Guides to Professional English

# Presentations, Demos, and Training Sessions

## A Guide to Professional English

**Adrian Wallwork**

Springer

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Pisa, Italy

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE READER

## Who is this book for?

This book is a guide to drafting and giving presentations and demos in a work or technical (but not research) environment.

It is intended for those who need to sell or explain their products and services, and / or to provide training.

The book is designed to help both those who have never done presentations before, as well as those whose English is already good (or who are native speakers) but who want to improve their presentation skills.

The focus is on language, rather than on the creation of slides from a technical/ artistic point of view (there are hundreds of sites on the web that can help you with this).

I hope that trainers in Business English will also find the book a source of useful ideas to pass on to students.

## I work in research, is this book for me?

No. Although much of this book is relevant also for presenting research projects, a much better option for you is to read *English for Presentations at International Conferences* (Springer). Some chapters (with some modifications) are common to both books, specifically the chapters on preparation, pronunciation, bullets and Q&A (Chapters 4-9 and 15 of this book). However, *English for Presentations at International Conferences* contains specific chapters on how to structure the various parts of a presentation (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion) and on how to create a captivating beginning.

## What will I learn from this book?

This book will help you to:

- prepare and practice a well organized, interesting presentation
- give effective demos and training sessions either on site or via audio/video conference
- highlight the essential points you want the audience to remember
- avoid problems in English by using short easy-to-say sentences
- attract and retain audience attention
- decide what to say at each stage of the presentation
- improve your pronunciation
- learn useful phrases
- deal with questions from the audience
- overcome problems with nerves and embarrassment
- gain confidence and give a memorable presentation
- motivate your audience to listen and act on what you have said

## How should I read this book?

This book is designed to be like a manual or user guide – you don't need to read it starting from page 1. Like a manual it has lots of short subsections, and is divided into short paragraphs with many bullet points. This is to help you find what you want quickly and also to assimilate the information as rapidly and as effectively as possible.

The first two chapters highlight the importance of doing presentations and how much you can learn by watching other presentations (e.g. on ted.com and YouTube). Chapters 3–10 cover all the preparation for your slides and for what you are going to say (including pronunciation and intonation). Chapters 11–15 cover how to conduct a presentation, demo and training session, either face to face or via video or audio conference. The chapters include how to answer questions, set tasks, manage the audience etc. Chapter 16 gives ideas on how to practice for your presentation, and Chapter 17 on how to improve your demo and training skills. The last three chapters contain lists of useful phrases.

All the chapters apart from Chapters 12–14, which are specifically on giving demos and training, are relevant to all types of presentations.

You can use the Table of Contents as a check list of things to remember.

## Why are there no images of presentation slides?

This book is designed primarily to teach you what to say and how to say it.

The technologies for creating slides are constantly changing, so it makes more sense for you to see the most up-to-date slides by searching on the web. You can try the following sites:

prezi.com

google.com/drive

slideshare.net

presentationzen.com

authorstream.com

bbc.co.uk/worldservice/…/unit3presentations/1opening.shtml

## glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| audience, attendee, participant | I use these terms indifferently to mean the people you are talking to when you give a presentation or demo |
| demo | a presentation of a product or service in which the presenter demonstrates how the product or service works. Sometimes, I use demo and presentation indifferently |
| training session | a meeting in which one or more trainers teach participants how to do something. Such training often takes place through a demo |
| audio conference call | a telephone call between multiple people, without video |
| video conference call | a telephone call between multiple people, with video |
| video conference | a meeting with participants in multiple locations in which participants can see each other on a big screen |

## Other books in this series

There are currently five other books in this series.

*CVs, Resumes, and LinkedIn*
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0646-8/

*Email and Commercial Correspondence*
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0634-5/

*User Guides, Manuals, and Technical Writing*
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0640-6/

*Meetings, Negotiations, and Socializing*
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0631-4/

*Telephone and Helpdesk Skills*
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4939-0637-6/

All the above books are intended for people working in industry rather than academia. The only exception is *CVs, Resumes, Cover Letters and LinkedIn*, which is aimed at both people in industry and academia.

There is also a parallel series of books covering similar skills for those in academia:

*English for Presentations at International Conferences*
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-6590-5/

*English for Writing Research Papers*
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-7921-6/

*English for Academic Correspondence and Socializing*
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4419-9400-4/

*English for Research: Usage, Style, and Grammar*
http://www.springer.com/978-1-4614-1592-3/

# INTRODUCTION FOR THE TEACHER / TRAINER

## Teaching Business English

I had two main targets when writing this book:

- non-native speakers (business, sales technical)
- Business English teachers and trainers

My teaching career initially started in general English but I soon moved into Business English, which I found was much more focused and where I could quickly see real results. The strategies I teach are almost totally language-independent, and many of my ‘students’ follow my guidelines when writing and presenting in their own language. I am sure you will have found the same in your lessons too.

Typically, my lessons cover how to:

1. write emails
2. participate in meetings
3. make phone calls
4. socialize

and perhaps most difficult of all, how to do a presentation or demo. While I think I have mastered the first four, I always learn something new when watching a new client give a presentation or demo.

This book is thus a personal collection of ideas picked up over the last 25 years. It is not intended as a course book, there are plenty of these already. It is more like a reference manual.

I also teach academics how to present their work. In fact, some of the chapters in this book are based on chapters from *English for Presentations at International Conferences* (Springer).

## How to teach presentations and demos

The reason I am not over keen on course books on Business English skills is that they assume you have 30–70 hours available to learn how to do something. In my experience, most of my ‘students’ learn that they have to do a demo a week or two before. They simply don’t have time to follow a neatly structured course, but instead need a series of instant fixes.

My advice to you is to jump straight in and get your students to do their presentation or demo in front of you. Note down the areas where they are having the most problems and then just focus on fixing those.

I find that the biggest problems, apart from pronunciation/ intonation and difficulties in understanding questions from the audience, have nothing to do with English. Instead the problems are:

- no clear structure
- too much text in the slides
- reading the slides rather than interpreting them
- tendency to improvise and waffle
- no eye contact with audience
- no interaction with the audience
- no enthusiasm

In this book you can find various solutions to the problems above, and of course how to deal with English-related problems.

If you have more time available, then a good approach is to:

- find out what they like and dislike about other people’s presentations (Chapter 1)
- help them to understand that just because they can see the faults in other people’s presentations does not mean they will be able to recognize the same faults in their own presentations
- show them lots of presentations done by ‘experts’ e.g. on ted.com (Chapter 2)
- teach them how to write a script for their presentation and highlight the benefits of doing so (Chapter 4)
- focus on improving their pronunciation (Chapter 9)
- teach them how to teach (i.e. most of the skills you have as an ELT teacher, they will need if they have to give demos or training sessions)

I am lucky to have had a lot of experience in giving presentations myself (i.e. to promote my books at BESIG and IATEFL conferences), so that has helped me massively as I understand exactly how it feels to stand up in front of a group of strangers. If you can somehow get similar experiences, this will help you too.

Also, I find it helps a lot to take part in real demos. For example, I have recently been helping some IT developers to give training sessions over the telephone (with no video). So I took part in their audio conference calls as a passive participant. Had I not done so, I would have had no idea of the difficulties involved and nor would I have been able to come up with solutions.

Keep up to date with the latest technologies and techniques - see 9.18 for a suggestion to use a tablet or mobile phone during a presentation.

In summary, get involved with the company / companies where you teach. You will find it much more satisfying!

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# 1 THE IMPORTANCE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD PRESENTATION

## 1.1 Why do presentations and demos?

Presentations are opportunities to:

- establish yourself within the company as being an expert in your field
- show that you have good communication skills (i.e. to persuade, to inspire, to motivate) and thus have management potential - in most surveys of companies, presentation skills were rated as being as important (if not more so) than technical skills
- learn a lot about the topic you are presenting, it will help you understand your topic better, and it may help you to see the topic from a new perspective (i.e. that of the user rather than the developer / designer)

Any kind of training session or demo is like selling a product – you are trying to get your audience to do something, e.g. to use some product or service.

Doing the training well will avoid future problems for you (and the company) – in the sense you won't have to waste time answering customers' queries.

A. Wallwork, *Presentations, Demos, and Training Sessions,*
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## 1.2 What kind of presentations do audiences like to see?

We tend to like presentations that:

- are professional and a delivered by someone who is credible and confident
- look like they were prepared specifically for us and make it immediately clear why we should be interested
- have clear slides, with minimal detail and helpful and / or entertaining images
- tell us interesting, curious and counterintuitive things
- don’t make us work too hard to follow what is being said - two or three main points, lots of examples, and not too much theory
- are delivered in a friendly, enthusiastic and relatively informal way
- entertain us and interact with us

In addition, an audience who is watching a sales presentation or demo will want answers to the following questions:

- will their product / service be worth its high cost?
- how reliable are they and their product / service?
- what can they do for us that we can’t already do?
- how will they improve our working life?

## 1.3 What kind of presentations do audiences NOT like to see?

We tend NOT to like presentations where the speaker:

- has clearly not practiced the presentation
- has no clear introduction, a confused structure and no conclusions
- appears to be talking to himself / herself rather than engaging with the audience
- reads the slides
- has a series of similar slides full of text and diagrams
- relies on animations
- fails to address the audience’s interest and only sees things from his / her point of view
- is too technical, too detailed
- speaks too fast, speaks with a monotone, speaks for too long
- shows little interest in his / her topic
- does not provide opportunities for participants to ask questions
- has no scheduled breaks for longer presentations / demos

## 1.4 What constitutes a professional presentation?

A ‘professional’ presentation is one where you put the audience first. You think about how the audience would most like to receive the information you are giving.

The key to an effective presentation is that you have a few main points that you want the audience to remember, and that you highlight these points during the presentation in an interesting, and if possible, enthusiastic way.

The important thing is to be relaxed. To become more relaxed the key is to prepare well and concentrate on the content, not on your English. Your presentation is not an English examination - your English does not have to be perfect. Be realistic and don’t aim for 100 % accuracy otherwise you will be more worried about your English than about communicating the value of your product / service.

## 1.5 How can I increase my confidence?

You may have had no previous experience in presenting or training. Your boss may have decided that you are the right person to give a demo or training session simply because you are the only person available (and not because you have the right knowledge or the right personality).

If you are not happy with being chosen to give a presentation, demo or training session, you have to work on yourself psychologically. Otherwise the demo may be a disaster both for you and your audience. Here are some strategies that might work for you:

- understand why giving demos and training sessions is important
- decide to believe (even if only temporarily) that what you are presenting is useful
- take on a different persona, i.e. the persona of someone who actually enjoys his / her work and enjoys explaining things
- relax and don't use your level of English as an excuse for doing a bad job
- appreciate that training people can be very rewarding and it might be something that you grow to enjoy

Although you may not be a born presenter, you will probably have one or more of the following qualities:

- an above average knowledge and considerable experience in your field
- a passion about what you do
- an ability to explain difficult technical things clearly
- an ability to find the exact answer to questions from the audience
- a professional look
- a sense of humor

Try to use these qualities to give yourself confidence and to show the audience that you know what you are talking about even if your English is not perfect.

A good presentation requires many skills that can only be learned over time. If in the past you did a bad presentation very probably it was because you had not prepared sufficiently. When you then have to do your second presentation you will have that bad memory of the first. It is important to put that bad experience behind you. Concentrate on getting it right the second time by preparing good content and then practicing it in front of as many people as you can.

## 1.6 What are the dangers of PowerPoint and other presentation software?

If you buy twenty tubes of paint you don't automatically have a painting. Likewise, if you create a set of PowerPoint slides (or slides using any form of template) you don't automatically have a presentation. You just have a set of slides.

A presentation is slides plus a lot of practice.

Try practicing your presentation without using any slides. If you find it difficult, it means you are relying too much on your slides.

PowerPoint templates encourage you to

1. create a series of similar looking slides
2. use bullets on every slide
3. have the same background
4. have a title for each slide

The first three can lead to a very tedious and repetitively visual presentation. There are a limited number of PowerPoint backgrounds, and most audiences will have already seen most of them. Try to invent your own background, or if not use a very simple background color (e.g. blue background with yellow text).

But the fourth, titles, is very useful. Titles are like a map for the audience guiding them through the presentation.

Having similar looking titles (i.e. same color, font, and font size) throughout the presentation should be enough to give it a sense of cohesion and consistency. This means that you can vary the other three - the look, the use or not of bullets, and have a changing background where appropriate.