

## **Presenting Confidently and Clearly in a Non-native Language**

by Matt Abrahams

For most of us, presenting confidently and clearly in our native language is hard enough, but communicating in another language is marked by unique challenges and opportunities for growth. What follows is specific advice that can help all non-native speakers feel less anxious, while being more authentic and successful in their communication.

### **Adopt a Clarity Over Perfection Mindset**

One critical mindset shift for non-native speakers is to focus on getting points across rather than trying to sound like a native speaker. Clarity of message should always trump language proficiency. Aiming for perfect pronunciation or mastery of idiomatic expressions can lead to undue pressure and wasting of precious cognitive bandwidth. Instead, it is more fruitful to concentrate on the structure and clarity of the points being made. This approach allows for authentic communication, where the speaker's unique voice and perspective are heard. Rather than judge and ruminate on your exact wording, focus on providing examples and analogies that help get your point across.

Value reflection. Dedicate time after every speaking opportunity for self-reflection. Even a few minutes can make a huge difference. Be deliberate about identifying what went well and what could improve. Keep a reflection journal to track your progress and establish a basis for comparison. These techniques can unlock ideas you can employ in the future.

### **Practice**

When it comes to practice, repetition and consistency are key. Regularly engaging in speaking exercises, whether through role-playing scenarios or using technology to simulate conversations, can greatly enhance your comfort level and proficiency. By helping provide a better understanding of language patterns and the natural flow of English. For example, generative AI like Chat GPT can serve as a tool for role modeling appropriate language use and grammar. These advanced AI systems can offer examples of sentence structures, provide grammar corrections, and simulate conversations to practice different speaking scenarios.

Recording yourself and then listening to the playback provides another opportunity to learn by allowing for self-evaluation and adjusting speech tempo, clarity, and pronunciation. There are also language learning apps that facilitate daily practice and online forums where one can engage with other learners and native speakers

### **Leverage Structure**

Often non-native speakers rely on memorization in the hope that it will help them say the “right” thing, the “right” way. Unfortunately, nothing is farther from the truth. When you rely on memorization, you also increase your cognitive load, which is the amount of

mental effort being used in the working memory. This added pressure can heighten anxiety and make it more difficult to present with ease and confidence. Also, memorization often leads to a robotic delivery, stripping your message of its natural cadence and reducing your ability to adapt in the moment.

Structures and frameworks, on the other hand, provide a flexible guide that helps organize your thoughts, giving you the freedom to communicate with spontaneity and authenticity. With a framework, you have a map that you can follow in various ways, taking detours as needed, without losing your way. A common structure to consider is What? So What? Now What?

- . Definition: This structure allows the speaker to state a fact or situation, explore its significance, and then propose a course of action or question.
- . Example: "Our company's sales have decreased (What?), which could impact our market share and lead to downsizing (So What?). We need to strategize a new marketing approach to recover (Now What?)."

Using structures helps you to prioritize your content, ensuring that you deliver your message in a manner that is clear and focused. Frameworks give you the flexibility to adjust to your audience's reactions, to answer unexpected questions, and to engage in a real dialogue rather than delivering a monologue.

Finally, patience with yourself is crucial. Language proficiency is a journey, and every opportunity to speak is a step forward. Encouraging oneself to embrace mistakes as learning opportunities rather than setbacks can foster a growth mindset that is essential for long-term development.

For non-native speakers, the art of communication is less about linguistic perfection and more about effective approach, structure, and connection. By focusing on clear, direct communication, leveraging technology for practice, and embracing their unique voices, non-native speakers can confidently step into the realm of public speaking and connect with their audiences in meaningful ways.