

# Teaching presentation with “no-tech” visual aids

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## Reference data:

Kano, A. (2011). Teaching presentation with “no-tech” visual aids. In A. Stewart (Ed.), *JALT2010 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

Presentation skills can be taught effectively without the use of personal computers, and students can improve their presentations without high-tech equipment. A practical “no-tech” method used in teaching presentation skills classes which focus on creating and utilizing effective visual aids will be introduced in this paper. “No-tech” visual aids are easy to create and use, but are often more efficient and effective than software slides. They also allow teachers who are often restricted by equipment shortages and the frustration of time-consuming technical problems, to focus on teaching how to make a presentation. The process of creating “no-tech” visual aids helps students understand the importance of organizing their presentations. The key points students learn while they are creating effective “no-tech” visual aids are easily transferred into computer software-based presentations.

本研究ではプレゼンテーションスキルをパソコン無しで教えることを可能にし、学生にハイテク機材を使わせなくともプレゼンテーション力を向上させ得る方法として「no-tech」ヴィジュアル・エイド方式を紹介する。発表者はこの手法を用いて、プレゼンテーションにおいて効果的なヴィジュアル・エイドの作成と活用に焦点を当てた実践的な授業を行ってきた。「no-tech」ヴィジュアル・エイドは作りやすく使いやすいうえ、しばしばパソコン上のスライドショー・ソフトウェアを使うより実用的で効果的である。「no-tech」ヴィジュアル・エイドを使うことによって、日頃から機材の不足などの物理的制約を受けたり機材操作に関わるトラブルなどで時間を無駄に費やしてしまうような事態に陥ることなく、プレゼンテーション自体の指導に集中できるようになる。「no-tech」ヴィジュアル・エイド作成の過程で学生はプレゼンテーションの構成の重要性を自ら学ぶ。さらに、効果的な「no-tech」ヴィジュアル・エイドを作るために学ぶ重要なポイントはそのままパソコン上のスライドショー・ソフトウェアを用いたプレゼンテーションへと応用することが可能である。

**I**N A high-tech world where students are so used to electronic devices such as videogames, computers and smartphones, giving a multimedia presentation may seem quite an easy task. But teachers often face unexpected difficulties when they ask students to create and give high-tech, computer assisted presentations in classrooms. In this paper I would like to introduce the effectiveness and usefulness of “no-tech” visual aids (Dale & Wolf, 2006), and suggest their use as an entry-level visual aid device. This type of visual aids helps students focus more on the content and delivery, and will help teachers plan classes with more time for students to actually give presentations. “No-tech” visual aids are a great way to effectively teach students how to create and give short presentations.

In today’s computer-based world, a “presentation” is usually considered to be a kind of high-tech talk which typically uses a slideshow created on a personal computer and projected



onto a monitor or screen. Most teachers who assign a “presentation” in class expect students to use such high-tech equipment. However, lack of access to this type of equipment is a common problem in many schools. The number of audio-visual and computer rooms is limited, and there are often scheduling and logistical problems that waste valuable preparation and class time. Sometimes, teachers must make their own arrangements to borrow a laptop, projector, and portable screen; carry them to class, connect the cables, and then do all the start-ups and adjustments of the electronic devices before the class presentations can even begin. Even for teachers who are familiar with modern equipment, unexpected technical problems often occur. For example, the school’s computer network may be complicated and difficult to access, a student’s USB memory stick may be unreadable by a school computer, a slideshow file a student made and brought might not open, slideshow animations, layouts and fonts might not work on a different computer, plus students sometimes bring the wrong file and do not realize it until the last moment.

Being able to give high-tech presentations using a laptop is a *must-have* skill for today’s young people. I absolutely recognize there is a need to teach such skills to university students. But rather than going straight to slideshow presentations, students can learn basic presentation skills in a more time-efficient, organized way by creating and using “no-tech” visual aids. In this paper, I will first explain why it is helpful for both teachers and students to use “no-tech” visual aids. Next, I will use data from a student survey to explain the need to spend more time on students’ presentations in class. The results of the survey suggest that Japanese university students lack experience in the basics of public speaking, and that they need entry-level practice before they can confidently move on to high-tech presentations. Finally, I will illustrate how teachers can conduct a presentation class with the extra time made available by using “no-tech” visual aids, by outlining a lesson plan with six very short presentations.

## Types of “no-tech” visual aids

The term “no-tech” visual aids (Dale & Wolf, 2006) refers to flipcharts, poster boards, blackboards, whiteboards, and actual physical objects which speakers use as visual aids while conducting their presentation. Dale and Wolf contrasted this term with “low-tech” visual aids such as overhead transparencies, films and videotapes, and “hi-tech” visual aids as such as image galleries and PowerPoint slideshows.

## Materials needed to create “no-tech” visual aids

“No-tech” visual aids are those which can be created using readily available materials. In my classes, I suggest students use sketchbooks, individual sheets of drawing paper, or large sheets of paper. After trying several types, most students prefer to use a ring bound sketchbook. The reasons they give for this choice is that the sketchbook is the easiest to handle when they are holding it up and flipping the pages in front of an audience. Additionally, the sketchbook itself often becomes a memento of their speech or presentation and gives them a feeling of achievement.

The sketchbooks my students usually use are easily available at hundred-yen shops. They are B4 or A3 size, with 10 to 20 pages of drawing paper, and are bound with a spiral, cork-screw shaped binder. Marker pens of various colors and size are used for the text and drawings. Some students paste cutouts, photos, clippings of articles, and printouts of Word-documents on their sketchbook pages.

## Samples of “no-tech” visual aids

The following images show students holding up their “no-tech” visuals. The charts and drawings are effective because they help the audience grasp the idea of the presentation. The lines are bold and clear, and the information that can be put into one



page is limited, thus avoiding information overload. Due to space limitations, the number of words, lines, graphs, and charts on each page is restricted.

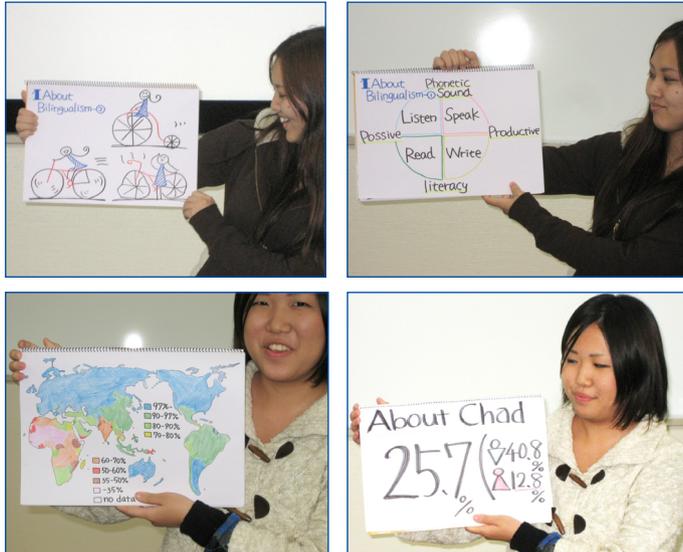


Figure 1. Samples of “no-tech” visual aids created by students

## Reasons for using “no-tech” visual aids

### *Easy to create*

Creation of “no-tech” visual aids does not require personal computers, digital equipment or any special skills. All the students need is a sketchbook and some pens and other drawing materials they may already have at home. Some students are artistic, some are not, but even for those who are not, there are still

many ways to create simple, yet effective, visual aids. Reynolds (2008, 2010) and Williams (2010) give practical hints about how to create simple and effective visual aids.

When preparing a high-tech presentation, students often put so much time and energy into creating a slideshow on a computer that when it is done, they feel they have already done so much work that they should be ready for their presentation. But to deliver a presentation effectively they need to practice. A large portion of the students’ preparation time and energy should be spent on practicing and rehearsing the presentation. Restricting the use of computer assisted visual aids helps students become more receptive to the other elements that make a presentation good, and encourages them to practice more.

Another practical reason for using “no-tech” visual aids as a starter tool when teaching presentation skills to university students is that many of them do not have slideshow software (for example, Microsoft PowerPoint) installed on their home computers. Typically in Japan, many computers sold in retail stores do not include pre-installed presentation software. Students must buy and install this software separately, which not many of them do. So students have to stay on campus in order to prepare for their presentations. If the school’s computer room is closed or occupied, they cannot prepare.

Even when students have easy access to computers equipped with presentation software, the time and effort they spend is enormous if they are novices. Referring to the images in Figure 1, computer-novice students would need a lot of time to learn the skills needed to create the digital equivalents of these illustrations and charts.

### *Easy to handle in class*

Another strong reason for going “no-tech” is that neither teachers nor students need to bother about setting up equipment.

This results in significant time savings. Class time for presentations can be allotted much more accurately. Teachers can plan to have students’ presentations during any part of the class, and can move smoothly and swiftly from one presenter to the next without technical interruptions.

Visual aids created in sketchbooks also provide consistent quality regardless of the room. Students know exactly how their visual aids will appear, while digital slides projected as images on a screen or monitor are often less effective than the student intended. Typically when a room is not dark enough, the contrast and color of the visual images is poorly reproduced. Sometimes, when played on a different computer from the one used for creation, animations do not run smoothly. Such problems are avoided when a student is presenting with “no-tech” visual aids.

### ***Students learn how to organize a presentation***

“No-tech” visual aids can be created freehand without digital constraints, so as soon as students come up with an idea, they can visualize it by drawing sketches and diagrams. Organizing visually helps students grasp the overall flow of their speech. Students learn how to transform their ideas into a structured speech through freehand creation process. They also notice that even a simple, primitive visual aid can be quite effective in conveying ideas and information, and recognize the efficiency of using visual aids.

I instruct students to create simple “slides,” that is, visual aids, on sketchbook pages, which the audience can easily see and read. If students want to confirm that their visual aids are readable, all they have to do is to stand a few meters away from their sketchbook, imagining the size of their classroom and the distance between the presenter and the audience in the back row. In this way, students can physically estimate the amount of information they should put in each visual aid.

The number of pages in a sketchbook is limited, which means students are restricted in the number of “slides” they can use in a presentation. Thus, students automatically make the content of their presentation simple and tight. Students have to think not only of how to begin a presentation but also how to end it within a certain number of “slides,” which keeps them conscious of the structure. Limitation of pages forces them to summarize their ideas, and organize them in an appropriate way to fit into the sketchbook.

### ***“No-tech” visuals work as a bridge to multimedia presentations***

“No-tech” presentations are not always effective, but from my experience, they work very well with short presentations with students who have little experience in public speaking. Due to their time efficiency and easiness of use, “no-tech” visual aids are helpful as entry-level device to teach the basics of presentation. Manually created images give students the basic knowledge of how to create effective slides, what to put into each slide, and how to organize them. Creation of “no-tech” visual aids serves as scaffolding in building presentation skills, and the experience can be efficiently converted to creating visual aids for multimedia presentation using computer slideshow software.

### ***Japanese students need more experience speaking in public***

After several years experience with students in high-intermediate to advanced levels of general English proficiency I began to wonder why such students were less confident when it came to speaking English in public. In pairs and in groups they were relaxed and enthusiastic, but when I asked them to prepare and give a five-minute speech in class, the result was very frustrat-



ing for everyone. The speeches may have been suitable for a writing assignment but when they were delivered orally they left much to be desired. Students did not look up from their notes and often did not make sufficient eye contact with the audience. Their voices were weak and monotonous, as if they were talking about something very uninteresting. Most of the students did not even consider using visual aids of any form. The big gap between what they could achieve in a general English class and their poor performance in public speaking made me notice these essential skills are missing in junior and senior high school English classes in the Japanese educational system.

### Survey on public speaking experience in junior/senior high school

To find out what the students themselves thought of their public speaking skills, I conducted a survey with students from three universities. One hundred and forty students from seven classes took part in the survey. Except for a few repeaters, the students were either first or second year students.

The main focus of the survey was to determine if students had any experience with public speaking in English in their junior/senior high schools. The question asked was: Did you do any public speaking in English during Junior and Senior high school?

Sixty-four percent of the students answered in the negative. To avoid ambiguous answers, the possible negative responses were scaled to include "No," "Not at all" and "almost none," while affirmative answers included "Yes," "Many times," and "a few times." The low percentage of public speaking experience was unexpected since the students were mostly high-intermediate to advanced levels, with TOEIC scores ranging from approximately 700 to 900.

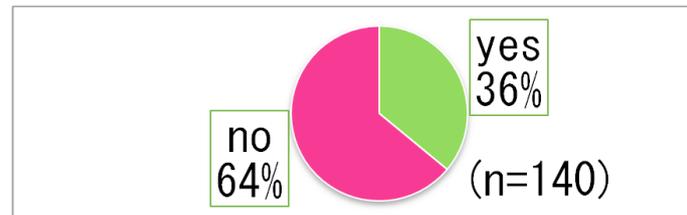


Figure 2. Public Speaking Experience in Junior/Senior High School

Question: "Did you do any public speaking in English during Junior and Senior high school?"

The comments in the free description section of the survey suggested that some students had personally practiced giving speeches as an extracurricular activity, and some had participated in speech contests. However, few students had had public speaking experience in English as part of their school curricula. The students came from a wide variety of schools; private and public, co-ed, all-male, and all-female, and were located throughout Japan.

After this survey was concluded, I talked with many of the students and asked them personally about their speech and presentation experiences at school. Through these conversations I realized that the students seldom received structured instruction about how to give a speech or presentation in Japanese, let alone in English. In other words, a large portion of the students had not been taught how to give a speech or presentation, and had not made one until they entered university.

To fill this gap, I designed a very basic step-by-step course for teaching speech and presentation to Japanese students. Assuming that the majority of them had little experience, the course focused on giving them as much opportunity as possible to

actually give speeches and presentations. After several semesters of trial and revision, the course started to run smoothly and efficiently.

## A course using “no-tech” visual aids for teaching speech and presentation to Japanese students

### A sample semester course

It is a one-semester course and students are required to give a total of six speeches and presentations. Table 1 shows the types of speeches and presentations.

Table 1. Speech and presentation assignments in a semester course

	topics	types of speech/ presentation	visual aids	allotted time*
1	Introducing myself	spontaneous, icebreaking	none	1 min.
2	What I'm good at	show & tell	an object	2 min.
3	A place I/we recommend	informative displaying visual aids	photos, maps, charts, etc. on a large poster	3 min.**
4	How to use an item	informative explaining procedures	flipcharts or sketchbooks	2~3 min.
5	Selling an item	informative plus persuasive	flipcharts or sketchbooks	3~5 min.
6	Asking for a small change	persuasive	flipcharts or sketchbooks	5 min.

\*Time allotted for each speech or presentation varies depending to the number of students in a class.

\*\*With large classes, this is done as a group presentation.

Table 2 shows a brief course outline, consisting of 14 lessons, appropriate for a class of 25 to 35 students. This is an extract from a more detailed course outline with *In Charge 2 Second Edition* (Daise, 2003) and *Speaking of Speech New Edition* (Harrington & LeBean, 2009) as textbooks. After they learned the basic concepts and practiced practical tips for good delivery, students had to prepare a very short speech almost every other week. Use of “no-tech” visual aids made this fast pace possible.

Table 2. Course outline of a semester course for beginners of speech and presentation

week	speech/ presentation	lesson	purpose of lesson
1	Introducing myself	introduction	speak in a loud, clear voice
2		group work activities	don't be afraid of making mistakes
3		group work activities	learn importance of physical message
4	What I'm good at		using objects as visual aids
5		structure and organization	how to organize a five-paragraph speech with Introduction, Body and Conclusion
6		visual aids	how to create good visual aids: good and poor samples
7	A place I/we recommend		using “no-tech” visual aids effectively



week	speech/ presentation	lesson	purpose of lesson
8		how to begin and end a speech importance of delivery informative speech	starting with a "hook" and ending with a strong, memorable ending types of speech and what to take care of when preparing an informative speech
9	How to use an item		
10		persuasive speech	what to consider when preparing for a persuasive speech
11	Selling an item (1)		
12	Selling an item (2)		
13	Asking for a small change (1)		
14	Asking for a small change (2)		

In the first class, students were asked to give a spontaneous speech in the form of a one-minute self introduction. The next few classes provided basic instructions on effective delivery, i.e., keeping good eye contact, speaking in a loud and clear voice with sufficient inflection, using appropriate gestures, and the general do's and don'ts of public speaking. Students worked in groups and had a chance to practice their public speaking skills in a non-threatening environment. These workshop-style lessons helped them overcome their shyness and fear, and brought a sense of togetherness to the class. This sense of camaraderie

later made it easier for students to open up and express themselves when they spoke in front of the class. There was a supportive atmosphere throughout the semester, and the first few lessons were vital in helping to build it.

### ***Students learn from each other***

A simple peer evaluation system was used for evaluating students' speeches and presentations. Each student was given a "peer feedback form" in which they scored and wrote comments for all the classmates. The appendix contains a sample peer feedback sheet.

The feedback forms were collected and the students' scores were calculated to produce an average for each speaker. This became the "students' score." A "teacher's score" was also given to each student. From these two scores, students were able to receive their evaluation in an objective, straightforward way. Students were told that both the "students' score" and "teacher's score" for all their performances would be used to calculate their final grades.

Students were asked to write a short comment for each speech about "what was good," and "what could be done to make it better." The comments were written in a positive manner, i.e., "speak in a louder voice" instead of "I couldn't hear." During a feedback session of four to five minutes students moved around the class, found a student to pair up with, and shared their comments.

The scores and feedback comments were one part of the peer learning process. Students learned a lot from observing their classmates' speeches and presentations. They learned what worked well and what they should avoid, and were able to see different styles of performances based on the different personalities of each student. Students noticed that those with higher English skills were not always the best presenters, and thus real-



ized the benefits of good preparation and practice. Overall, peer observation encouraged the students to be more imaginative and creative, and to prepare well and practice hard.

## Conclusion

"No-tech" visual aids are easy to create, easy to handle, and allow class time to be used more efficiently. By introducing the use of "no-tech" visual aids, teachers can give students more time to practice giving short speeches and presentations within a semester course. Survey results indicate that Japanese university students lack experience and practice in public speaking. Given the opportunity to see other students' performances, students are able to learn from their peers. Furthermore, creation and use of "no-tech" visual aids help them learn the basics of speech and presentation. These skills serve as the foundation for further constructive multimedia presentations.

## Appendix

### Sample peer feedback sheet

FEEDBACK TO YOUR CLASSMATES

STUDENT NO. \_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_ (nickname: \_\_\_\_)

No.	Name	Delivery	Contents	Comments	Total score
1					
2					
3					
19					
20					

## Bio data

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