



研究成果を英語で伝えるスキルに磨きをかけたい皆さんへ：このシリーズでは、東京大学のウッドワード先生が、あなたの今の英語能力を使って成果をより効果的に上手に伝えるためのアイデア、作戦、ヒントを紹介します。また、日本語でのプレゼンにも役立つ多くのアイデアも見つかるでしょう。

## By Invitation of the Editor-in-Chief

# English Scientific Communication Part 7—Before the presentation

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Over the last six months, in this series of articles, we have looked at various methods to improve scientific communication skills in English, with a particular focus on delivering oral presentations. In the last two articles, we focused on using presentation software effectively, to maximize the smoothness and impact of a presentation while relying on and making the most of existing English language skills. This month, we fast forward to the time when we are almost ready to deliver the presentation and focus on some ideas that will help us on the day we go live!

### Focus on the introduction

Back in article 4, we identified the importance of the introduction of the presentation. The introduction is the only point during the presentation when you can guarantee that you have the attention of everyone in the audience and so you need to make sure that you capture their imagination and get them interested in what you are going to say at that point. The biggest problem associated with this, however, is that the beginning of the presentation is when you are most nervous and so least likely to do a good job of impressing the audience (although see the next section, “the audience effect” below). If you are anything like me, before your presentation you will be sitting in the audience listening to the speaker who is presenting before

you (if you are the first speaker, you are probably pacing around the room trying to stay calm) and becoming more and more nervous and aware of the increasing levels of adrenalin pumping through your body. The best thing that you can do to deal with this situation is to be aware of it and acknowledge it in advance. You are always going to feel like this before presentations, and the nerves are likely to make you start worrying about whether when you get on the stage, you will forget entirely how to speak English! However, you will either know, or will soon learn from experience, that after getting up in front of the audience and speaking for two or three minutes, you will begin to calm down. The adrenalin levels in your bloodstream will drop to manageable levels and after a while, you might even find yourself enjoying the presentation!

The question, then, is how do you deal with the nerves and adrenalin right at the beginning of the presentation, which you can guarantee are going to affect you? The answer is to make the introduction as foolproof as possible. The best way to do this is to know precisely what you are going to say in advance. As we have discussed previously, the best presentations are not ones that are read from notes or learned word for word by heart, because they often come across as unnatural or slightly stilted.

However, when it comes to the introduction, it is worth making an exception. When preparing your introduction, give it priority and don't just make it a last minute addition. Plan very carefully not just the content of your slides, but exactly what you would like to say (word for word if you like) for at least the first slide or two. As an example, if you are giving a presentation at an international meeting, your first job is going to be to thank the organizers of the conference for giving you the opportunity to talk about your work. After that, you should take the opportunity to introduce yourself and this is a good chance to say something distinctive about yourself so the audience might remember who you are. Try to make it relevant to the main content of your talk, or the location of the conference or something in the news or indeed anything that can provide context for your point and make it easier to remember. After that, you are onto introducing the title of your presentation and beginning your introduction proper. Work out all these details down to the letter, practice them and commit them to memory, becoming comfortable with saying them. This way, when you make your way in front of the audience to give the presentation for real, you can go into a kind of autopilot mode while the nerves are shaking you. Once they subside, you will be a couple of slides into your talk and you can relax

into a more natural presentation style.

### The audience effect

Our ideas for surviving the first two minutes of a presentation bring us onto an important more general phenomenon which we should be aware of as presenters and communicators. It is known as the audience effect.

In the late 19th Century, the first studies on the effect of the presence of others on performance were undertaken. Norman Triplett performed a simple experiment where he compared the performance of cyclists when racing against the clock and racing against other cyclists. Their performance was enhanced when racing against other cyclists. These days we are very familiar with this effect. Often it takes the biggest stage—the final of a Grand Slam tennis tournament or the Olympic Games to see athletes perform at their best. A disproportionate number of world records are recorded under conditions of intense audience pressure. The same is true in other endeavours—live performances of music, dance or drama, high profile speeches—the list goes on. Most performers respond significantly to their audience and can struggle to perform well if there is nobody watching. It seems that the presence of an audience makes people perform better than when they are alone.

On the other hand, many people seem to perform terribly when under the scrutiny of others. For me personally, I find it almost impossible to write kanji with someone watching me! In the early 20th Century, studies showed that the presence of an audience can cause some people to perform worse than without the audience. It was in 1956 that Robert Zajonc was wondered why some studies showed performance improvements in the presence of an audience, while others showed impairments. The factor that determined which response oc-

curred appeared to depend on whether the task involved was simple or not or well learned or not. For things that we are good at, or which we find easy, the presence of an audience is likely to enhance performance. However, if we are doing something that is not well learned or that is complex or we feel uncomfortable with, the presence of an audience will lead to performance being impaired.

When we give presentations for the first time, we are naturally unconfident, often underprepared and very nervous. All these factors tend to lead us to underperform. If we get a few presentations under our belt, we relax a little, become more familiar with and more confident about the process and eventually we move from the situation where the audience impairs our performance to one where we perform better in front of them. This, then, is really the secret to giving good presentations—to get from the wrong side of the audience effect to the right one! I imagine the question in your minds right now is, “but how do we do that?”

### Practice, practice, practice!

Clearly, the best way to improve is to keep giving presentations. Not only do you learn from the experience and grow in ability every time, but your familiarity and confidence level in the task grows and you soon become able to “feed off the audience” —that is to use the adrenalin and the stimulation to perform even better. However, until you reach this level, it might seem like an impossible task. You are scared about making mistakes in English, forgetting important words or points and knowing how to answer questions at the end, among a list of other things. The best thing you can do is practice—over and over, as much as possible. Do it in front of your friends, family, pets, your smartphone, your webcam, mirror and in the shower! Do it until you are completely bored with

the presentation and you will find that doing it in front of an audience makes it interesting again. You need to make yourself so familiar with the task that doing it in front of an audience doesn't make it more difficult. Even better, if you do this successfully, the confidence you gain from the experience will make your next presentation even better and you will continue on a virtuous circle, giving better and better presentations each time.

The other aspect lies in comparison. Many people believe, often without good reason and despite being very well prepared, that their presentation is in some way inferior to that of other presenters. The easiest way to rid yourself of this misconception is to become a presentation critic. Whenever you witness presentations, in any situation, try to ask yourself what the presenter did well and what the presenter did poorly. As you become confident at identifying the strengths and weaknesses, not only will you learn from the former and try to avoid the latter, but you will be able to look at your own presentations more critically and decide objectively whether they are good or not, rather than make judgments based on your own fears and lack of self confidence. As long as you believe that you have something important to say and that it is something that the audience will want to hear, then practice, practice, practice will fix the rest!

Taking advantage of the audience effect is mostly about being aware that it exists, so you can take measures to benefit from it. As always, being well prepared is key. Next month, we will move on to some ideas and suggestions for actually delivering the presentation and things that you can do to make the “on stage” experience more comfortable for yourself and more enjoyable for the audience. Until then, keep practicing!

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