



Advanced Oral Proficiency – Giving a Talk

Some “rules” of the game for giving a good talk in the Advanced Oral Proficiency class.

From experience I suggest the following rules for giving talks to ensure that the class is interesting for both speakers and listeners. Remember that everyone has at least one turn at being a speaker, but many turns at being a listener.

Speakers:

- Your topic must be from literature or linguistics.
- Your talk should last about 10-15 minutes. Most people admit that they cannot really concentrate on a monologue for much longer.
- Your topic / point/ argument/ must be clear. See the guidelines for structuring your talk in the handouts section of www.FindYourFeet.de. FyF_giving_a_talk.pdf
- Don't try to tell people things you haven't understood at all yourself. Don't pretend to be an expert if you are not.
- Use materials in English when preparing your talk. That way you won't have to translate your ideas into English before you talk.
- Put your title on the board and give your listeners a chance to note down their own questions on it before you start talking.
(Listeners: Ask yourselves "What would I like to know about this topic?")
- It is a talk, not a reading. That means you have to talk from notes only. It is boring for your audience to listen to long, complex sentences, and see only the top of your head. Don't worry about hesitations and mistakes. That's normal. If you have structured your talk well, your listeners will be able to follow you.
- Your short talk should be the starting point for a good discussion.

- Have some questions ready for the class. Get their opinions and ideas. This is the place where you can admit/say what you yourself didn't understand in the linguistics/literature seminar, and this is the place where you can discuss aspects that puzzle you or really interest you.
- Many students say they can't reduce their topic to a 10 or 15-minute talk. Try! It's possible. Getting to the basics, the essence, the core, of a topic is an academic skill that can be learnt. In the discussion afterwards you can bring in lots more of your knowledge when you answer your listeners' questions. You don't have to pack all your knowledge into 15 minutes.
- You're not "performing" to please or astound me, but giving a talk to share some of your knowledge and ideas with your classmates.
- One final word, on the content. Tell us where you got your information from. Sometimes speakers tend to make statements about things as if these things were the eternal truth and not just, for example, the findings of one study carried out at one particular time with a particular group of people, in a particular society, or the personal opinion of one person, and therefore not generalisable.

If you follow these "rules" you can make a great class.

