

# ADAPTING PRESENTATIONS TO AN ONLINE SETTING FOR ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL PURPOSES

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## INTRODUCTION

At Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), all freshman students take a class entitled *Freshman English*. In the Freshman English class, an orientation unit is required for the first unit. In the orientation unit, there are academic and social goals that should be met. Academically, the students are introduced to six core learning processes, providing them with a variety of multimodal learning experiences which are revisited in each proceeding unit. Socially, the Freshman English orientation unit is used to create a positive learning environment for the students. Most importantly, a significant emphasis is placed on creating bonds within the Freshman English classes through numerous games, discussions, and other get-to-know-you activities. The Freshman students in the English department of KUIS attend Freshman English class four times a week together. In addition, the same group of students takes *Foundational Literacies* and *English for Academic Purpose* together as well. Because the students are together so much in class and are required to work together in discussions, classwork, and project work, getting to know each other well is also an important necessity for the Freshman English class. With the migration of classes online due to the 2020 pandemic, significant adjustments needed to be made to ensure that these academic and social goals are met. This article will explain how I adapted the final project for the orientation unit.

## PREVIOUS YEARS' PROJECT

For the past three years, the final project was a *useful thing* presentation in which the students must present one useful thing to the class. A former KUIS teacher shared this presentation idea with me as an effective introductory presentation for the orientation unit. The content of this presentation is divided into three parts: a description of the useful thing (including details and history), why the student chose this useful thing and its importance, and how to use it.

For many students, this presentation is the first time they have given an English presentation. Therefore, the main goal of this project is to introduce the students to the basics of giving a presentation, specifically following a logical presentation structure, making notecards, and developing effective presentation skills. First, the students learn how to organize a presentation with an introduction, content section, and conclusion. Then, the students learn about making notecards instead of writing a script. Lastly, the students learn about presentation skills including body language, gestures, eye contact, posture, and voice. While the content is important and assessed, the main focus is on organizing and delivering an effective presentation.

## ONLINE AFFORDANCES

There are many benefits and constraints for conducting classes in the online environment, both academically and socially. At KUIS, Zoom is the platform that the synchronous online classes utilized, so it was necessary to find a way to adapt this presentation using Zoom.

Academically, Zoom is a sufficient, while not perfect, platform for online classes. Specifically, it has several useful functions that make giving a presentation online doable and even effective. In terms of giving a presentation, the *Share Screen* feature (called *Share Content* on an iPad) allows participants to share their screens with the class. Therefore, a class participant can easily share his/her screen and present a slideshow to the class. In fact, once the students are familiar with the platform, it becomes quite easy to give a presentation and to progress from one student's presentation to the next.

On the other hand, there are numerous limitations for adapting this presentation to the online environment. It is very difficult to include and assess presentation skills other than voice while giving a presentation on Zoom. Many students have limited space and are sitting in their bedrooms at a desk, on their beds, or on the floor; some are in a common area of their house or apartment. Therefore, it is not feasible for them to stand up in a room with enough space to give the presentation, making it difficult to assess presentation skills. Even if there were enough room, the students would have to stand back from their computer or tablet in order to display body language, gestures, eye contact, and posture. If they stood back, then the students would be farther away from the microphone making hearing difficult. In addition, they would have to step forward to touch the screen or key each time they wanted to change the slide. Also, although there is a camera function in Zoom, many students wanted to keep the cameras off while presenting a slideshow because they must hold and look down at their iPads, which creates an awkward camera angle. While Zoom can be an effective tool to give presentations, it presents limitations if the goal is to mimic a traditional presentation in front of an audience with a screen projection.

One of the biggest challenges for online learning is the limitation of socialization. With online learning, the students do not have the regular, on-campus, day-to-day bonding activities. For example, it is difficult for them to chat before or after classes and during free periods, eat lunch together, study together, help each other with assignments, and attend school events (specifically beginning-of-the-year events that are normally held for freshman students on campus). Missing these opportunities significantly reduces the amount that the students can get to know each other, their personalities, their thoughts, and opinions. Class bonding and getting to know each other well is a very important goal for the Freshman English class since the students must take many classes together. Online learning presents a limitation to this as the students are isolated from each other and stuck in their houses all over Japan in their own workspaces with the internet connection that is available to them.

## **PRESENTATION ADAPTATIONS**

Due to the limitations of the online environment, I needed to adapt the final presentation for the orientation unit. I made significant changes to the presentation's focus and content.

Before even considering the content, it was clear that I would have to change the presentation's focus. The primary learning outcomes from the useful thing presentation were for students to be able to positively give a presentation in front of an audience using effective body language, gestures, and voice; demonstrate an understanding of a logical presentation structure; and create notecards that could guide them without having a script. My main goal was for the students to experience what it is like to give a presentation in front of an audience in-class and to do so effectively.

Having that in-class experience would not be possible, so I focused mainly on voice and omitted the other presentation skills. Regarding the voice component of presentation skills, in the useful thing presentation, I usually focus only on projecting your voice so that everyone can hear. In an online setting, I expanded the vocal components to include speed, fluency, clarity, and intonation. Before the presentation, we analyzed video clips of presentations and discussed which speakers spoke loudly, clearly, naturally, and enthusiastically. We also reviewed and practiced sentence stress. Lastly, I introduced intonation and we practiced shadowing different YouTube videos. While I usually introduce these voice skills later in the semester, this online situation presented me with the opportunity to introduce these skills earlier.

Another big difference was the addition of slides to the presentation. Usually, I do not introduce making slides until the second unit, which begins about five or six weeks into the 15-week semester. However, because everything was online and the students were somewhat familiar with using Google Slides, I thought it was a good opportunity to introduce creating a slideshow for a presentation earlier than I normally would. By 'somewhat familiar' I mean that the students had edited various slideshows that I had created and shared with them, but they had not created their own slideshows.

Lastly, and most importantly, I changed the content of the presentation from useful things to *my life*. Through conversations with the students, it was clear to me that they still did not know each other that well towards the end of the orientation unit, especially compared to previous years. Therefore, I thought it was a good opportunity for the students to present about themselves and share more details about their lives with their classmates. While the useful thing presentation is a satisfactory presentation for the orientation unit, it does not reveal very much about the students themselves.

In the new presentation, I wanted the students to discuss different points about their lives. I expanded on a presentation idea that another KUIS instructor shared. She was using a presentation in the orientation unit entitled, *my first few weeks as a university student*. That presentation focused more on the students' *present* lives, so I thought that I could adapt that and include *past* and *future* and make it a presentation about the students' lives. For the past section, students could include any general information they wanted such as experiences, high school activities, etc. For the present section, the students had to discuss how they had been impacted by the 2020 pandemic and how high school and university were different. For the future section, the students had to tell their goals for the year and how the goals are related to their future dream. By adjusting the content, students could share much more about their personal lives and hopefully get to know each other better.

## **RESULTS & REFLECTIONS**

Overall, I think I was able to accommodate this presentation well to the online setting. I was able to make adjustments to the outcomes that better utilized the available online affordances. I could hopefully create an opportunity for students to get to know more about their peers. The students shared a lot about themselves and highlighted various aspects of their lives that was new information for their classmates. I feel that this presentation met my expectations for using it as a tool to help the classmates become closer as a group by learning much more about each individual.

Nonetheless, it was not without some issues. First, there were still many students who read a script. In the future, additional in-class practice of small sections of the presentation multiple times with a partner or small group may help the student become more familiar with the content and discourage them to read. Another problem was that most content in the present section was very similar without much variation between presentations. On the one hand, the present content was a bit repetitive, especially considering the differences in the content in the past and future sections from all the students. On the other hand, it could have been beneficial for the students to hear the same concerns and issues from the other students to reinforce the idea that 'we're all in this together,' even though they are all isolated from one another.

## **CONCLUSION**

In the future, I would like to continue doing an adaptation of this presentation. On-campus, combining the focus on presentation skills from the useful thing presentation and the content of the my life presentation could create a good final project for the orientation unit. In an online setting, there should be more focus and practice on giving a presentation as opposed to reading a script. Adapting this presentation to an online setting and changing the content to reflect the current situation, I believe that I was able to create a better sense of togetherness within the class while still teaching the students how to create a presentation.