

Development of an Online ”Oral Skills” Course

*Laura Mendoza
Aalto University Language Centre*

Laura.mendoza@aalto.fi



LC-1116 Directed Studies in English (Oral Skills)

- **Background:** where, why and how this course came about
- **Description:** what is currently done
- **Findings:** student expectations & experiences
- **Future directions:** what's next?

Background

- **Aalto Engineering schools:** 3 ECTS (oral + written) B2
- **Previously (2012-13):** [Talking Technology](#) (2 ECTS, o) & [Writing in Technology](#) (2 ECTS, w) or English exemption tests
- **Now:** Communicating Technology (3 ECTS o + w) / Persuasive Communication (3 ECTS o + w) or English exemption tests

Background

- **Problem:** shifting from **2 ECTS + 2 ECTS** to **3 ECTS** courses
- Students might only lack 1-2 credits to complement **earlier** studies

LC-1116 Directed Studies in English

(1-2 ECTS o / w)

- **Blended** (mostly online, some face-to-face sessions possible)
- **Utilizing existing materials** when possible

LC-1116 Oral Skills, 1-2 ECTS

- **Focus: Presentation Skills** important for engineers

(Bhattacharyya & Sargunan 2009, Lappalainen 2012, Huhta 2010, Rontu 2010, TEK 2013)

Chosen approach: Process approach, Learner autonomy

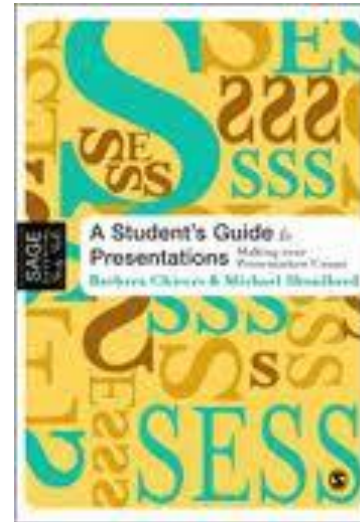
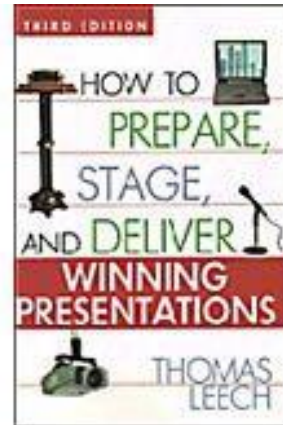
- Initial self-reflection & goals
- Input
- Output
- Final self-reflection

Initial self-reflection

- Background with presenting
- Background with English
- Attitudes/feelings about presentations
- Evaluation of one's strengths and weaknesses when speaking in English
- Evaluation of one's strengths and weaknesses as presenters
- Setting goals for this course

Input (weekly assignments)

- Chapters/parts from e-books



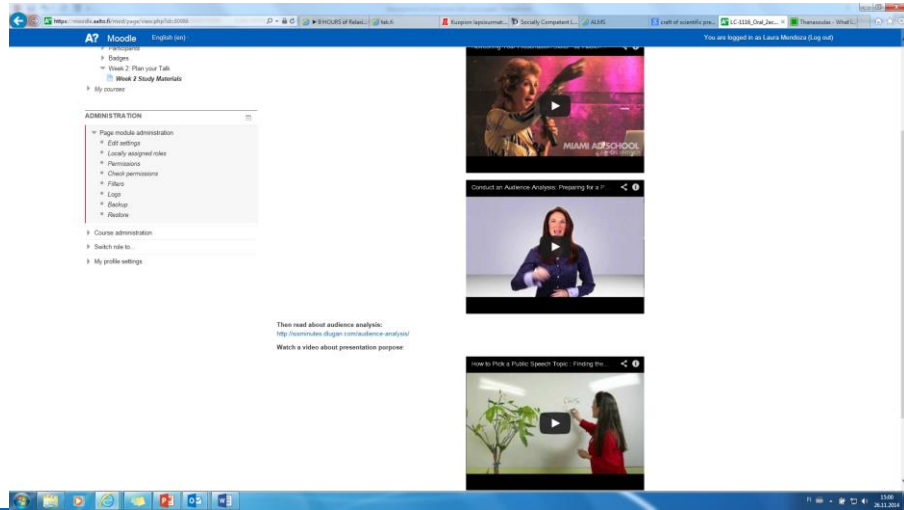
Input (weekly assignments)

Videos: YouTube

<http://poptech.org/blog/categories/Technology>

<http://poptech.org/blog/categories/Science>

<http://www.ted.com/talks>



Input (weekly assignments)

Something old and familiar from our courses:

- Outline template for presentations
- Sample outline
- Useful language for presenters (handout)
- Slide template

Output (weekly assignments)

- Class **brainstorm** on GoogleDocs
- **Discussion Forum in Moodle**: presentation analysis, peer commenting, reflection on visuals design
- Presentation outline
- Presentation slides
- Practice session (face to face) + feedback
- Watch video + self-evaluation = concrete goals for improvement
- Final version through Movenote

Final self-reflection & Course feedback

Reflection of the process as a whole

- Experience of practice session
- Experience of watching the video
- Experience of redoing the talk

Course feedback

- Online format: like or not?
- Usefulness of course materials / assignments
- Suggestions

Findings

Initial student expectations

”Not much” - category (about 30%)

”Just hoping to get the oral skills out of the way”.

”I cannot expect much from an online presentations course”.

”Not much. A few hours of talking doesn’t really improve my presentation capabilities.”

”Slightly hopeful” (about 30%)

”I’m really mostly after the compulsory credit, but of course it would be good to gain something more at the same time. “

”I hope I would be better presenter in future. Don’t know if this course is going to make big difference but it is better than no experience at all. “

”Concrete goals” (about 40%)

”I hope to survive the talk”.

”To get rid of nervousness and find my inner presenter”.

”To prepare an efficient and compact presentation in English”.

Spontaneous reflections during the course

”Thanks so much for your support and comments and sharing so openly about your own experiences...”

”So far this course has been surprisingly useful...”

”I went ahead and did the first two weeks’ assignments already, it has been really interesting. Good job with finding really useful videos from YouTube. 😊”

”I have always been a lazy student but this course format works for me. I have actually worked.”

Final reflections & feedback

Online learning a positive experience? 15 YES, 1 NO

- + I had the chance to do the exercises on my own time and at my own pace. The combination of good quality youtube videos and articles and other literature was a nice change.
- + Solid, easy to understand goals. All assignments available at once. Great possibilities for planning ahead one's schedules. It was also a great thing to be able to participate without going to university premises often.
- + Easier to fit in a tight schedule. Easier to concentrate on study material at home than trying to read from slides at classroom.

Final reflections & feedback

Online learning a positive experience? 15 YES, 1 NO

- Independent work means you are easily in the situation where you do everything just before the deadline ---> maybe not best result
- Networking from China was painful. Otherwise it was OK.
- More chances needed to improve spoken language. A few more face-to-face meetings?
- Asking for help is more difficult.

Future Directions

- 1) Make some videos (transitions & linkers?)
- 2) Include a part on "improving delivery"
- 3) Add more interaction (peer feedback for outlines and slides)
- 4) Add 1-2 face-to-face sessions more? Mid-course, final presentations?
- 5) Continue surveying student responses in a different format: initial, mid and final.

LC-1116 **Directed Studies** remains for 2015-16?

2016-17? Separate learning modules for "written skills" and "oral skills"?
Open for everyone or limited intake?

Conclusion

- **Online oral skills course = possible**
- **Seems to work for**
 - Students with strong English skills
 - Students with low expectations
 - Students with presentation anxiety
 - Special needs students
- **More work is necessary...**

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