

2 LEARNING FROM OTHER PEOPLE'S PRESENTATIONS

2.1 TED.com

The best way to begin to learn how to do presentations is to watch and analyse presentations done by other people.

Subsections 2.2-2.6 analyse three presentations that you can download from TED - simply type in the name of the presenter and the title of their presentation.

I will highlight both the good and the bad aspects of these presentations. The idea is that then you can use the same techniques to analyse TED presentations as well as those of your colleagues, and of course your own.

On TED you can download the scripts of the presentations. This is not just useful for helping you to understand the presentation, but also to see how the speech is constructed.

If you are a Business English trainer (see Introduction to the Teacher), then you might find it useful to show extracts of these presentations in your lessons.

2.2 TED example 1) Jay Walker: English Mania

Jay Walker is head of Walker Digital and was named by *Time* magazine as one of the fifty most influential leaders in the digital age. In this 4-minute presentation Walker tells his native English speaking audience why their language has become so important and how it is being learned throughout the world.

LANGUAGE AND SPEED

Let's analyse the opening minute of his speech:

Let's talk about manias. Let's start with Beatle mania: hysterical teenagers, crying, screaming, pandemonium. Sports mania: deafening crowds, all for one idea -- get the ball in the net. Okay, religious mania: there's rapture, there's weeping, there's visions. Manias can be good. Manias can be alarming. Or manias can be deadly.

The world has a new mania. A mania for learning English. Listen as Chinese students practice their English by screaming it.

72 words. 10 sentences. 60 seconds. That's an average of 7.2 words per sentence - much less than 100 words per minute. Jay speaks incredibly slowly and clearly. Is he talking to a group of English learners? No, he is talking to people who speak English as well as he does and could probably still understand him if he spoke three times as fast. Yet Jay chooses to:

- use short sentences
- use simple language
- speak very slowly and clearly

Why? To ensure that his audience does not have to make any effort to understand him. Also, by using short sentences it helps him to:

- remember what he wants to say
- speak clearly without hesitation

Are all Jay's presentations delivered in such a clear way with a slow speed? No. Jay varies his speed according to the importance of what he is saying. In the introductory part of another of his presentations on TED ("Jay Walker's library of human imagination") he speaks far more quickly as in rapid succession he shows the audience a few amazing artifacts from recent history. But when he begins talking about the main topic - the printing press - his voice slows down and takes on a more animated quality. He really wants his audience to understand what he is going to say.

2.2 TED example 1) Jay Walker: English Mania (Cont.)

STRUCTURE

Does Jay launch straight into his topic? No. He introduces the theme i.e. manias, but not the key topic i.e. English. This gives the audience time to

- adjust from the previous speaker to this new speaker
- hear something interesting, relevant, but not crucial
- tune into Jay's voice

It also allows the presenter to settle his nerves.

TRICKS

If you watch Jay's presentations, you may notice two things. One, he doesn't smile much. Two, he has notes. Although he may not be the most charismatic presenter on the planet, he recognizes his own limitations. Even though he doesn't smile a lot, he is still interesting - he packs his presentations with weird and wonderful statistics (but always pertinent). OK, so he can't remember every word he wants to say but he is confident enough to know that it is perfectly acceptable, even at this level of venue, to take a quick look at his notes. Alternatively, in your hand can hold a tablet or mobile phone where you can upload your entire speech / slides (see 9.18).

You will also notice that his slides have no text. They are simply there to remind him what to say, and to help the audience follow what he is saying.

2.3 TED example 2) Aleph Molinari: Let's bridge the digital divide!

Five billion people don't have access to the Internet. Economist Aleph Molinari tells us what we should do about it. Like Jay Walker, Aleph Molinari is not the most dynamic presenter, he doesn't run around the stage entertaining us. But he does know how to inform us and how to bring important data to our attention.

EXAMPLES AND STATISTICS

Aleph immediately starts with concrete examples of victims of the digital divide. He then moves on to some statistics. He shows a slide with the number of people in the world: 6,930,055,154.

Why not 7bn? Because the length and exactness of the number emphasizes firstly the incredible number of people who live on our planet and at the same time that they are individuals. The long number also looks dramatic on the screen. But when he actually mentions the number verbally he says "nearly seven billion people" - there would be no point in reading the exact number. He then gives the number of people who are digitally included, which on the slide appears as 2,095,006,005. What he says is "Out of these, approximately two billion are digitally included, this is approximately 30% of the entire world population, which means that remaining 70% of the world, close to five billion people do not have access to a computer or the Internet .. five billion people, that's four times the population of India".

Aleph's technique is thus to:

1. show a statistic in a simple clear way (i.e. not along with several other distracting statistics)
2. talk about the statistic in three ways (first as a whole number, then as a percentage, then by comparison with India). Aleph thus offers his audience different ways of absorbing the information, his aim being to help them to really understand the true significance of the numbers involved
3. interpret the statistic by saying what the implications are

TEXT, BACKGROUNDS AND FONTS

Aleph's slides have a black background with a yellow font. They are incredibly clear. The majority of his slides that contain text only have one or two words. The slide with the most text, which is his first slide and contains a definition of the digital divide, contains 19 words. At least half his slides are just photographs, which support his speech. Essentially, the information contained on each of his slides can be absorbed in less than two seconds. This means that all the audience can listen to him with 100%

2.3 TED example 2) Aleph Molinari: Let's bridge the digital divide! (Cont.)

of their concentration, rather than some of the audience reading the slides and some listening to him.

CRITICISMS OF ALEPH'S PRESENTING STYLE

I imagine that he is quite introverted. This reveals itself in the fact that he spends too much time (in my opinion) looking at the screen rather than the audience. Although he does try to emphasize his key words, his voice is rather monotonous. The combination of these two factors could lead to the audience losing interest.

However, Aleph compensates for this lack of dynamism by

- having a clear logical structure
- having excellent slides - clear, easy to follow
- being professional

This makes him in the audience's eyes very credible. Although they may not be entertained they will certainly be motivated to follow him and listen to what he has to say. And this also means that although his conclusion in itself lacks much impact (his voice does not sound very impassioned), as a whole his presentation will have a positive impact because he appears to the audience as being totally committed to his project and also very sincere.

2.4 TED example 3) Philippe Starck: Design and destiny

As you can read on his TED biography, Philippe Starck is a well-known French product designer. His designs range from interior designs to mass-produced consumer goods such as toothbrushes, chairs, and even houses. I have chosen to analyse him because he is a non-native English speaker with what most people might consider to be not a very good English accent. He is also the only presenter not to use any slides at all.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE: GRAMMAR, VOCABULARY, PRONUNCIATION

Philippe Starck is worth watching in order to prove to yourself that even if you don't have a good English accent it doesn't necessarily matter. His technique for dealing with his poor English is to immediately draw attention to it in a self-deprecating way by saying: "You will understand nothing with my type of English."

His pronunciation is terrible. At least 20% of his first 100 words contain pronunciation mistakes (e.g. 'ere instead of *here*, zat instead of *that*, the *u* in *usually* pronounced like the *u* in *under* rather than the *u* in *universe*) and he consistently puts the stress on the wrong part of a multi-syllable word (e.g. *comfortable*, *impostor*). He makes a series of grammar mistakes: forgetting the plural *s*, using the wrong part of the verb etc.

But because the audience are interested in what he is saying rather than how he is saying it, his poor English skills are not a problem. In fact if you read the comments on his presentation, not one reference is made to his poor English. Instead many viewers simply write: *Superb! Fantastic! Really the most brilliant talk I've heard on TED.*

However, note that Starck does speak slowly. If he had spoken very fast, this poor accent would probably have interfered with the audience's ability to understand him.

NO SLIDES, GOOD BODY LANGUAGE

Philippe manages to hold his audience's attention for 17 minutes without using a single slide. He is able to do this not just because he is a dynamic person who obviously loves an audience, but also because he has interesting things to say which he presents with a new perspective.

Another technique for retaining attention, is that he moves around the stage. This means that the audience have to follow him with their eyes, and this small bit of physical effort keeps them more alert. In addition, he uses his hands, and often his whole body, to give meaning to what he is saying.

2.5 What can we learn from these three TED presentations?

What these presentations all have in common is that it is clear that the presenters were well prepared. The audience feel that they are being led forward in a logical progression and that the presenter has spent a considerable amount of time practising his / her presentation. This gives each presenter credibility in the eyes of the audience, and also helps to make their presentation memorable.

It is probably these two factors - credibility and memorability - that you should aim at. And you can achieve this through:

- uncomplicated language
- loud, clear, slow voice
- simple slides
- a clear logical structure

Clearly, none of the three presentations have anything to do with business or giving demos. At least not in terms of content. But the factors that I have highlighted (body language, structure, simple slides etc) are nevertheless very relevant to any type of oral presentation.

2.6 The benefits of TED

You can choose the topic of the presentations you want to watch by using TED's search engine, and you can also choose whether to have English subtitles on or not. The subtitles report every single word, and are particularly useful for seeing (not just hearing) how many words a presenter uses in a sentence. This highlights that the shorter the sentence is, the easier it is for the presenter to say, and the easier it is for the audience to understand.

You can see or download a full transcript (called 'interactive transcript') of the presentation in English, plus translations in several other languages. This means that you can note down any useful phrases that the speaker uses that you think you could use too.

By reading the transcript and listening to the presentation at the same time, you can also improve your pronunciation and intonation by trying to imitate the presenter. For more on pronunciation and intonation, see Chapter 6.

2.7 Dragon's Den: learn how to pitch your ideas to venture capitalists

Another great source of presentations is Dragon's Den. This reality show originated in Japan and features entrepreneurs pitching their ideas to venture capitalists (known in the program as 'dragons'). There are versions of this program in over 20 countries worldwide, with several editions in English. For more details of the programs see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragons'_Den. The Wikipedia site explains under the section 'Show format' how the show works and the various 'rules'. This is essential reading in order to get the best out of the show. You can also learn useful tips about presenting, about the dragons themselves etc by consulting the websites of the shows (e.g. bbc.co.uk / programmes).

The English language versions vary considerably. The UK version, produced by the BBC, is the most serious and business-like, and for non-native speakers is probably the easiest to understand. But the Canadian version is also great fun, where the Dragons interact much more with each other and the contestants seem to have whackier ideas.

You can find many of the shows on YouTube, and each version has many series, so there is an infinite amount of material to watch and learn from. However, unlike TED there are no subtitles or transcripts for download.

By watching Dragon's Den you will learn some useful tips for making a sales pitch or presentation. Here are my top five tips in no particular order:

1) YOU ARE AS IMPORTANT AS YOUR IDEA

Basically venture capitalists invest as much in the person (i.e. the presenter) as in the idea. This is very important for you to know as it underlines the importance of how you as a person / personality come across during your demo and presentation. This means that you have to be:

- credible, honest and transparent
- approachable (i.e. potentially easy to work with)
- prepared to listen to what the dragons say, rather than talking over their questions - the dragons all hate presenters who fail to listen carefully (see Point 3 below)
- appropriately dressed (some of the UK dragons seem quite obsessed by the entrepreneur's dress code, one says he would never invest in someone who is 'scruffy')

While they do appreciate entrepreneurs who are enthusiastic or passionate about their product or service, the dragons don't like people who are arrogant or aggressive.

2.7 Dragon's Den: learn how to pitch your ideas to venture capitalists (Cont.)

2) KNOW YOUR FACTS AND PREDICT ALL THE POSSIBLE QUESTIONS THAT THE DRAGONS MIGHT ASK YOU

The dragons are venture capitalists, therefore one of their top priorities is money - how much money has your company made in the last quarter, last three years etc, how much do you estimate it will turn over in the next year etc. Contestants who are unable to answer these questions rarely get an investment.

This highlights the importance of knowing your audience. What are their priorities? What questions are they likely to ask me?

3) LEARN HOW TO LISTEN AND HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

The times when the dragons become the most irritated is when the entrepreneurs interrupt the dragons while they are speaking or making suggestions. This means that when you are explaining something and someone interrupts you and starts talking, you should not continue talking yourself. Try to answer their question calmly and clearly, without showing any signs of irritation. This is particular important when dealing with clients, or with people higher up the hierarchy than you - they will not appreciate your determination to continue talking and may decide that you are impolite or even arrogant.

If however it is clear that the others in the audience wish you to continue, then very politely interrupt the questioner and say that you will be happy to deal with their question in a minute.

4) BE CLEAR AND CONCISE

Contestants only have three minutes to make their initial pitch (a pitch is a rapid presentation giving the essential facts). This means that every word has to add value. And this means that you cannot afford to improvise. You must know exactly what you want to say. To be able to do this, you really need to prepare a script (see Chapter 4).

5) PUT A REALISTIC VALUATION ON YOUR BUSINESS

The dragons never invest in a business that they consider overvalued.

The lesson to be learned here, is that in your presentation or demo, you have to motivate your audience to listen to you. If you say anything that is clearly unrealistic or not viable for your audience, then they will quickly stop listening.

2.8 Get ideas about what to say at the various stages of your presentation: Google IO

If, for example, you are unsure of the best way to introduce yourself or a good way to end your demo, then watch how others have solved these problems. Google IO conferences take place every year, and you can see a variety of presenters from top managers to developers. These people are at the top of their game, so if you copy / adapt their techniques you cannot go wrong.

However, bear in mind that most of these people are technicians, not trained presenters - so even they do not deliver perfect presentations. Hopefully, you should find this reassuring!

These presentations are available on YouTube and elsewhere. Obviously, you can learn similar ideas and techniques from conferences held by Microsoft, Apple and other large companies.

2.9 Learn from Steve Jobs

Steve Job's was considered one of the world's most captivating communicators. There are many articles and presentations on the web that analyse Jobs's techniques. Here are just a few.

<http://www.slideshare.net/asad.taj/steve-jobs-presentation-skills>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RHX-xnP_G5s&feature=related

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ABFW6rv15g&feature=related>

2.10 Analyze other people's slides

There are several sites on the Web where you can share slides, for example:

slideshare.net

myplick.com

authorstream.com/slideshows/

These sites are useful for seeing how other people in similar fields to yours create their slides. Watching these presentations should help you to understand that packing a presentation full of detail is not usually a good approach.

When you have watched five or six presentations on TED (or whatever site), write down what you remember about the content and about the presenter and his / her style. You will be surprised how little you remember about the information that was given. Repeat the same memory exercise a week later and you probably won't even remember how many presentations you watched. Instead, you will remember the impression that the presenter made on you and their style of presenting for much longer.

What this means is that there is no point filling your presentation with descriptions of complex procedures or masses of data, because the audience will simply not remember. What they will remember from that experience is their frustration in not being able to absorb the information that you gave them. Make sure you always give your audience a positive experience.

2.11 Assess other people's presentations

You can learn a lot from the presentations you watch. Use the assessment sheet below to decide which presentation styles you liked and why. Then you can perhaps think of ways to incorporate these aspects into your own presentations.

Also, analyse the audience's reaction. Is the audience attentive? Are you yourself attentive? Notice when and why the presenter starts to lose your attention. If you stop watching, at what point did you stop watching and why?

	THE PRESENTER TENDS TO DO THIS	RATHER THAN THIS
CORE FOCUS	clarifies the main point of the presentation immediately - it is clear to audience why they should listen	the main point only emerges towards the end - audience not clear where the presentation is going
PACE / SPEED	varies the pace i.e. speaks slowly for key points, faster for more obvious information; pauses occasionally	maintains the same speed throughout; no pauses
BODY LANGUAGE	eyes on audience, moves hands, stands away from the screen, moves from one side of the screen to the other	eyes on screen, PC, ceiling, floor; static, blocks screen
STRUCTURE	each new point is organically connected to the previous point	there are no clear transitions or connections
FORMALITY	sounds natural, enthusiastic, sincere	sounds rather robotic and non spontaneous
STYLE	narrative: you want to hear what happened next lots of personal pronouns and active forms of verbs	technical, passive forms
LANGUAGE	dynamic, adjectives, very few linkers (<i>also, in addition, moreover, in particular, etc</i>)	very formal, no emotive adjectives, many linkers
RELATION WITH AUDIENCE	Involves / entertains the audience - thus maintaining their attention	seems to be talking to him / herself not to the audience
TEXT IN SLIDES	little or no text	a lot of text
GRAPHICS	simple graphics or complex graphics built up gradually	complex graphics
ABSTRACT VS CONCRETE	gives examples	focuses on abstract theory
STATISTICS	gives counterintuitive / interesting facts	makes little or no use of facts / statistics
AT THE END	you are left feeling inspired / positive	you are indifferent



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