The Audience is Your Friend:
A Brief Guide for International Conference Presenters

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Abstract

This paper presents some findings from a survey about international conference presentation. It analyses the nature of a conference presentation, contrasting it with a published article. It offers advice and outlines techniques that are designed to help EFL presenters, with particular emphasis on rapport with the audience and on cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: audience involvement; audience participation; courage; cross-cultural communication; English as a foreign language (EFL); eye contact; game; gestures; international conference presentation; oral communication; participation activity; questions; rapport with audience; reading; smiling

The world is becoming smaller – truism! By the day – truism? Part of the reason for the impression that we have of a shrinking world is the increasing cross-cultural contact we have. Much of that contact occurs during a steadily-increasing number of internationally-attended conferences held all over the world. Many of the conferences are about specialised and scientific topics that do not address international concerns directly. A few conferences have international understanding as their theme and focus. In both cases, it is important that international communication be accomplished as smoothly and constructively as possible.

One of the prime goals of a conference is to bring people together – for mutual understanding, not just of subject matter, but of one another within an international community. The mixing of people from various parts of the globe, whether or not the conference concerns international understanding explicitly, is inherently and powerfully an achievement in cross-cultural communication. It is in the accomplishment of cross-cultural enrichment that most international conferences have their most profound and longest-lasting impact.

This paper, then, is prompted by a desire to contribute to international understanding. The profession of English as a foreign language (EFL) contributes to international understanding indirectly by giving people skills that they can use to communicate outside their own community. We sometimes teach it directly when we give classes in cross-cultural communication. However, we should not forget

our responsibility for enhancing cross-cultural communication in our own conduct. Thus, when we give presentations in international settings, we have a special responsibility over and above the dissemination of knowledge and ideas. We should also strive to contribute to international understanding in the way we do our presentations. (See Jaffe, 1995, for further discussion.)

This paper is written mainly (a) for academics who give conference presentations in EFL and (b) for EFL professionals who help others in preparing their presentations. However, much of this paper will also be useful (c) for all EFL teachers who require their students to do presentations in their ordinary EFL courses. In other words, our suggestions for academics in international conferences can also be used by students in EFL classrooms.

We first outline some findings about conference presentation. In particular, the results of a survey indicated that academics have considerably greater difficulty in giving presentations in EFL than they do in their mother tongue. After examining some of the difficulties, we make suggestions about ways in which they may be tackled and even overcome. We focus on one aspect of conference presentations that we consider to be crucial – the introduction. We also suggest an activity for managing one area of particular difficulty for EFL speakers – the question and comments at the end.

Survey

It is difficult to know exactly what difficulties are faced by EFL presenters. For example, do they consider that using culturally-appropriate gestures is particularly problematic

or do they find that answering audience questions is more difficult in EFL than it is in their mother tongue?

In order to find answers to questions such as these, a survey was carried out. The objective of the survey was not to conduct fundamental research, but to provide a rough-and-ready indication of what sorts of problems were particularly troublesome for international conference presenters. No attempt was made to determine if the sample of presenters interviewed was representative of the population as a whole. Despite these limitations, the survey brought to light some interesting findings. We will share some of these here because they may help readers to focus on certain aspects of their presentations and to make improvements.

Questionnaires were sent to 62 people and received back from 43 people. Eight of these had to be eliminated for various reasons, which left a sample of 35 valid respondents (15 female and 20 male),. The questionnaire contained both qualitative and quantitative questions. The questions resulted in 147 quantitative variables.

Respondents profile

It is useful to summarise the overall profile of the respondents. The average age was 46 years. Eleven respondents had a bachelors or masters degree and 20 had a doctorate (the other four had other degrees or gave no indication). Respondents spoke an average of 3.4 languages (including their mother tongue), with one person speaking six languages in all. Their self-evaluations of spoken and written proficiency in EFL were fairly high. Their foreign experience, overall, was high (they had visited an average of 13 countries each and lived in over two countries each). Their presentation experience

at conferences was fairly high (the average number of presentations given was about 17, with about half being in EFL). They had collectively given presentations in 45 different countries. Thus, respondents had had a varied and rich experience of other cultures and of giving presentations in EFL.

Overall difficulty

Four questions asked respondents to compare, in general terms, how difficult they found their early and recent presentations in

Table 1: Level of difficulty in early & recent, L1 & EFL presentations

Difficulty of presentations:	L1 mean	EFL mean
At early conferences.	**high**	**v high**
At recent conferences.	*low*	med

Means (on a scale from 1 to 4): *low* (italic) 1.99; med(ium) 2.00-2.29; high (bold) 2.30-2.59; very high (bold) >2.60

Figure 1: Level of difficulty in early & recent, L1 & EFL presentations
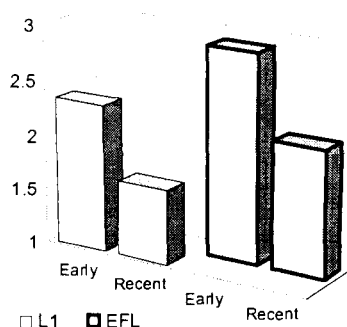
both their own language (L1) and in0 English as a foreign language (EFL). As might be expected, respondents reported that EFL presentations were considerably harder than L1 presentations. This was the case for early and recent conferences. Over time and as experience was gained, both L1 and EFL

presentations became less problematic. For details see Table 1 and Figure 1.

What is a conference presentation?

Before looking at some of the more specific difficulties that respondents revealed in their answers to the questionnaire, we should examine the notion of a conference presentation. Indeed, responses indicated that some respondents were unsure of what a conference presentation is. Our observations, too, of live conference presentations sometimes lead us to think that some presenters have not really thought about what exactly a conference presentation is.

Indeed, some presenters give the impression that a conference presentation is just an oral form of a published article. This impression is reinforced by a number of characteristics of conferences.

- Presenters sometimes simply read a written text.
- People talk about "giving a paper" at a conference. Occasionally presenters will get a colleague (or graduate assistant) to "read" their paper at a conference that they cannot attend.
- Written proceedings containing the oral presentations are sometimes available at the start of a conference. The presentation is sometimes just an elaboration (or even merely an oral rendering) of that written paper.
- Some people consider the presentation principally as an entry in their CV. (A few people have been known to follow the dubious practice of entering presentations as publications in their CV.)

In a word, reinforcement is given to the idea that a conference presentation is similar (or should be similar) to a published article.

One way to answer the question "what is a conference presentation?" is to contrast a presentation with a published article in a journal. One reason for making the contrast is because many academics think that the two are the same (except that one is in ink on paper and the other is conveyed by sound). This is only one of the differences. Other differences are more fundamental, and are related to differences in the situations. Table 2 highlights some of these differences.

Perhaps the difference that has the greatest impact is simply the presence of a group of other people with whom the presenter needs to communicate through the establishment of some kind of live, dynamic relationship. This alone accounts for many of the differences noted in Table 2.

Some presenters tend to give a presentation as if it were a written article. This should be avoided. A presentation is not an exercise in perfecting a form or giving a flawless performance (almost as though you were a computer printer). A presentation is a personal and serious conversation that you have with a group of people. The audience is not interested watching how well you give a performance of a text. They want to hear what you have to say. You are not in a theatre; you are in the business of sharing and exchanging ideas. The audience is not a theatre critique; they are your friends.

In realising that a presentation is an event in its own right and that it has its own specific characteristics, you can be free to focus on communicating your ideas.. With the above differences in mind, we should now go back to our survey findings and see what ideas can help us.

Specific difficulties

Let us now look at some of the specific difficulties as expressed by respondents to the questionnaire. We have chosen only a small selection of items (see), but they help (a) to highlight some areas where improvements in our presentations might be made and (b) to reinforce the notion that a conference presentation, rather than a written article, is more like a serious conversation.

As you can see, problems were reported to arise in quite a wide range of areas. In some areas, no significant difference between L1 and EFL situations was found (e.g., A.3 and B.1). In other areas, respondents had significantly more difficulty in EFL than they did in L1 settings (e.g., A.1 and B.2). It will be interesting to look at each of these areas, comment on them and offer some advice.

Courage

Having courage is, of course, one of the biggest problems of all presenters. As the figures show, it was a problem for both L1 and EFL settings, but a significant difference was found between the two. It is normal that people who are nervous about doing a presentation in their L1 would be more anxious about doing it in EFL. However, this is not a simple increase in fear. A number of studies have shown (see. e.g., Horwitz & Young, 1990) that anxiety is a major contributory factor to impairment of performance in and the learning of a foreign language.

Table 2: Differences between a written article and a spoken presentation

	Written article	Spoken presentation
Social situation / environment	Task, usually accomplished alone & in private (home, office).	Event, carried out collectively & in public (conference theatre).
Role of message producer	Author/writer.	Speaker/presenter.
Message realisation	Writing instrument (e.g., pen, word processor).	Speech organs (mouth, tongue, etc.).
Role of message receiver	Reader.	Listener.
Message receptor	Eyes.	Ears and eyes.
Relation between message producer & receiver	No interpersonal contact. No negotiation of meanings.	Rich interpersonal contact (visual, kinesic, sound, gesture, etc.). Meaning negotiation imperative.
Transmission timing	Delayed.	Real time.
Channel	Text & static.	Audio-visual (voice & visuals) & dynamic.
Accessibility of message	Published work. Permanently available across space & time.	Ephemeral (only accessible to people present and at the moment of realisation, unless recorded).
Control	Complete control over situation & activity.	Almost no control over situation and little control over activity.
Feedback	No direct feedback.	Direct feedback given (& sometimes invited).
Author/speaker's personality, social skills & looks	Hidden.	Visible.
Style of message	Usually impersonal (e.g., use of passives).	Often personal (e.g., use of "you"); similar to serious conversation.
Language	Usually more complex. Visual indications of structure (e.g., paragraphs).	Usually simpler. Indications of structure verbal & visual (e.g., OHT).
Purpose	Tell the whole story.	Illuminate the essential.
Effect	Reflection.	Action.
Form	Rigorous; Detailed; Complete.	Streamlined; Concise; Key points.

Table 3: Specific difficulties

Areas of difficulty:	L1 mean	EFL mean	P
A. Self			
1. Courage.	med	**high**	*low*
2. Not reading.	*low*	med	*low*
3. Remembering main points.	med	**high**	
B. Rapport with audience			
1. Smiling at audience.	*low*	*low*	
2. Using culturally appropriate gestures.	*low*	med	**high**
3. Using appropriate eye contact.	*low*	*low*	med
4. Responding appropriately to audience comments.	*low*	*low*	**high**
5. Involving the audience.	*low*	**high**	**high**

Means (on a scale from 1 to 4): *low* (italic) = 1.99; med(ium) 2.00-2.29; **high** (bold) =2.30
P = probabilities of difference between L1 and EFL: **high** .0000-.01; med(ium) .0101-.02; *low* .0201-.05; none .0501-1. Probabilities were obtained with SPSS using the Two-Tailed Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test for 2 related samples.

It may be that an interdependent relationship exists in which (a) anxiety derived from using a foreign language in a conference presentation contributes to nervousness about the presentation and (b) anxiety resulting from doing a presentation adds to nervousness of using a foreign language. The research question here, of course, is how much can anxiety in an EFL presentation be attributed to EFL anxiety and how much to other factors. That, however, is beyond the scope of this paper.

Other factors can include one's self image. In others words, if we think positively, we are less likely to be afraid. Evidence for this comes from a survey of a number of studies into fear of public speaking. Beatty (1988, p.29) expresses this clearly.

> In general, these studies suggest that most speakers experience considerable arousal during public speaking whether or not they are fearful. However this arousal engenders pressure to understand and label the sensation. It is how an individual labels this arousal that determines the emotion experienced. Accordingly. A person who perceives himself or herself to be a poor speaker would interpret increased heart rate during public speaking as fear or anxiety whereas a confident speaker might view the arousal as excitement and requisite to vigorous and effective speech.

The lesson is obvious. Visualise yourself as a successful speaker, and use whatever techniques are likely to help. For example, if you involve your audience, you will gain confidence. Also, if you rehearse your presentation, you will overcome some of your fear. Here is a list of suggestions that might help you feel; more courageous and more confident about presentations in general or a particular presentation that you have to give soon.

Table 4: Ideas for overcoming nervousness

Idea	Notes
1. Prepare your presentation thoroughly.	Nothing can replace proper preparation. Preparation helps you to get to know the substance well.
2. Rehearse your presentation, preferably with a small, but real audience (e.g., a few colleagues or friends).	A number of scholars (e.g., Trussel, 1978; Menzel & Carrell, 1994) have demonstrated that one of the greatest aids to improving a presentation is rehearsal.
3. Video-tape your rehearsal, but do so with a real audience (e.g., small group of friends or colleagues).	Video-tape allows you to see many things that you are not aware of; it allows you to see yourself in a similar fashion to how the audience sees to. Use a checklist to remember what you do well and to aspects what need improvement. (See, e.g., Ayres et al., 1993.)
4. Keep the structure of your presentation simple. Also, make that structure clear to the audience.	The simpler your structure and the more explicit you make it, the easier it is for you as well as for your audience.
5. Use overhead transparencies (OHTs).	OHTs provide much support; they help keep you on track; they show the structure of your presentation. They also help reduce anxiety (see Ayres, 1991).
6. Be confident.	"Realize that your audience is there to hear you succeed, not fail" (Fletcher, 1983). Beforehand, visualise your presentation as being successful.
7. Go for a short walk.	A little fresh air in your lungs can do wonders. Go for a 20-minute walk about hour or two before the presentation (leaving time after the walk to freshen up and cool down).
8. Talk to some of the audience before the presentation.	Arrive a little early and give yourself time to mingle and talk with some of the early arrivals. They will be the friendly and familiar faces to help you at the start of the presentation.
9. Focus on your message.	Be clear about your main ideas. Engage in a conversation with your audience.
10. Remember that the audience is your friend.	The audience has come to hear you to talk with them, not to watch a robot "perform a text". Your presentation is serious, but friendly, communication, not a theatre performance.
11. Do some of the things outlined below.	

Not reading and remembering main points

Some people still read their presentations. They think that this will help them not to forget the main points of their talk. They also think that they will avoid being afraid. Unfortunately, this is a false security because a presentation that is read usually puts people to sleep. In our training workshops, we have found that if we take away the verbatim text from a trainee presenter right in the middle of a talk that they are giving, not only do they in fact remember what they want to say, but they suddenly become more lively and gain confidence in themselves. They are able to look at the audience, sound natural, and a host of other things that help to engage the audience and make the presentation more interesting.

Table 5: Ideas for not reading & remembering

Action	Notes
1. Never write out your text in full (as though you were writing a journal article).	This can also save you much time. You can, of course, write out quotes (but do not make them too long).
2. Use overhead transparencies (OHTs).	OHTs are your notes – they contain your key points. It is these that will help you remember, both the main points and the details.
3. KISS – keep it short and simple.	Keeping things simple (mainly structure and language) will help both you to remember and the audience to understand. Using short sentences will allow you to attend more easily to other aspects of the presentation, including the recall of points to make.
4. Get to know the room.	Go to the room (the previous day) and practise speaking for a short while.
5. Remember that the audience is your friend.	Would you recite a text to your friends? If you did, would they stay interested?

Smiling

The findings for smiling were interesting. This is an area where presenters may, at worst, be "blissfully unaware" of the difficulties involved. They may, at best, experience a vague discomfort without being able to link it to anything. Respondents did not think that smiling was difficult in either an L1 or an EFL setting. In many cultures, however, it is perhaps the single most effective way of communicating friendliness and rapport (at least in conference situations). In an L1 situation, (a) presenters are less tense and therefore tend to smile more, and (b) if they do not smile, they at least have easier recourse to alternative means of conveying smiling messages.

However, in an EFL setting, smiling becomes even more important, yet more difficult. It is important because smiling is probably one of the most powerful and

ubiquitous cross-cultural acts of communication. It is in an EFL conference presentation that smiling can help overcome many of the obstacles that raise anxiety in presenters (and thus in the audience). Despite respondents' replies, smiling is, nevertheless, more difficult in EFL settings because presenters are more anxious. The importance of smiling is highlighted by Turk (1985, p.39).

> ... second to failing to look at the audience, the commonest fault ... is failing to smile. By that I do not mean that the speaker should adopt a constant grin.

Thus, if resistance to smiling can be overcome at the start of a presentation, this can do wonders for the rest of the presentation. This helps to emphasise the importance of the introduction, where more opportunity will arise naturally for smiling. It is here that the presenter is establishing rapport with the audience and can feel more natural about smiling. Another aspect of smiling is also worth mentioning.

> Anything which makes the recipients feel that an interest is being taken in them personally, is a reward A smile is a reward. (Turk, 1985, p.40.)

Thus, a little smiling at the start of a presentation help you establish a more relaxed rapport with your audience, leading to less anxiety. This does not mean that you have to brandish great smiles – just a small, relaxed one from time to time is fine. Of course, if you are from a culture that smiles easily (e.g., some Asian cultures), then that will help you, even if your audience is seemingly unsmiling (e.g., some northern European cultures). However, do be aware of cultural differences in the meanings attributed to smiling.

Table 6: Ideas to help in smiling

Action	Notes
1. Find out about your audience.	If necessary, ask the conference organiser.
2. Be sensitive to your audience's culture(s).	Although a smile is sometimes considered as fairly universal, remember that different cultures tend to interpret smiling in different ways depending on the context (see, e.g., Barna, 1994). However, as a general rule, an internationally-oriented audience will respond positively to moderate smiling.
3. Do a good introduction.	Do not skimp on your introduction. Find out about them here, and smile to their replies. However, a smile cannot substitute for good substance.
4. Go early and meet with some of the early arrivals.	The smiling you do with them can be carried over to the introduction and on into the body of the presentation.
5. Remember that your audience is your friend.	We tend to smile more to friends, is not that the case?

Gestures and eye contact

In our survey, respondents found both culturally-appropriate gestures and eye contact significantly more difficult in EFL than they did in L1 situations. Again, this is hardly surprising, given the greater ambiguity inherent in culturally-different settings. However, with a little sensitivity towards people from other cultures, presenters can make sufficient adjustment.

Gestures, of course, tend to be somewhat easier to regulate than eye contact. Gestures are specific actions over which one has greater control and choice than one does over eye contact. In multi-cultural settings, it becomes important to avoid gestures that can be interpreted as being offensive. With eye contact, it is more the case of behaviour that needs to be modulated according to cultural circumstance.

An example of a typical, and not uncommon, gesture mistake is one in which, with the intent of signifying the figure "two", an America holds up two fingers to a British audience. Broadly, two outcomes ensue. Members of the British audience who do not realise that cultural differences exist will be very offended. However, most audience members will simply realise that the American has not bothered to find out anything about the host culture. In either case, it reflects badly on the American presenter. Another example of a mistake would be a French presenter pointing at an individual member of the audience in some Asia cultures (e.g., Malaysia).

Eye contact, although more difficult to control because it is more automatic, should also be modified slightly and to the extent that you yourself also feel comfortable. For example, the more penetrating and sustained look of a Latin/Mediterranean person should be tempered in some Asian cultures. A Japanese presenter should make a special effort to look more and in a more sustained way at European audiences.

Remember that eye contact serves at least three functions. First, it keeps your audience interested. Second, it helps the audience realise that your are trustworthy. Third, it helps you keep track of the mood and reactions of the audience. These functions become even more important in a setting where you do not know the culture (very well), that is, where cultural ambiguity is high and where more information is needed for you to build up a reasonably accurate picture.

Of course, gaffes will happen. Each case of a faux-pas is specific, but as a general rule, if it is obvious that a mistake was unintentional and that an appropriate level of concern is expressed, then people in general and audiences in particular will not take umbrage. If the audience knows that you are making a genuine effort to communicate, and that you are not simply giving a performance, then the audience will either not notice or be very forgiving of most gaffes in eye contact or gesture. The more your presentation is a conversation with your audience, the more your audience will be your friend – perhaps because of, as well as despite, small gaffes.

The more you know about your audience, the more your gestures and eye contact will be appropriate and thus contribute to a presentation that is appreciated and achieves its objectives. Fletcher (1983, p 31) argues that a presenter should

> get as much information about your audience as you can, to help guide you in the ... presentation of speech.

If you have already visited the country or place, or if you have some cross-cultural experience, then adapting to host culture will be easier. For both well-versed and less experienced cross-

cultural presenters, some of the ideas in Table 7 may be helpful.

Table 7: Ideas for gestures and eye contact

Action	Notes
Before the conference:	
1. Get to know the audience.	Ask the conference organiser.
2. Find out about cultural expectations of the audience.	Read about the culture of the host (e.g., for Malaysia: Munan, 1992; Kim, 1996).
3. Attend a course on cross-cultural communication.	If this is not possible, read up a little on cross-cultural communication (e.g., Barba, 1994).
At the conference:	
4. Go to one or two presentations given by local people before you do your own presentation.	Also (closely but discretely) observe local people interacting together. Interact with them yourself.
5. Ask host colleagues and friends.	Do not be nervous about approaching local people at the conference. As a general rule, they will be pleased, even flattered. Many people go to a conference primarily in order to meet others.
6. Suspend all judgement about host culture and customs.	In other words, do not pre-judge (i.e., do not be prejudiced).
7. Get to know the audience.	Chat briefly with early arrivals. Ask the audience questions during your introduction. Involve the audience during the body of the presentation.
8. Video-tape-record a session.	An analysis of the recording afterwards will help you to make adjustments for next time.
9. Remember that the audience is your friend.	

Audience questions and comments

In their quantitative responses to our survey, respondents considered audience comments to be relatively unproblematic. However, two exceptions to that general statement should be pointed out. First, respondents did report audience questions as being significantly more difficult in EFL than in L1 situations. Second, respondents' qualitative responses did reveal some real concern with this aspect of conference presentation. For example, some respondents found it difficult to understand questions from the audience (because of limited listening skills or because of unfamiliar audience accent). Others had difficulty dealing with challenging comments

(that is, keeping their cool and not being flustered by an abrupt or even obnoxious member of the audience).   Here are the comments of two respondents, with which you might identify.

> How to master the situation, when I do not understand a question from the audience and I don't know if it is because of my bad English, her/his bad English (or both) or different connotations.

> It is sometimes difficult, especially when audience is also a NNS [non-native speaker], to understand what is meant by the question that is put forward.

It is useful to realise that this difficulty arises more from fear of losing control than it does from any lack of knowledge.   You have to realise that you are the presenter, that you are in control and that you decide how to handle audience questions and comments.   Remember that you can even turn this to your advantage by making it an episode for establishing rapport with the audience and involving them more actively.   Asking your friends, the audience, for help is flattering, and, if done with poise, they will respond well.   No simple or quick-fix solutions exist, but you may find that Table 8 contains some helpful ideas.

Involving the audience

The final area that we shall examine is knowing how and how much to involve the audience.   The responses to the questionnaire revealed this area as problematic.   In L1, respondents reported that involving the audience was relatively easy.   In contrast, in EFL, respondents considered this area as being extremely problematic.   Not surprisingly, a statistically

significant difference between L1 and EFL situations was found.

Giving a presentation in front of an international audience and in EFL tends to make one less confident.   This in turn discourages one from involving the audience, a task that is perceived as stretching one's language abilities.   In addition, one is less sure of how people from another culture may accept participation.   The result is that one tends to play safe.   However, playing safe is often less effective than encouraging more audience participation.

The extent to which you will plan and encourage audience participation will depend on a number of factors.   These factors range from very personal characteristics to issues related to broader cultural concerns.   The main factors are summarised in Table 9.   Of course, cultures vary in their expectations about the level of personal participation as an audience member.   However, most people who attend conferences are likely to appreciate a certain amount of participation.   In international conferences especially, this is more related to the nature of the human mind, rather than to culture.   An actively-involved mind is more likely to stay awake and appreciate a presentation.   So, a general rule that you might adopt is "involve your audience to the point where both you and they feel comfortable".   This may mean less than the level you would establish in your own culture, or it may mean more.

Involvement can fall in a range from simple intellectual interest to physical participation (such as talking or moving).   Here we outline only a few ways in which you could involve your audience.   The limit is really your imagination.

Table 8: Ideas for dealing with audience questions and comments

Idea	Notes
1. Ask the person to repeat the question more slowly.	Ask the person politely. If you are still not sure, then use a different approach, for example, use Idea 2 (below).
2. Paraphrase the question. Do not be defensive when challenged.	Paraphrase to make sure that you have understood the underlying or hidden question. For example, "Am I correct in thinking that you are asking about ...?", "Are you saying that ...?".
	Then answer the question as though it came from the whole audience (i.e, address the whole audience in your reply). Avoid showing any annoyance. Do nothing to make the audience member to loose face. Respond to the facts and to the logic, not to the emotional side of person's question.
3. Turn the question back over to the audience.	Say something like: *Hmm. That's certainly an interesting angle. However, I'm not well versed in that side of the issue. I am sure someone here would be able to respond. [Dr. X, for example, you have had experience in this area, right?]*
	[The phrase in brackets can be included if you know someone in particular. However, do not give the impression that you are simply passing the buck. Do it so that it is part of getting the audience involved.]
4. Above all, keep your cool.	Never be impatient because some nitwit does not understand! (1) If they lack ability to grasp your sophisticated ideas, be patient. (2) If they refuse to understand, be gracious, and move diplomatically on to another question/client. Do not take objections personally. Discretion is the better part of valour.
5. Say that you do not know the answer.	Be a little apologetic, and infer that it is your fault for not knowing. Avoid giving the impression that the audience should not have asked such a difficult or silly question. Say something like: *Hmm. I'm sorry, I don't know enough about that to give a useful answer.* Or: *Hmm. That's an interesting (important/delicate/...) question, but I have to admit that I don't have (much of) an answer.*
6. Anticipate questions.	Go over in your mind the kind of questions that might arise and think of rough answers.
7. Use the QC game.	See below.
8. Remember that the audience is your friend.	

Table 9: Factors determining level of audience participation

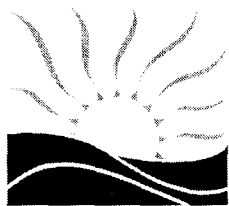| Factor	Notes
• Your confidence.	The more confident you are, the more you will feel comfortable in encouraging participation. However, also realise that pushing yourself to get the audience to participate will, in its turn, increase your confidence.
• Your own personal style of presenting.	It is useful to develop a variety of personal styles (or a broad repertoire), so that you feel comfortable with a range of participation levels.
• Your own culture.	As you gain experience in other cultures, aspects of your own culture will become less salient to your comfort level in encouraging audience participation.
• The subject matter and objectives of your presentation.	As a general rule, make your presentation as participative as is appropriate for the subject matter and the objectives of your presentation. Indeed, sometimes it pays dividends to push just a little beyond the participation bounds traditionally dictated.
• The personal preferences of the audience.	It is, of course, possible to ask the audience about individual comfort levels for participation. However, this is tricky. By asking explicitly you may raise some members' anxiety level, and discourage them from agreeing to more active participatory activities.
	It is probably more advisable, after considering the above factors, simply to announce, in reassuring manner and early in the session, that the audience will participate later in a short activity. In any case, and when the time comes, it must be made clear that individuals have the right to refuse participation.
	In many cases, it again pays dividends to stretch your audience's imagination by gently pushing them just a little further down the path of participation than they would go on their own. The audience is your friend; hold their hand.
• The preferences and style of the conference.	Some conferences explicitly state expectations about participation levels of sessions. In this case, these will usually override cultural expectations. It is, nevertheless, wise to take cultural expectations into account within the parameters set by the conference.
	A general tendency in recent years has been for conferences to become more participative. Often this is achieved by including special types of session, such as workshops or posters.
• The audience's cultural expectations (or rather, the expectations of the culture of the audience).	This is an important factor to consider, especially if you have not had prior experience in the culture. If your audience is very mixed culturally, invite the higher-participation members and allow the lower-participation members to observe. Alternatively, adapt your overall participation to the lower-participants. However, through synergy, the lower often become just as involved once the higher do. If you treat the audience as your friend, you will not go far wrong.

Table 10: Ideas for involving the audience

Action	Notes
1. Do a good introduction.	See next section.
2. Rehearse.	See section above, entitled *Courage*
3. Watch other presenters.	Jot down notes on things that other presenters do to involve their audience, such as use of language and activities (e.g., games).
4. Ask people at the back if they can hear you well.	Even better, ask people at the back to come forward and fill up empty seats at the front.
5. Questions and comments at any time.	Announce at the start that questions and comments at any time during the presentation are welcome. Explain that this will also help you to gauge what aspects need further explanation. On its first occasion, explain that you may hold over till later the answer to a question concerning a future part of your talk. This method is best with smaller audiences.
6. Stop from time to time and ask if there are any questions.	This is best done at the end of each section of your presentation.
7. Ask an occasional rhetorical question.	For example, *How do you think they solved the problem? Well, let me tell you.* You can even let the audience make a few guesses, and then go on to tell them or give further details.
8. Communicate well.	By using good eye contact and occasionally smiling, you can help the audience become involved.
9. Use clear visuals and objects.	The clearer your visuals, the more this will encourage involvement. Using objects and realia (maps, models, samples, photographs, ...) helps involvement.
10.Quiz.	Give the audience a short quiz from time to time. Make sure the questions can be asked relatively easily. Ask people to work in pairs or groups of three.
11.Get the audience to play the QC Game.	See detailed instructions below.
12.Play other games.	Consult Thiagarajan (1995) & Thiagarajan & Thiagarajan (1995). These are two books full of great ideas for activities, such as games, to involve your audience.
13.Remember that the audience are your friend.	

The introduction to a presentation

In addition to the above suggestions, we should like to emphasise one thing in particular that we have found crucial and that helps all our trainee presenters. This is to do a good introduction. In fact, the introduction is the key to involvement – indeed, it is the key to your whole presentation. Among other things, the introduction does some important things:
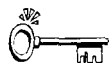
- **You**. It allows you to get into the swing of things before starting on the main content.
- It allows you to establish your expertise and experience in the area. However, in some cultures, this may be perceived as self-promotion.
- It allows your vocal chords to warm up.
- **Topic**. It allows you to give the title of your talk and to outline the structure of the body (main part) of your presentation.
- It allows you to tell the audience why you are interested in the topic (before getting into the substance).
- **Audience**.. It allows your audience settle down, to warm up and to begin to focus on the topic.
- It allows you to capture the interest of the audience. It gives your audience reasons for listening.
- It helps the audience to adjust to your way of speaking. This is particularly important in an international setting, where people may need a short while to adjust to your accent (whether native or non-native).
- **Rapport**. Perhaps more important of all, it enables you to establish rapport with your audience.

- It enables you to get to know and to begin to feel comfortable with your audience.
- It allows you to find out a little about the audience's prior interest and experience with the topic area, and thus to re-adjust your presentation to their level.
- It allows the audience to become your friend.

Figure 2 is a reproduction of one of our training OHTs. It outlines a typical structure for an introduction. You do not have to do every single item in your introduction; nor do you have to follow the exact order of items suggested. However, for the first few times, we suggest that you stay as close as possible to this pattern. As a general rule, your introduction should take about 12% of the time of your whole talk. For example, in a talk of 30 minutes, you can easily devote about four minutes to your introduction. Remember that your introduction is your key. Take a moment to make friends with your audience.

The QC Game

Some academics would probably balk at the idea of playing a game as part of their conference presentation. However, the trend internationally is towards greater audience participation, and more and more presenters are including participatory activities as part of their presentation. An excellent way of encouraging participation is, of course, the use of games (see Crookall, 1990, 1995; Crookall & Saunders, 1989). If you are hesitant about using the term game (which may connote frivolity for some people), then use a word like activity or exercise.

Figure 2: OHT showing model structure for an introduction

Introduction → Key

♠ **Get attention** &
signal start

♠ **Introduce** self &
organisation

♠ **Title** *(OHT)*

♠ **Overview** of topic :

♥ Purpose / objectives
♥ Background & context
(how you got there)
♥ Interest & importance --
why you (& audience should)
like the topic
♥ ...

♠ Relate to & involve
♪ **audience :**

♥ Ask questions
♦ Ask for show of hands
♥ Ask for volunteers
♥ Discussion
♥ Listen to tape
♥ Smile, Sing, ...
♥ ...

♠ **Outline** of talk *(OHT)*

♦━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━━♦

♠ Start talk (body)

Make your point: Workshop notes. © 1996, Nor Hafizah Ismail (Univ Glamorgan) & David Crookall (Univ Tech Compiègne, France). p 14

(side text) Make your point: Workshop notes. © 1996, Nor Hafizah Ismail (Wales) & David Crookall (France)

The QC Game was designed to help presenters during the question and comments stage of the session. The basic format is provided below, but you will be able to adapt it to your own style, audience culture and circumstances. Paradoxically, the game can be used both to regulate a barrage of questions and to encourage a reticent audience to ask questions. For other activities, consult Thiagarajan (1995) and Thiagarajan and Thiagarajan (1995).

Conclusion: Celebrating culture

Today, globalisation requires us to deal respectfully with people from all kinds of different cultural backgrounds. As the world grows smaller, and as conferences become increasingly international, we have to care about how we deal with people from other cultures. When we enter into a foreign culture, we need to be sensitive about the locals' ways of doing things. Presenters at an EFL conference have to realise that negative attitudes will turn against them. Positive attitudes of respect will reflect back on them and their presentations will be appreciated. We have to conduct ourselves in and out of the conference room in a manner that carries a message of respect for cultural difference and celebration of cultural enrichment.

Table 11: The QC Game

Objectives	The game is fairly adaptable, and has (like many games) several objectives.
	• In general, regulate the questions and comments of the audience at the end (or in the middle) of a conference presentation.
	• In particular, allow the more timid audience members to ask questions (especially if they are from cultures that discourage this), or provide the presenter with greater control over audience questions.
	• Additionally, help your own students listen carefully to their friends who give presentations in class.
	It is useful, however, to focus on only one objective each time you use the game.
Materials needed	Set of blank cards (7 x 5 cm minimum to 10 x 7 cm maximum). You can cut these from card stock or even heavy paper.
Basic procedure	At the start of your presentation, hand out cards, one to each member of the audience. Tell them (1) that, at the end of the more formal part of the presentation, you will collect up the cards, (2) that by then each person should have written down (legibly) one question that they would like to ask.
	Five minutes before the end, remind the audience that they need to write down one question on their card.
	At the end, collect up the cards. From this point on, several options are open to you. Below are some variations that you can use. With a large audience, ask members to help you collect and distribute cards.
Variation 1: Themes	Take up all the cards; spend a minute going through them and group them by theme. Obviously, you do not have much time, and this is only a rough-and-ready classification. Alternatively, collect up the cards about 10 minutes before then end and ask a colleague or co-presenter or one or two audience members to categorise the cards.
	Choose one of the themes – preferably a theme with many cards, thereby including many audience members. Then, either (a) choose a representative question, or (b) make up a general question that represents the central idea. Then reply to the question. Ask if anyone has any comments.
Variation 2: Audience shuffle	Collect all the cards. Shuffle them fairly well. Deal them out at random. Tell the audience that they can now ask (a) the question that is on their card, (b) their original question or (c) any other question. They are not obliged to say which question they are asking. Respond to the question. Ask if anyone has any comments.
Variation 3: Group discussion	Ask people to work in groups of three. Each group's three-minute task is to make a question for the group. The new question can combine elements of any of the original three questions, or it can be an entirely new question. The new question cannot be any of the original three questions word for word.
	At the end of three minutes, ask a group (to volunteer) to put its question. Answer it, ask for comments and move to the next (volunteer) group.
Variation 4: Group themes	From Variation 3, instead of asking groups to put their question, collect all the new questions (on previously-distributed, different-colour, blank cards). Proceed as in Variation 1.
Variation 5: Doubles	At the start, hand out two cards to each person. Tell the audience that, at about 1/3 of the way through your presentation, you will collect one of the cards. At about 2/3 of the way through, you will collect the second card. Proceed as in Variations 1 or 2.
Variation 6	Your own!

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