

Academic Communication

Course purpose

People working in universities across the world recognise the immense importance of effective academic communication in English. This course trains students to give good presentations and uses the opportunity to raise the level of general and scientific language skills. It is suitable for all students who will work in science or education, such as technicians, researchers, teachers and professors.

Course outline

The standard plan is based on a 7-lecture course (with some additional weeks for assessments). This can be modified, by dropping or adding exercises, to fit the timeframe available. Assessments are done by attendance, class participation and presentations.

1. **Introduction.** Teacher and student introductions are done. The course purpose, structure, policies and assessments are outlined. Students are given direction on choosing a paper to present. They must choose one for the next class.
2. **The central idea.** Good and bad presentations are analysed. Students practice extracting and summarising the central idea of their paper. They must prepare a summary for the next class.
3. **Working outlines.** The structure of a good presentation is analysed. Students begin preparation of a working outline and complete it for the next class.
4. **PowerPoints and figures.** The importance of personal and professional impressions is discussed. Good and bad PowerPoints are analysed. Techniques for presenting complex data are considered.
5. **Introductions and Conclusions.** Presentation introductions and conclusions are practiced, discussed and redrafted. Students must prepare a full transcript for the next class.
6. **Effective communication.** Using a simple memory test, the psychology of attention is analysed. Some communication techniques are considered. Presentations are practiced, with common difficulties and remedies discussed.
7. **Final preparation.** Presentations are practiced and guided self-evaluations are performed. Techniques for handling audiences and controlling nervousness are practiced. Presentation schedules are arranged and the marking criteria explained.

(Much of the material for this course was developed by Murray Sherk, currently at USTC)

Review

Students report that this course raises their confidence when speaking English to audiences. By making their presentations clearer and more memorable it has a significant effect on their reputations as researchers and educators, and improves their career prospects.