How to prepare and perform an oral exposition


As a teacher, the most difficult skill to work with at the English language lessons is the speaking. Students are used to follow patterns, to answer to short questions or they just reproduce some speech of the text they have read.

Another problem pupils must deal with is their shyness or the embarrassment they feel while speaking a foreign language mainly because students are not used to talk to an audience or they do not feel confident enough to talk in English.

In this article, a guideline to work with this skill and to improve it is given. The aim is to achieve that students will be able to prepare, to face an oral exposition about a particular topic and they can perform it without any problem. When the students are getting used to this kind of expositions, they will be able to talk in English without noticing.

First of all the teacher together with the student will choose a motivating theme. A good start could be using the topic of Myths and Legends. Why? Because students known many popular legends and myths either classical like the Minotaur legend or the legend of Robin Hood, for example.

Once the pupils have selected a legend, they must brainstorm the topic and write a rough outline about the legend. Then it is time for looking for more information about the topic. It is essential to remember that the exposition only lasts around 5 minutes, so the students have a limited time. Then, they organise the material and write a draft. After that, they summarise the draft into points to write them on a power point which includes visual aids. Later, pupils must rehearse the presentation and get its length right.

Rehearsal is an important part that students must work at home. They can use the power point as visual support of their exposition. In case, they block during some seconds, they can have a look at their cards or the power point but they can not read the whole exposition from the power point. While they are rehearsing, as they will probably do more than one, they get conscious of the length of the exposition; they check their pronunciation, the vocabulary, the intonation and the grammar. The teacher will ask students how many times they have rehearsed at home. If the exposition is not satisfactory, the teacher could give them another opportunity with the condition to rehearse at home till the performance is perfect. It is up to the teacher.

In order to achieve the fluency and coherence in their exposition, it is important that students are familiarised with the topic because they must memorise big quantities of information and memory may fail, but they can improvise because they know the topic they are talking about.

When it is the time of their oral presentation, the speakers introduce themselves (although their partners and the teacher know them, but it is necessary so that they see it normal in case one day they may give a speech). Here there are some introductory phrases to fulfil these parts:

Hello! My name is...
Good morning! I am...
Then they will introduce the topic they are going to talk about. The beginning must be a personal anecdote, an experience like the professional orators. Useful phrases:

I plan to speak about...Today I'm going to talk about...
The subject of my presentation is...The theme of my talk is...
I've been asked to give you an overview of...I have chosen to speak about this because...
I was asked to speak about X because...

Then they justify why they have selected a specific legend or myth. They can say:

What I would like to do today is to explain/ to illustrate/ to give you the essential background information on/ to outline/ to have a look at...
What I want my listeners to get out of my speech is...
If there is one thing I'd like to get across to you today it is that...

As the topic chosen is about Myths and Legends, they must follow a narrative text structure or they can introduce the topic using the inverted pyramid of the journalistic style (who, what, when, where, how, why). These same questions can be used at the end of the exposition to check that the audience has been listening carefully to the speech. It is important that they persuade the audience and make their exposition as entertaining, visual and amusing as possible. Useful phrases to start with:

In the first part I give a few basic data.
In the next section I will explain...
In part three, I am going to show...
In the last part I would like/want to give a practical example...

While the students are explaining the topic, they will mention examples; they will rephrase or emphasize some ideas; they can refer to what an expert says, as well as to refer to common knowledge. Here there are some useful phrases:

An example of this can be found...
To illustrate this...
For example/instance,
Now let's take an example.

In other words,
Another way of saying the same thing is...
That is to say...

What is important to remember.
What is very significant is...
I'd like to emphasize/stress/highlight the fact/the importance of...
What we need to focus on...

According to...
In the words of...
I quote the words of...
As X says in his book...

As you all may well know...
As you are probably aware (of)...
It is generally accepted that...

Finally, the conclusion must be a summary of the purpose of the topic chosen and a reference to the audience. Here the student can use the following expressions:

To summarize/sum up
In conclusion/short
So that concludes my overview
What I've tried to show in this part...

Then it is time to questions either to the audience or the audience to the speaker.
Once the exposition is performed, it is time to say the mark. While the exposition was in progress, the teacher was taking notes on two main aspects. The first makes reference to language aspects like: Fluency, coherence, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical points. The second to the content of the exposition, the performance of it and the power point. What do we mean by the first aspect?

Fluency is the speed of the speech, the length of answer and pausing correctly while Coherence is the ability to expand the answer, add relevant detail to explain or illustrate the speech, connect the sentences using connectors, anaphora and cataphora items.

A good pronunciation supposes: basic word pronunciation, linked speech sounds, stress and intonation.

In vocabulary use, the point is to know if the students use enough words to make themselves understood clearly, using synonyms, or paraphrasing what they mean when the words or concept do not come to their mind in the moment of speaking.

As regards to grammar, it is very crucial not to make grammatical mistakes. But about all, using a wide range of grammatical structures show knowledge of the language and it is really valued. Students must not be limited to simple sentences all the time. At the beginning of the course, this may be inevitable but as the course goes on, the level of grammatical structures is higher and the students must use all the possible structures seen at the classroom.

As regards to the second aspect it is valued the content of the exposition, the power point and the performance of the speaking activity as well. For example, they should maintain eye contact with the other students, they can not interrupt their exposition (by telling swore words); the posture, the gestures they make are also taken into account.

It is crucial that they look confident and enthusiastic. They must smile to the audience. In case of being really nervous. Nervousness is shown in voice. Students mumble, sometimes are inaudible, and their voice can be monotonous so, they should breathe deeply, think of controlling their nerves. Holding a pen in a hand will give the students confidence and calm while doing gesture. If their knees knock, they ought to stand behind a table. But above all, they have to think that it is an exercise to improve their English.

When they are using visual aids. It is important they point the photo or picture they are talking about. They can not stand in front of the visual aid and they must leave time to the audience to look at it, so they can use a pointer to direct the viewers' attention. We must recall them to use the pointer and the photos when they are appropriated not just because they are funny or pretty.

The teacher may have a grading criteria from 0 to 10 in the different points of the language aspect and add them to the second aspect, that is also graded from 0 to 10. The marks may diverse depending on the students, nevertheless, the main objective is that the students are able to express themselves clearly and successfully.

Finally, We include a summary of some useful expressions to fulfil this activity:

First of all as you (may) know
May I begin by in other words
I would like to start by draw your attention to
to point out/as far as this indicates
as you can see in this...on the one hand/ on the other hand
on the contrary on the whole
in this particular/specific case to sum up/to conclude
finally in conclusion

Bibliografía

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