

MEDIA PRESENTATIONS: ADAPTED FOR EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING

Amanda Yoshida

Kanda University of International Studies

INTRODUCTION

My university has a required English course for second-year students, the objective of which is to expose students to a variety of forms of media and encourage them to think critically about the form and the message of the medium. This paper will discuss a specific assignment, the Media Presentation (MP), that my students do each semester. First, I will describe what this assignment entailed pre-2020 pandemic emergency remote teaching (ERT), and then I will explain how I adapted the assignment for this semester.

MEDIA PRESENTATIONS PRE-2020 PANDEMIC

The MP is not a required component of the course, and not all teachers include the MP in their course syllabi. Those who do include it tend to approach it differently. Initially, it was introduced to me as a Media Report in which students write about five different pieces of media throughout the semester. Some teachers of this course incorporate this report in their reflective journals. Some teachers go further by requiring students to choose one of their media reports and develop it into a presentation for the class.

In my classes, my students write five media reports in their reflection journals throughout the semester, choose one media report and develop it into a presentation. The presentation must include the following: introduction, explanation of background and content, clip of media source (in the case of a video), question and answer time, and discussion questions. Once the presenter has given their presentation, they allow time for the students to discuss the content in groups. The groups are then expected to ask questions to the presenter about the content, background, reason for choosing the clip, and so on. Finally, the presenter provides three discussion questions and allows the groups to choose one of the questions to discuss, and after some time, the presenter asks each group to report about their discussions to the class.

This presentation has some important pedagogical elements. First, the students must research and develop a presentation based on a topic of their choice. After seeing an MP demonstration performed by me at the beginning of the semester, they are given a schedule for the semester. The schedule allows for three individual student presentations per MP Day, which are set apart from lesson content days. In this way, I can ensure that all members of the class have a place on the schedule and can prepare accordingly. Second, they are given a 25-minute limit for the presentation and discussion. Finally, they are informed that they will be assessed on their presentation and discussion facilitation skills. For the Q & A portion of the presentation, they must be able to answer the questions or to respond with, "I am not sure of the answer, but I will research and get back to you." For the discussion portion, the presenter is expected to comment on and summarize the reports to conclude the presentation. As their teacher, I am there to provide support and encouragement as needed.

The reason I enjoy the MPs so much is because I feel they have a true pedagogical purpose and are an integral part of their learning development. Most of the students have never presented alone before much less facilitated a class discussion. In choosing topics, they are forced to think about their audience and the appropriateness of the topic. Students tend to put time and effort into these presentations, and I appreciate the opportunity to learn about pieces of media that I am not familiar with.

MEDIA PRESENTATIONS ADAPTED FOR ERT

With the decision to go online this semester, I had to decide whether or not to keep the MPs and, if so, how to adapt them to be done either synchronously or asynchronously. As they are my favorite part of the course, I decided that I wanted to keep them. The question was how.

I organized my course, which has two lessons per week, to have its synchronous lesson on Zoom in the second lesson of the week. The first lesson of the week was reserved for asynchronous tasks, such as homework, small group work, and so on. Initially, I was reluctant to attempt whole class presentations on Zoom because I worried about technical issues, connectivity, and students' anxiety regarding performing for their entire class. We were advised to not spend more than 50% of our class time on Zoom in synchronous lessons, so I needed to spend that time focusing on the coursework. Instead, I decided to make groups of four students and schedule them to come to the asynchronous lesson to perform their MPs and participate in the discussions.

In our orientation unit, the students and I had made some presentations that involved sharing slides and playing video clips. While I could share my screen for slides, I was unable to show video clips with sound. Despite this setback, I imagined that the MPs could be done similarly to how they were done in the classroom with the following adaptations:

1. Four students would present their MPs in one asynchronous lesson.
2. Each MP would be limited to 20 minutes, including the discussion.
3. Slides were to be submitted to Google Classroom before the assigned MP day.
4. I would control the slides to ensure that the content could be shared smoothly.
5. For video-based media, students would have to provide the link in the chat so that we would watch it individually.
6. I would participate in the discussions with the students.
7. I would take notes and evaluate their presentations as usual.
8. I would invite other students to attend class on that day (attendance was optional) and they would be able to participate in the discussion using breakout rooms.

The MPs were scheduled to take place for five weeks in a row from mid-June. I was nervous on the first day of MPs. I questioned whether 20 minutes would be enough time and worried if I would have enough energy to take part in four discussions in a row. I soon found some limitations to my plan, and made the following adjustments, which worked and which I used for the remaining MPs:

1. I could not grade their presentation skills strictly because making eye contact and gestures on Zoom is challenging, and I could not always tell if they were reading a prepared script or not.

2. Because I was controlling the slides and sharing my screen, it sometimes worked better if I also pasted the video links into the chat, but it depended on the students. I had to be flexible about this.
3. For the Q & A portion, I put all students into breakout rooms and let them discuss the content and come up with questions. Meanwhile, the presenter and I chatted about the topic in the main room.
4. The presenter prepared three discussion questions, but due to time constraints, we could only use one, so I asked the next presenter to choose the question.
5. For the discussion portion, I had the presenter lead the discussion, which allowed me to observe and evaluate his/her leadership and discussion skills. These were important skills that we had been incorporating and reflecting on all semester as part of a separate research project I am involved in.
6. For the discussion portion, I turned off my camera and just observed. This served two purposes: it preserved my energy and it allowed them to discuss more freely.

MEDIA PRESENTATIONS FINAL REFLECTIONS

Although I really miss the whole-class atmosphere of experiencing a piece of media together and listening in on all the various discussions, I felt that the adapted MP has some advantages, particularly regarding the discussion portion. Never had I observed their discussions as an isolated group, and I could provide feedback on students' strengths and weaknesses. It helped me understand what issues to address in terms of their roles as discussion leaders or members. Until then, I had been relying on their own self-reporting of their discussions, but this gave me a new perspective. My own observations include the following: some groups discussed topics very seriously while other groups giggled nervously throughout; and while some students could comment on and summarize their group members' comments, it was clearly still a struggle for other students to do so. In addition, it also gave me a chance to talk to students in small groups and one-on-one so I could get to know them better and provide encouragement or praise.

The MPs were fun and worthwhile even though it was tiring for me, and I lost the asynchronous time to prepare lessons, assess assignments or meet with students who needed extra help. The MP presentation in a small group helped students reflect on their own presentation and critical thinking skills, which they wrote about in their reflection journals. I plan to schedule the MPs in the fall semester during the asynchronous time so as observe their progress with presentation skills and discussion facilitation.