Audience. Each part features a specific number of chapters that are further divided into sub-sections where separate topics related to the chapter are discussed in detail. Each chapter begins with a list of key areas to be discussed followed by a short introductory note, preparing the reader for the upcoming content of the text. This four-part structure has ensured a logical sequence of the topics covered in the text while enhancing the accessibility of the content being presented. Each chapter concludes with a checklist summary, followed by exercises that are periodically included to stimulate reader engagement and encourage learning and practice beyond the text. The text is further supplemented by the inclusion of reflection points in the form of brief instructional notes that elaborate more on an important point discussed in the text.

Part A: The Presentation features five chapters: 1. Presentation Types, 2. Online and Joint Presentations, 3. Presentation Structure, 4. Digital Slide Shows, and 5. Slide Design. The chapters collectively contribute to a succinctly outlined overview of almost every single factor that needs to be considered when presentation content is designed for effective delivery. Starting with drawing a distinction between professional and academic presentations, the introductory part next proceeds to a discussion on the types of content delivery in presentations, the varying nature of audience participation, and particularly draws the reader's attention to the etiquette expected in presentations increasingly delivered online using web-conferencing software while pinpointing their advantages as well as drawbacks. This detailed coverage of the foundational aspects of presentations is further supplemented by instructions on the basic components and structure of a presentation. The latter portion of the section is reserved for providing the reader with important tips and hints on making the digital slideshow of the presentation both functional and visually engaging to the audience, using a theme and appropriate design elements.

Part B: The Language explores important linguistic components of spoken English that determine the success of a presentation. This part comprises of five chapters: 6. Useful Sentences, 7. Useful Words, 8. Clear Vowels and Consonants, 9. Tongue Twisters, and 10. The Music of Your English. Each chapter is thoughtfully designed to enhance the presenter's ability to communicate effectively in English during a presentation, providing examples, reflective points, and exercises to illustrate the key concepts and make the presenter familiar with a range of strategies available for utilisation. While the initial portion offers the reader some useful tips on the use of sentences and fixed expressions, this part of the text also features suggestions on building up and maintaining a well-stocked and accessible inventory of spoken vocabulary at the presenter's disposal through a range of strategic means. The rest of the section is allocated for an important discussion focused on enhancing the reader's awareness of the technical aspects of the pronunciation of English vowels and consonants, drawing the reader's attention to the common mispronunciations that occur due to the majority of speakers not being familiar with articulatory distinctions of English vowels and

consonants. The preceding chapter focuses on pronunciation rules and unique pronunciation problems, and Part B ends with an illustration of suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation that significantly shape the way spoken language is used. As each chapter assigns the reader a number of exercises, it will further enhance their understanding and the practice of mutually intelligible pronunciation of words.

Part C: The Presenter includes five chapters: 11. Speaking Style, 12. Posture, 13. Face, Arms, and Hands, 14. Emotions before Presentation Day and 15. Emotions on Presentation Day. While serving as the logical extension of Part B, this part draws the attention of the reader to the other important dimensions of human vocal production that lead to a clearer and comprehensible articulation of smaller, intermediate, and larger units of spoken language. In addition to the vocal factors, optimal physical, behavioural, and psychological conditions that significantly affect both the preparation and performance stages of a presenter and how they collectively determine the effective delivery of a presentation are discussed at length. This involves guidance on the effective use of non-linguistic bodily behaviours such as posture, facial expressions, eye contact, and hand gestures. Also included within the text are preparatory tips and relaxation techniques. The content of this part is further supplemented by the addition of reflective points, instructional suggestions, and exercises, inviting the reader to experiment with the practical value of the points discussed.

Part D: The Audience explores the best practices for establishing an interactive connection between the presenter and the audience. Five chapters are allocated for this purpose: 16. Knowing Audience, 17. Handling Audience Diversity, 18. Engaging Your Audience, 19. Convincing Your Audience, and 20. Audience Questions. The chapters collectively emphasise the importance of the presenter being thoroughly aware of the audience and its key characteristics. This includes understanding the size of the audience, its basic composition, and the desires and expectations the audience anticipates from the presentation. In addition, they explore the practical aspects that govern a mutually engaging and respectful interaction between the presenter and the audience through activities such as using visual content, asking questions, creating suspense, and allowing the audience to raise questions in a Q&A session. The exercises included at the end of each chapter will further assist the reader in gaining a better understanding and hands-on experience of those presentation dynamics.

One notable feature of this instructional manual is its detailed coverage of the four domains of presentations with a special emphasis placed on the need of their collective contribution to a successful delivery of presentations in English. The step-by-step methodology coupled with both straightforward advice and suggestions for further improvements provided to the reader in an accessible language greatly enhance the reader's awareness of the presentation skills they need to learn, practice, and master to become confident and outstanding communicators in English. The reflective points included within the text and the exercises assigned to reader at the end of the chapters further contribute to the development of the text as they invite the reader to extend the instructional guidelines offered to them beyond the text and test their potential by practically engaging with the tasks assigned to them.

Another significant contribution of this text is that it is supplemented with a companion website that provides the reader with free access to easily retrievable support materials. The materials mainly consist of audio recordings of a native speaker of English, intending to exemplify correct pronunciation and clear articulation of English words, phrases, and expressions that can be used in presentations. The website has a simple design, yet it is easy to navigate and interactive, with hardly any distraction to fragment the concentration of the reader as they listen to the recordings. The chapters are arranged on the website as they appear in the text, and the corresponding page number is located just below the recording, allowing the reader to easily navigate between the text and the materials in the companion website. This arrangement will enhance the reader's experience with the content as it does not confine the reader's interaction with the content to the text.

While the author's efforts in producing this all-inclusive instructional package with the intention of guiding the students who find it challenging to deliver presentations in English are praiseworthy, the enthusiastic readership might have further benefitted had it included either within the text or at the end of the relevant chapters a suggested list of web-based sources and applications that could be used, for example, to research and gather reliable information, create more visually engaging presentation slides, cite sources properly using citation generators, and collaborate online with team members. Incorporating such sources, given the increased student interaction with the internet-based tools, could foster their digital literacy and expose them to the other digital and technical aspects of presentations.

As a graduate of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), a teacher in English for Professionals, Communication Skills for Professionals, Effective Speaking, and Business Communication, I discovered it useful to read Dick Smakman' *Presenting in English: A Practical Guide*, perhaps due to the clear and concise manner it is written unifying the essential components required for the delivery of successful and effective presentations in English and presenting them in one single instructional handbook for students and an excellent reference material for those who teach presentation skills for English medium undergraduate programs. Even for the seasoned instructors this could offer a fresh perspective in exploring new content or revising their existing teaching materials that reflect the changes that have taken place in in the delivery of student-led presentations in both academic and professional settings.

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