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The oral presentation: an EFL teacher's toolkit

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to share some views and practical ideas concerning oral presentation projects in the EFL classroom, especially the English teaching/learning environment in universities in Japan. With reference to relevant literature, I outline some of the benefits these projects can bring to both participants and practitioners and give pedagogical reasons why all learners should be given opportunities to present their work in class. In the context of detailed descriptions of several oral presentation projects, I also discuss some potential pitfalls in having students perform oral presentations and ways to overcome these situations. The key issues here concern the design of projects, supportive frameworks for presenters, tasks for the audience, and assessment.

Overview of the EFL presentation

There are many different types of presentations that learners can give in the EFL classroom. Typically, they involve giving a pre-prepared speech in English to an audience, usually with a time limit. An interesting exception is the poster presentation where the task for the learner is to research a topic and combine organizational and artistic skills to produce a large poster as part of a class exhibition.

While poster presenters should be encouraged to discuss their work in English with visitors to the exhibition, there is no pre-prepared speech. Similarly, students can be asked to present a 5-minute movie sequence. Although there is a speech-giving element, since presenters are required to introduce the movie from which the sequence is taken, the most important part of the task for presenters is to design both a listening comprehension worksheet and post-viewing discussion questions. For a full description of how to set up this project, see Munby (2004).

Despite the exceptions outlined above, the EFL presentation bears similarities to the English speech contest which is famous in Japan in secondary education and in English speaking societies at universities. However, it should be remembered that EFL presentations differ from speech contests in several important ways. First, the primary goal of the EFL oral presentation is not to determine a winner, as it generally is in the speech contest, although I will describe how a competitive element can be introduced for groups rather than individuals in a later section dealing with assessment. Second, EFL presentations can, and indeed should, be part of a broader project framework with pre-presentation and/or follow-up activities. In the course of this paper I will describe some of these activities. Third, EFL presentations are best performed with the support of audio-visual aids such as pictures and posters, or with technology such as Microsoft Powerpoint. Finally, presentation audiences have an important role to play in the EFL classroom, especially in the absence of the intimidating panel of judges in the speech competition.

Reasons for having students give oral presentations in EFL classes

In this section, I shall put forward four ways in which EFL oral presentation projects can promote effective learning and learner development from a theoretical perspective. They concern (i) the development of English speaking skills, (ii) the fostering of learner autonomy and empowerment, (iii) the recognition of individual differences and multiple intelligences, and (iv) performance assessment. To begin with the development of English speaking skills, there is no need to state the case that teachers should design "activities that provide students opportunities for improving oral fluency through interpersonal communication" Murphy (1991, p. 51). The problem is that oral presentation skills in English as a foreign language are not normally associated with the ability to communicate fluently in the language. Indeed, according to the evidence of numerous essays written by students at Hokkai Gakuen University on the subject of international communication in English, the goal for most learners is to be able to communicate informally with people from English-speaking countries. While this "interpersonal" goal clearly has great surface appeal, it is only one aspect of communicative competence. With reference to the 2005 World Language Curriculum Framework, Phillips (2008, p. 95) links foreign or second language communicative goals to oral presentations in the following manner:

"Thus, the Framework of Communicative Modes came into being (*SFLL* 1996: 33), to delineate the '3.1 *Goal Area of Communication*. Communicate in Languages Other than English'. The supporting standards are:

INTERPERSONAL. Students engage in conversations, provide and

obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

INTERPRETIVE. Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

PRESENTATIONAL. Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics".

Viewed in this light, if teachers focus exclusively on interpersonal communication at the expense of the presentational mode, the result may be that learners fail to develop an important element of their communicative competence. North (2011, p. 8), in discussing ways to implement the Common European Framework of Reference, comments that: "Valid assessment requires the sampling of a range of relevant discourse. For speaking, this normally means combining interaction (spontaneous short turns) with production (prepared long turns)". The oral presentation is, in effect, a prepared long turn. Those involved in the assessment of speaking skills in high stakes tests of English are also keenly aware of this situation. For example, part of the speaking component of the IELTS test requires students to prepare and deliver a short speech. One such task that appears online in the IELTS official guide for test-takers (Part 2) is:

"You will have to talk about the topic for 1 to 2 minutes. You have one minute to think about what you are going to say. You can make some notes if you wish.

Describe a teacher who has greatly influenced you in your education.

You should say:

1. where you met them
2. what subject they taught
3. what was special about them
4. explain why this person influenced you so much".

One could choose not to require students to perform such tasks because they are the preserve of higher level students who do not generally exist at most universities in Japan. The alternative view is that "long turn" discourse skills should be developed alongside conversation skills at the earliest or lowest levels of proficiency. Nevertheless, one cannot fail to notice that most ELT course books for elementary and lower intermediate students do not include such tasks. Indeed, most major ELT publishers avoid the topic of oral presentations altogether. I was astonished to find that there is very little written about how to set up and assess presentations in EFL teaching practice handbooks. To take one example, in the Oxford Resource Books for Teachers series, with 31 titles focusing on a variety of topics including *Newspapers* and *Teenagers*, there is no handbook about presentations. One encouraging exception to this trend takes the form of two new EFL classroom textbooks by Steve Gershon called *Present Yourself 1* and *Present Yourself 2*. As the name of the books suggest, these titles gently prepare lower level students for the giving of a series of short presentations on a variety of familiar and accessible topics.

The second reason for promoting the inclusion of oral presentations in English courses concerns the development of learner autonomy. The goal here is, in the words of Mizuki (2003) to help "students become learner-independent rather than teacher-dependent" (p. 144). Prioritizing learner autonomy involves fostering a number of positive character-

istics, strategies, or attributes in the learner. Many of these hinge upon training learners to perform tasks which do not involve discrete language skills. In some cases, it may simply involve providing opportunities for learners to train themselves to perform tasks such as learning how to use computer applications like Powerpoint. With oral presentations, taking advantage of these opportunities is closely linked to, or based on, the conceptualization of the classroom as a community, a forum for the sharing of ideas, or an arena for student collaboration. The development of learner autonomy therefore places an emphasis on learner empowerment and the building of self-confidence and "hands-on" motivation. Allowing learners to develop the content of their presentations, or even choose the topic, is therefore a vital part of this process.

With reference to English education in universities in Hong Kong, this points Asian learners towards a learning environment where they are "required to make radical changes in their learning styles as they move from secondary to Western-modelled tertiary level education" (Bankowski, 2010, p. 187). Bankowski also points out that, "at the outset of tertiary study, Hong Kong students are unaccustomed to carrying out individualistic, research-type work" (p. 187). This research-type work is often involved in the gathering of information on a topic for a presentation. She attributes much of the learning style challenge in the Hong Kong university system to the prevalence of silence and passivity in secondary schooling in the former British colony. According to Bankowski, this custom of silence and passivity stems from Buddhist and Confucian traditions in Hong Kong and applies equally to the learning environment in Japan. Takanashi (2004) suggests that the high value placed on receptive skills in Japanese

education may be a factor contributing to feelings of awkwardness in classroom spoken interaction in English. This said, it is also possible to argue that the Confucian tradition does value creativity, an important feature of oral presentation planning and performance. Added to this, one could say that it is the influence of high stakes grammar-translation tests in English secondary education in North-east Asian countries that produces students who do not respond well, at least initially, to invitations to present individual work. Whatever the causes, a culture of silence and passivity may also represent an obstacle to both teacher and student in the staging of classroom presentations. It is therefore an issue I shall return to in connection with discussion of ways to provide supportive environments for presentations.

In sum, oral presentations allow for learner empowerment in a cultural environment where the learner may neither be accustomed to, nor desire, power. Alternatively put, the oral presentation, while it may require learner independence, may force the learner away from the comfort of teacher dependence and demand the immediate building of self-confidence in students who have none to begin with. In this scenario, requiring a student to perform a presentation in class could merely be placing her, and her weaknesses, under the spotlight. In contrast, Dias (2000), on the subject of autonomy in Japan, takes the view that presentation projects should be packaged as interesting invitations rather than threats. The fact of the matter is, unless there is a shift away from a focus on English purely as a system, particularly a written one, learners may never fulfil their potential in communicative competence in the language. Indeed, the following two reasons point us back in the direction of the promotion of learner autonomy and Western values in education.

The third reason for promoting the inclusion of oral presentations in English courses concerns individual differences. Schmidt-Fajlik (2004) notes that "multiple intelligence (MI) has been described as an important way to address individual differences in the language classroom". Based on theories of multiple intelligence, or the notion that there may be considerable diversity in what learners are good at, oral presentations allow opportunities for some learners to perform well in areas where others do not. In other words, if we base our foreign language courses and assessment exclusively on pencil and paper activities and tests, and gear them towards learner ability to produce correct language, we are exploring a very limited range of learner capability. In this situation, or in courses with no oral presentations, a learner's special talent for attracting the attention of an audience, or lack of it, can pass unnoticed.

The fourth reason for including the oral presentation as a component of an EFL course concerns assessment. From a practical point of view, when observing an oral presentation, a teacher is provided with an excellent opportunity for making a detailed assessment of a learner's performance. The quality of this performance will depend not only on the learner's speaking and organizational skills, but also on the amount of effort a learner has invested in preparation. Put bluntly, a simple presentation task can require learners to put in up to 5 hours of work into a 5 minute performance that can be assessed in real time, in the classroom. Further, it is extremely difficult for a learner to disguise lack of effort and performance skills in this test-like situation. However, it has to be remembered that a teacher's assessment of learner performance is not necessarily the most important one. Larsen-Freeman (1986) links self-assessment to paths to autonomy:

"Students need to become independent, self-regulated learners. Self-assessment contributes to learner autonomy" (p. 163). Further, Mizuki (2003) states that it is important to "encourage students to reflect on their performances so that they can improve their presentations" (p. 145). This kind of learner reflection is also an important part of the development of learner autonomy. Reflections on presentations often appear in learner diaries, such as: "my presentation about my language learning history was not so good because of my small vocabulary" (Barfield, 2003, p. 56). Beside teacher assessment and learner self-assessment, peer assessment can also be a powerful teaching/learning tool and frameworks for these shall be discussed in a later section.

In sum, reasons for considering requiring students of all levels to give presentations in English include the following. First, it is probably necessary to develop "long turn", prepared discourse skills in our learners. This is because it helps develop important elements of communicative competence that are generally not practiced in, or even related to, the more common "interpersonal" or conversation mode. Second, presentations can be an important driving force in the development of learner autonomy. Third, in consideration of individual differences in language learning, presentations allow for a broader perspective on learner competence and performance than traditional pencil and paper language tests. Finally, they establish excellent conditions for teacher, peer, and self- assessment.

Potential pitfalls

Before beginning to describe some practical ways to reap the benefits of oral presentations, it is important to consider some of the

potential pitfalls that may arise and defeat the purpose and promise of the exercise. These pitfalls may even constitute: "Reasons for not doing oral presentations in the EFL classroom in Japan". Bearing in mind the risks involved with the Japanese culture of silence and passivity that have been outlined in the previous section, most of the key elements of the worst case scenario can be summarized according to the following three observations from the literature. First, regarding classroom presentations in Japan, Chiu (2004) observes: "In my past experience .... usually the presenters stumbled through their long and formally written presentation speeches, while the rest of the class would try hard to stay awake". Second, regarding presentations in Hong Kong, Bankowski (2010) writes: "With the exception of a few students, most appeared nervous and very reliant on their notes, making eye contact with others only occasionally and reading for much of the time" (p. 191). Once again, she could have been writing about Japan. The third problem is: "the wording of the presentations was beyond that of their written English abilities as well, suggesting that the work presented was not their own" (Bankowski, 2010, p. 192). In other words, the key problems, or situations that require practical solutions, are that presenters may download text from the internet which neither they nor the audience understand, print it out, and then read it out nervously to a bored audience. The following sections deal with the three cornerstones of the EFL teacher's toolkit in oral presentations: (i) task and preparation, (ii) classroom management on presentation day, and (iii) assessment.

Presentation tasks and preparation: some standard models

Oral presentation tasks or projects usually begin with an idea for

a theme, or set of related themes, and/or a specific preparation format. As mentioned earlier, in the absence of adequate literature on the subject of projects that lead to presentations in mainstream ELT publishing, it may be necessary to access alternative idea pools and resources. Many of the ideas for my own projects have come from three sources: journals such as *The Language Teacher* and *The Internet TESL Journal*, fellow practitioners, and the muse. Projects can be roughly classified according to the degree of freedom or choice given to the presenter. In a nutshell, students can either: (i) be allowed complete freedom to present on any subject they like or (ii) select the content within the framework of a pre-determined theme. While option (i) guarantees that presenters will be interested in the subject they are presenting - an important factor in harnessing motivation and allowing for autonomy - option (ii) is probably preferable in that they allow for some theme-based harmony in the class and offer the possibility of organizing presenters into theme-based groups. Nevertheless, a certain amount of freedom or choice can still be enjoyed by presenters within the framework of this option. Problems may arise if the students do not verify the subject or content of their presentations with the teacher before presentation day. For example, to develop and explore the theme of festivals covered in a textbook unit, and practice the language normally associated with describing festivals, I asked a group of 15 students to research, individually, a festival of their choice. It was unfortunate that no less than 3 students had chosen St. Valentine's Day as their theme. However, provided that no presentation is about the same festival, this is, in my experience, a good topic especially in the context of a cultural course, such as British studies. In other ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses, topics can be geared towards the specific purpose of the course. In an English for Pharmaceutical

Science course reported by Munby (2002), one task for students is to research and present about a drug. In general English courses, aside from festivals, the following are also recommended as option (ii) topics where students focus on one of their choice: famous people, famous cities, food, travel and musicians. For a brief account on how to organize presentations on countries, see Swain (1996). For festivals, see Chiu (2004). For travel, see Fast (2010).

For option (ii), where the theme is selected by the teacher, I highly recommend the following procedure. In this project, each student researches, prepares and performs an oral presentation about an endangered species following a procedure that can be applied to any project. To begin with, in order to give the students an idea of what is expected of them, it is advisable for the teacher to give an example presentation to the class before presentation day. I use the example of the *Iriomote Yamaneko* (Iriomote wild mountain cat) and give my example presentation using an A4-size presentation poster complete with pictures and key words (see Appendix 1). It is best to do this by projecting the poster onto a screen. If you don't have a projector, you can make a large poster, or simply distribute copies of the poster before the presentation. They will eventually need a copy anyway as a model for their own posters. There are three reasons for having the students make A4 size posters; each of these reasons show how the poster can help make the presentation more effective. The first is that it provides the students with a model to follow, thereby allowing them an opportunity to structure their presentation in a similar way if they wish. In the case of endangered species, the presentation is organized along the following lines: size, geographical distribution, food, number surviving in the wild, reasons for the species being endangered, and extra notes.

The second reason is to counter problems listed in an earlier section in this paper entitled "Potential pitfalls", namely reading from notes and failure to make eye contact with the audience. In this way, the posters play a supportive role by reducing the memory burden on the presenter who may have to include a large number of facts in the presentation. The third reason is that the posters facilitate communication of the presenter's message to the audience.

Having established the parameters of the task, the next decision to be taken is whether to divide the students into groups of 3 or 4 for collaborative presentations or devote class time to individual stand-alone, or self-contained presentations. With the endangered species project, the presentations are of the stand-alone variety. I assign, or allow students to choose, one different endangered species each from the list below.

Japan	Africa	India	North America	Europe	Asia
1. Japanese Otter	5. Cheetah	9. Tiger	13. Sea Otter	17. Iberian Lynx	21. Giant Panda
2. Japanese Giant Ibis	6. Mountain Gorilla	10. Ganges River Dolphin	14. Gray Wolf	18. Golden Eagle	22. Orangutan
3. Ryukyu Flying Fox	7. White Rhinoceros	11. Snow Leopard	15. Steller Sea-lion	19. Ibex	23. Komodo Dragon
4. Japanese Crane	8. Gazelle	12. Dhole	16. Bald Eagle	20. Polar Bear	24. Dugong

However, these endangered species are grouped regionally (e.g. Japan, Africa, etc.) so that students can perform their presentations in groups according to a special format to be described in the next section. With collaborative presentations, groups -with 3 or 4 students in each- present on different aspects of the same theme. In other words, a class

of 18–24 can be divided into 5 or 6 groups, each with its own theme. In my Intermediate Topics (British Studies) course, each presents on one of the following: food, festivals, musicians, famous people, London, and Scotland. Having established what the students will be presenting on, whether they will be grouped or presenting individually, and what the time limits will be, the final step of the preparation stage is to issue the following rules or guidelines: (i) they must make their own A4-size presentation poster, (ii) they must not use any extra notes, or write anything on the back of their posters, and (iii) they should give Japanese translations for any infrequent English words that they do not expect their classmates to know.

Presentation tasks and preparation: alternative models

In this section, I shall describe some alternatives to the above models. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is possible to introduce an element of choice in the project by giving the students an opportunity to give presentations on an endangered species which they have selected. I shall now describe how to introduce choice into a project on famous painters. This begins by taking in a set of postcard size reproductions of some famous paintings by several world famous artists, such as Picasso, Renoir, Van Gogh, and da Vinci. Students then discuss their reactions to the paintings. In this way, as Kern points out, "students develop a curiosity about the painting — who painted it, when, who the depicted people are, what else the painter painted, what impressionism is, and so on — an inquisitiveness that they more seldom exhibit when art is presented through a teacher lecture" (p. 376). Having orchestrated interest in the paintings, the students can each select a famous artist to research for a presentation. As with the

format reported in the previous section, it is also necessary for the teacher to do an example presentation with an AV including an example of a painting by the artist.

A further option is for students, either in groups or individually, to report the results of surveys conducted outside the classroom on a set of topics related to the lifestyle of university students including: part-time work, movies, music, and club activities. The surveys take the form of questionnaires — with 7 to 10 items — fielded to 30–50 respondents. Results of the questionnaire form the backbone of the presentation. It is important to allow, and even encourage, students to suggest their own topics for surveys. A more detailed description of the procedure is reported in Holst et al (2001). Since this publication is no longer in print, interested colleagues are welcome to ask me for a copy.

Classroom management on presentation day

In the previous section, I described some ways in which teachers can establish supportive frameworks to help students prepare effective presentations. I explained how posters can be used to avoid a potential pitfall where presenters read from notes. In this section and the one which follows, I discuss ways in which the remaining pitfalls can be avoided. These pitfalls concern nervous presenters and bored audiences. Before explaining strategies for avoiding these twin pitfalls, I feel it is necessary to offer an important piece of advice for fellow practitioners who have not learned it already. It is unwise to mark the final lesson of a course as presentation day. In my experience, students who wish to avoid the friendly invitation to present at the end of term absent themselves from class. In other words, it is best to

arrange presentations mid-term together with a reminder that the friendly invitation will remain open to them in the following class if they are unable to attend on the designated day.

To return to the theme of the pitfalls, it may not be possible to reduce a presenter's nervousness completely. Indeed, a certain amount of adrenalin is probably necessary to help the student rise to the performance challenge. However, in my experience, presenter nervousness is often a product of poor or insufficient preparation and it is worth pointing this out to students. According to Kondo & Ying-Ling (2004), a combination of relaxation techniques and "positive thinking e.g. imagining oneself giving a great performance, trying to enjoy the tension" (p. 258) may help students perform better.

However, there are some practical ways in which teachers can minimize presenter nervousness. Choosing the group format, where students give presentations as part of a group, instead of individually, may help reduce nerves. Further, having the audience move as close as possible to the presenter in the classroom, by moving all chairs away from desks and set at the front, may have a positive effect on reducing tension (and keeping the audience awake). However, if stage fright is deemed to be a major problem, the best way to avoid the problem is to remove students from the podium altogether. According to Murphy (1991) "ESL speakers at lower levels of proficiency will probably feel more comfortable when they are provided with opportunities for expressing themselves in dyads and small groups since these formats are less intimidating than ones that require individual students to take turns speaking in front of an entire class" (p54). Tomei (2001) describes an ingenious "rotating presentation" format. In the first half

of the lesson, half of the groups are presenters and set up in different corners of the classroom while the remaining groups play the role of small, mobile audiences. Each student in each group presents on their endangered species, for example. In this way, there are 3 or 4 presentations happening simultaneously in different corners of the room. After each group finishes, the audience groups move around to listen to the next group. In the second half of the lesson, the presenting groups become audiences and the process is repeated. Thus, each group repeats their presentations 3 or 4 times which maximizes student talking time and minimizes participant fear of speaking in front of large groups. I use a kitchen timer to control proceedings.

The remaining pitfall concerns the potential for bored audiences. In my experience, the audience may not be bored at all; students may simply not pay attention to the presenters because they are absorbed in preparing for their own presentations. A good way to avoid this is to have all students place their posters or notes on the desk at the front of the class, or under their chairs. However, the best way to avoid the problem of audience boredom is by giving them a listening or peer assessment task to complete. This brings us to the final subject of this paper.

Assessment

In this section, I shall introduce some procedures and rubrics for peer-assessment, self—assessment, and assessment by the teacher. To begin with peer assessment, according to Brew (2011), it is worth bearing in mind that "[peer] assessment practices should be carefully targeted to the requirements of the learning and that no assessment

model is universally applicable" (p. 34). The peer-assessment model I employ for oral presentations is relatively simple. The reason for this is that the peer assessment task should not be too complicated or time-consuming to complete in the context of short presentations. For the group format, I copy and distribute copies of the following form.

Presentation topic _____

How do you rate each member's English speaking and presentation skills?

Give a score by circling a number 1-5 (1= terrible >5= excellent)

Names	Comments
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5
	1 2 3 4 5

How good was this presentation? Circle 1-5 1 2 3 4 5

Comments

At the end of the class, I collect the completed forms and distribute them to the groups so that they can read them. If there is time, a competitive element can be introduced by inviting each group to sum their group scores (How good was this presentation? Circle 1-5) to determine a winning group. I collect the completed assessment forms at the end of the session and compare them with my own assessment notes.

The teacher may, however, prefer a more detailed evaluation form.

Ideally this form should reflect aspects of presentation performance which feature in comments provided on the peer assessment form. Below, I list some examples to illustrate the quality and variety of peer comments written on peer-assessment forms collected from students after a presentation project in a course on British culture.

Peer-assessment feature	Example comment from peer and [topic]
	[Topic: London]
Content	I learned about London more
Presentation skills	Everyone looks at students. Very good!
Presentation skills	funny
Preparation	prepared enough
Speaking skills	the voice is easy for listening
Content	story was good
Content	story was boring
Presentation skills	giving quiz was nice
Presentation skills	they cooperated each other
Content/preparation	It is so interesting presentation. Yuta's speech is so active, but I feel lack of prepare
	[Topic: Festival]
Speaking skills	she stammers many words
Preparation	she just read a paper
Preparation/content	Photos made me excited
Preparation/presentation skills	use of whiteboard was good
Speaking skills	Your English and expression is understandable
Presentation skills	you should be up your face
Speaking skills	you should speak more fluently
Speaking skills/preparation	hard to understand, only reading
	[Topic: Scotland]
Preparation	His presentation was too long
Preparation/content	a lot of difficult words
Speaking skills	I thought his speaking need intonation
Speaking skills	the voice is dismal
	[Topic: English food]
Preparation	Two people talked about same thing. It's not good
Content	almost good, but a little too much information
Content	I learned about English food I didn't know

Preparation/Content/Speaking skills	I feel a little longer, but presentation content is very good and it is easy to understand
	[Topic: Music]
Preparation	It was good that they investigated about music in detail

It was encouraging to find that there is a near perfect match between the elements or features of peer- assessment listed above (preparation, presentation skills, speaking skills and content) and the most detailed teacher's evaluation rubrics for assessing EFL learner presenters that I encountered in the literature (King, 2002; Otoshi & Heffernen, 2008). For the purposes of my own assessment of presenters, I use the following, more detailed form for individual presenters.

Name:	Comments
Preparation	1 2 3 4 5
Presentation skills	1 2 3 4 5
Speaking skills	1 2 3 4 5
Content	1 2 3 4 5

The same form could be used, or adapted, for self-assessment, although I have not tried this yet. It should probably include a comment box to answer the question: "How could I improve this presentation?"

Follow-up activities

It may also be a good idea to introduce a follow-up activity after a presentation project. In a follow-up activity to the endangered species project, the students assume the role of the same endangered species that they researched and write an essay detailing the story of their lives (and deaths) in the first person. See Appendix 2 for an example essay which I give to the students. As a teacher, I found my

students' essays to be much more interesting to read than most other writing tasks.

Conclusion

I conclude this paper with three points. First, there is one way in which these presentation projects, as I describe them, differ from the "real life" presentations that teachers attend at conferences such as JALT. This is that the audience may ask questions and open up debates following a talk. It is by no means easy to make this happen in the EFL classroom. In one medical English course I taught on many years ago, each student, or member of the audience, was obliged to ask at least two questions during the course of a series of presentations covering more than one session. It was extremely difficult to keep a tally of who had and hadn't asked their required questions. It ended with one presenter taking a seat among the audience to ask himself a question! However, in the break between presentations, I have found that members of the audience will participate in brief conversations about the presentation they have just heard in pairs and in English. The second point is that one of the major benefits of these projects from the practitioner's point of view is that they enable the teacher to learn things from the students. When it happens, it is certainly worth pointing out. Finally, from the learners' point of view, giving an oral presentation can be an extremely challenging but enjoyable task that gives them opportunities to (i) practice research skills, (ii) develop their English speaking skills, and (iii) be creative.

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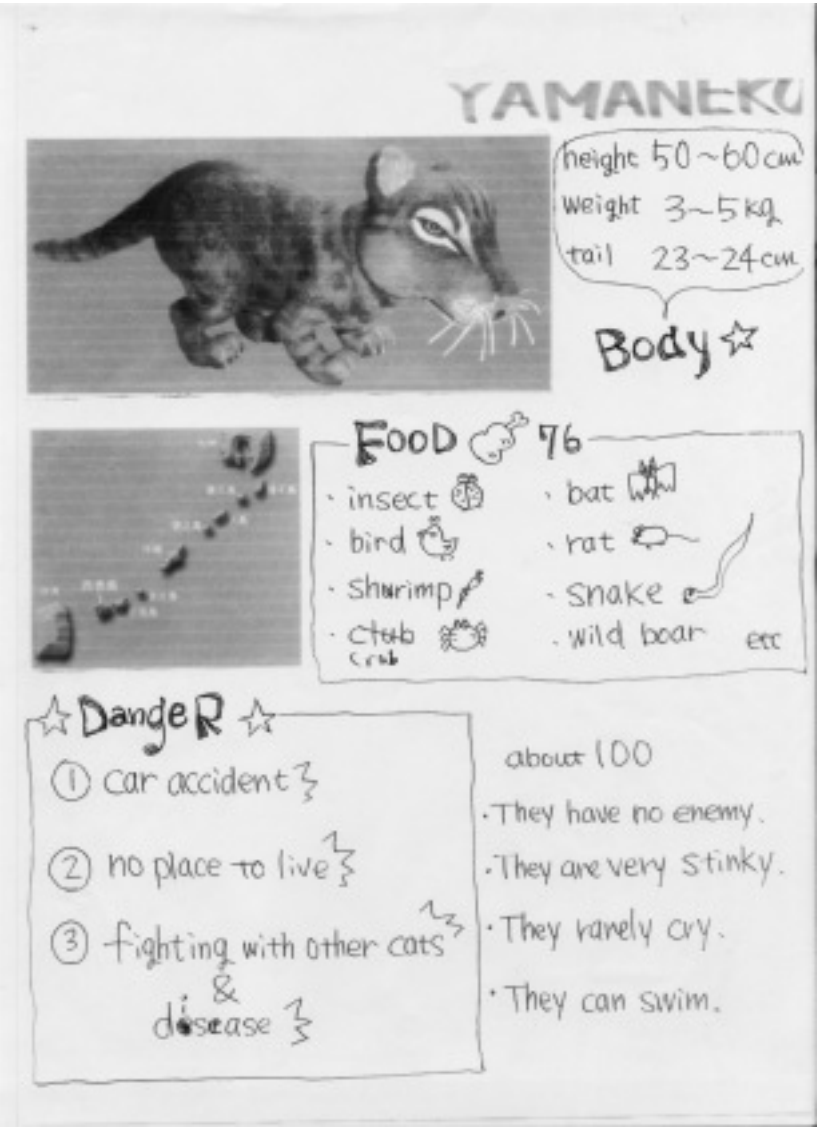
Appendix 1. Example poster.



Appendix 2

Intermediate Topics. Global Issues. Writing Assignment

Deadline: Tuesday, _____ 7th.

Task: Imagine you are an endangered animal. You should choose the one you researched for a presentation.

Describe your life history and the events of the last 7 to 24 hours of your life, leading to your death.

Length: 400–500 words. Please write the number of words at the bottom of the page.

All assignments must be typed and double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman or Arial font.

Example: Iriomote Yama Neko

Hello. My name is Tom. I am a ten-year old male Iriomote Yama Neko. I live in the jungle of Iriomote Island. This is the story of my life. I had three brothers and two sisters, all born at the same time as me. Life was much better back then when I was a young cat. I remember my father once caught and killed a wild boar. It was the best food I ever tasted, but there are very few wild boar left on the island now and I have never eaten one since then.

When I was one, we had to move home because our patch of the jungle was cleared to build a hotel. We didn't move very far but some other cats said it was their territory and told us to leave. Soon after, my father was killed in a fight with another cat and my mother was run over by a car. About a year later, two of my sisters and one brother became very sick and died. I felt very ill too but I survived. I haven't seen my brothers for about seven years and I have no idea where they

are.

When I woke up at nightfall, I climbed down my tree and headed for the river for some food and water. I was feeling a bit scared because there are more humans around and not as many trees as there used to be. I can usually catch a crab or two at low tide by the mangrove swamp. Today, I only caught one, so I swam in the river to see what else I could find. Nothing. I was feeling a bit hungry so I headed back inland. I was also feeling lonely. In fact, I hardly ever see any other cats and in this season I need to find a mate. I was just passing through an area where I thought I could find a snake to eat, when I thought I could smell a female cat. I had to move fast to try to find her. I think she was in the field across the road. As I darted across to the other side I saw a blinding light and was hit by a car. My legs were broken, I was in terrible pain, and I could hardly move. The driver got out, picked me up, and put me in the car. He took me to the cat hospital. To my surprise, I saw one of my brothers there. He had been hit by a car too and couldn't move very well. Then I felt really bad and my life just slipped away from me.

444 words.