

Teaching ideas for the Public Speaking Award

Inform, persuade, inspire:
Coaching students for public speaking

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This speaking competition is a wonderful opportunity for your learners to improve their English. It is also an opportunity to take part in a contest which will build self-confidence, and allow learners to engage in an extra-curricular activity which will enhance their school experience. Speaking in public is a valued skill in both the workplace and in life, and it requires skill with language, engagement with an audience and constructing a sophisticated argument.

This is a challenging task. In addition, the content of the speech should be clear, well researched and well-argued.

If you are coaching learners, the following list shows the main areas for training students:

1. Choosing and narrowing the focus of a topic
2. Structuring a talk
3. Introductions and conclusions
4. Delivery
5. Taking questions
6. Assessment

1 Choosing a topic

From the given titles, your students will have to narrow the focus of their chosen topic in order to treat it in enough depth, in the given time. The given topics are general enough to allow quite a bit of freedom.

Task 1

It's important to ask your students to use the following questions as a checklist. Firstly, ask your students to brainstorm some ideas for topics. Then put them in groups and get them to present their topics. Each student needs to justify their choice in terms of the questions. The group can suggest improvements for one another.

Will the audience be interested in my topic?

- capture the audience's imagination
- make a link between the topic and the audience.
 - Does it connect with something that they know about?
 - Does it affect their lives, even if they don't realise it?

Am I interested in the topic?

- choose for your own interest
- you'll have better credibility if you show you care
- mention to the audience why you chose to discuss the issue, or how you came to know about it

Can I research my topic effectively?

- include information in your speech to inform, persuade and inspire your audience
- Where will you get it from? (the internet, a library, interviews with other people, personal experience)

Can I properly discuss my chosen topic in the limited time I have available?

- make sure you have a topic that the audience know something about

- have you narrowed the topic to an aspect of it that can be discussed properly in the time?
- avoid long introductions which need to provide the audience with information before you discuss the topic

Task 2

Brainstorm in groups. What angle on the topic would be suitable?

- sharp focus
- personal interest
- connection to audience

Think of a title, anecdote and find an image for each topic.

Find images for each topic to stimulate ideas and discussion.

Then write a statement of intent. You will not use this in the speech but it will help you to check if your topic works. Just write a few sentences that explain:

- what the purpose of the speech is
- what the main points will be
- give yourself a specific target.

Task 3

Students read and try to improve the following statement of intent:

“At the end of my speech I want to have persuaded the audience that social networking is damaging face-to-face interpersonal skills.”

One improved version (may need some more work)

“At the end of my speech I want to have persuaded my audience that while social networking has allowed us to connect with more people than at any other time in history, we must be careful that we still maintain and develop interpersonal skills for face-to-face contacts at home, at school and in the workplace.”

You do not need to deliver this statement of intent in your actual speech. It is a useful device to get clear focus.

2 Structure of the talk

The table below shows the general structure, but this can be adapted as the speech takes shape. Your students may need to make several drafts until the final version is reached. It's a slow and thoughtful process, so patience is necessary, as well as allowing enough time to develop the speech.

It's a good idea to get your students to watch videos of past speeches and to attempt to analyse each speech for structure according to the table. Discuss where the talk departs from the table, and if this is effective (or not).

Introduction	What's your topic? What do you hope to achieve by the end of the speech?
Preview points	Outline the main points you will make
Main points	<p>Basic structure: one main point plus supporting evidence, then the second etc. A logical order of ideas that develops the argument</p> <p>Use transition words and phrases: <i>So we've looked at ... – now I'd like to examine ...</i> <i>I've explained, so I'd now like to turn to ...</i></p> <p>Supporting evidence: <i>statistics</i> <i>examples from history or current affairs</i> <i>widely accepted facts common sense etc</i> <i>beliefs</i> <i>religious tenets</i> <i>the views of others</i> <i>opposing opinions and contrary evidence</i> <i>analogies</i> <i>narrative stories, personal anecdotes</i></p>
Summary	summarise as you go along at the end, remind audience of the key points
Conclusion	why the audience should be persuaded. finish with a strong final statement, possibly a question invite questions from the audience

3 Introduction and conclusion

Again, working with models, both strong and weak, is a useful way to raise students' awareness, and to give them confidence to prepare their own work.

Task 1

Improve this introduction:

"Today I want to talk about global warming caused by carbon emissions. I will show how the rise in global temperatures will lead to inundations of low-lying ground, droughts and food shortages in some areas, disruption to the ecosystem and civil unrest. I will then tell you what we can do to stop these effects from occurring."

Feedback:

- ✓ It's not a good idea to signal intent ('Today I want to talk about ...' ; 'I will show ...'; 'I will then tell you ...')
- ✓ The syntax is relatively complex. Avoid too many relative clauses and long utterances without a break. This introduction is more like academic written English than a speech. The audience will not be able to take in the content while listening.
- ✓ Think about choosing vocabulary which will not strain the patience of the audience. If you are using less frequently heard words, make sure you slow down and pause so that the message can be taken in.

Suggested improvement. Ask students to analyse why it is better.

"Floods; famines; plagues of locusts; war, death and destruction on a worldwide scale – no, not prophecies from the bible, not the scenes of some Hollywood disaster movie, but predictions for the real world in the next twenty years from top scientists, if we continue

pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and altering the global climate. I want to show you how easy it could be to avoid this doomsday scenario, if we only wake up to the reality that this time it's fact, not fiction."

Feedback:

- ✓ The opening grabs the attention of the audience with the use of dramatic vocabulary.
- ✓ The syntax is more 'conversational', with plenty of chances for the audience to get the point.
- ✓ The speech talks directly to the audience, and asks them to be engaged.

Task 2

Conclusion – analyse the elements

"So I have shown you the precipice on which we stand, and which, at our current rate of carbon dioxide production, we seem doomed to topple into. I have shown you how easy it would be to turn our heads away, to ignore the signs, to hope that the problem will go away, solve itself, or will only affect our descendants, not us. I have agreed that sometimes it can feel hopeless to think that our small actions can possibly affect a problem so widespread on a planet so huge. But I have also explained today that our actions do make a difference, that we do have reason to hope, and that although our actions will cost us time, effort and money, they must be taken if we are to avoid the greater cost of the end of our way of life. So which will you do, ladies and gentlemen – turn your heads, and hope against hope, even as the wind whistles past your ears, that we won't fall off that precipice; or wake up, face the problem and do your part to solve it, and feel proud when you are able to show your grandchildren the world you have bequeathed to them, which they so nearly didn't inherit. Only you can make that decision – what will you choose?"

1 Which parts of this conclusion

- a) remind audience of key points?
- b) challenge the audience (why they should be persuaded)?
- c) have a strong final statement.

Highlight the text in different colours to show the parts a) – c).

2 What phrases are used to introduce element a) and b)?

Answers:

- a) 'So, I have shown you ...'; 'I have agreed that ...'; 'But I have also explained ...'
- b) 'So which will you do, ladies and gentlemen ... or ...'

4 Delivery

There are many tasks you can use with your students to train delivery of a speech. There are far too many to show here; first, analyse your students' needs and concentrate on just what each learner needs. The list below shows the main areas for work:

- Body language
- Project the voice
- Speed of delivery
- Interactivity

Pitch
Pace
Eye contact
Facial expression
Language choices

Here are ideas for 2 areas:

a) Pitch – Intonation

I often find that students' intonation is too flat, and their voices sound boring; this will have a serious effect on the motivation of the audience.

Task 1 – practising intonation to convey meaning. Using ONLY the word 'Sorry', respond in the following situations:

- 1) You're in an important meeting. You've just drunk your colleague's coffee by mistake.
- 2) You didn't hear what someone just said.
- 3) Your boss, who you get on with quite well, has just asked you to stay till 9pm tonight.
- 4) You're in a meeting and someone has just started to say something you completely disagree with.
- 5) You're at the airport and you want to get past some people with your heavy bags.
- 6) You've just said something you didn't mean to – nothing serious.
- 7) You've finally understood what someone has been trying to explain to you for ages.
- 8) You've forgotten – yet again – to give your partner an important message.

Activity 2: Putting the music back into text

1. Read the text quickly to get a general idea of the content. Did you find it hard to read quickly? Why?
2. Capitalise and punctuate the text.
3. If you were reading this aloud, where would you pause? Indicate your pauses with /.
4. Now practise the speech.

the world's most popular drink is water you probably knew that already after all its a basic requirement of life on earth but did you know that the world's second most popular drink is coke and that the human race drinks six hundred million cokes a day now let's just put that into some kind of perspective it means that every week of every year people drink enough coke to fill the empire state building there's almost nowhere on the planet from Miami to Malawi where the word coke isn't instantly recognized the brand name alone is worth thirty billion dollars and that's what makes coca cola a global marketing phenomenon

b) Language choice

Task 1

Discuss the aspects of language that are not appropriate for a speech:

“Human beings have an innate tendency to exploit the resources of their environment in a non-sustainable fashion, which will lead to a point of such depletion that the use-value of those resources become nil.”

Feedback:

- Looks like written text with complex clauses
- Over-academic lexical choice
- Not connecting to the audience

- No redundancy to give listeners time to process the information – text is too dense

Task 2 Write an improvement

Suggested improvement:

“Everything mankind touches it seems to destroy – felling forests, draining lakes, burning ancient jungles long since fossilised into oil and coal; sooner or later we’re going to realise that there’s nothing left to destroy –those forests, those lakes, and most of all, those fossilised jungles, aren’t coming back.”

5 Answering questions

It's a good idea to play some spontaneous speaking games in class to get students used to responding to unexpected topics. You could make a board game (a pathway snaking across the board divided into spaces; or use a snakes and ladders format); in each space on the board is a topic (Your favourite relative; how to get young adults to vote; the most important invention ever, and so on). Use gaming dice or 2 regular dice. As each student takes a turn, he/she has to speak for one minute on the topic in that space. (You'll need someone to watch the time, or use a timer app on a mobile phone.)

Tips:

- ✓ Before your speech think what questions are likely to be asked, and consider how you might answer them.
- ✓ Use the time in which the question is being asked to start formulating your answer, and don't be afraid to pause before answering.
- ✓ Thank the person asking the questions for giving you the chance to make yourself clearer.
- ✓ You don't have to say a lot to answer a question. Some of the best answers are very short.
- ✓ Although some questions may ask you to further explain, defend or justify your views, don't become too defensive or start a debate with the questioner. Simply answer the question concisely as well as you can.

Top ten tips for confidence

- ✓ Rehearse well
- ✓ Have clear and easy-to-follow notes
- ✓ Wear comfortable clothes and shoes, no distracting jewellery
- ✓ Have a sip of water before you go up to speak. Keep the glass near at hand
- ✓ Breathe deeply, using your diaphragm, not your chest
- ✓ Make eye contact with the audience from the start
- ✓ If you stumble, stop, have a drink of water or simply pause, breathe deeply and start again
- ✓ Smile at the audience – they're not hostile
- ✓ Relax and enjoy yourself – having a whole room of people listen to you is a rare experience and can be exhilarating!

6 Assessment

The assessment criteria are shown below. Students need to see the assessment tool, and it's good to get them to work with it to evaluate each other's speeches. You could also use videos for assessing, and discussing with your students.

1. Content: subject, reasoning and evidence ___ /50

- Original approach to topic
- Clear structure (opening, body, ending)
- Main ideas supported by evidence / examples
- Argument /alternative viewpoints
- Contact with audience
- Clear purpose

2. Expression and delivery ___ /30

- Use of voice
- Audibility
- Use of language (max 15 marks)
- Appearance on stage
- Use of gestures

3. Handling questions ___ /20

- Courtesy
- Originality
- Relevance of the answer

TOTAL NUMBER OF MARKS ___ /100

Good luck!

Thanks to the GNE website for some of the information in this article.

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She now works as a freelance trainer, writer and consultant as director of Copage Educational Services, both in the UK and internationally. She is a keynote speaker at TESOL and EFL conferences, providing both academic plenary talks and practical workshops and seminars. She is also an author of student EFL materials and teaching methodology resources.