Notes for Unit 1

Unit 1, “Giving an Introduction Speech,” introduces students to academic speech-giving by having them make a short introduction of another member of the class. Before preparing the speech, students are asked to think about audience and purpose. For this course, the audience is the class members. They are likely current or future members of the academic community who come from a range of disciplines and/or who have diverse professional interests and experience. One purpose of both the interviews and the final speeches is for class participants to gather more information about their audience, especially their educational and professional background. This information will reveal similarities and differences among audience members that will ultimately guide speakers in preparing and delivering presentations throughout the course.

Another related purpose of the introduction speech is for class participants to get to know each other so that they can develop a comfortable relationship with their audience. This helps offset the tendency for speakers to see their audience as a somewhat distant and even hostile group of people.

A third purpose of the speech is to help the instructor become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the class members. While students are not always consistent in their speech-making abilities, during the first speech the instructor can observe, among other things, a speaker’s (1) level of comfort while standing in front of the class, (2) general level of fluency, (3) specific weaknesses that may interfere with audience comprehension, and (4) ability to incorporate strategies presented in unit 1 into their speeches.

Other aims of the unit are discussed in the notes that follow.

There are a number of short tasks in unit 1. Spending too much time on them may make the lesson drag on. If class time is short, instructors can assign them for homework or, if necessary, eliminate some tasks. Suggestions on how long to spend on activities are included below.

Unit 1, as well as the other units in the text, has several paragraphs of introduction. Students need not read the introduction. The instructor can summarize it orally.

Questions found in the introduction under Sizing Up Your Audience and Clarifying Your Purpose are meant to guide instructor-led or small group discussion.
Discussion about the audience may include whether characteristics like country of origin, field of studies, and age are relevant for this speech. Students should be reminded that relevant audience characteristics may change depending on the topic of their speech. Instructors can alter discussion questions to suit the goals of a particular class—for example, if all students are from the same field of studies.

**Organizing your speech** emphasizes the need for good presenters to organize their speeches and encourages students to think about how they can order information they collect from their partner. In **task 1, Organizing an Introduction Speech**, students are expected to identify two organizational strategies—chronological order and a combination of classification and chronological order—that they can use in constructing their introduction speech. Task 1 questions can be done quickly in small groups or pairs and answers discussed with the rest of the class. Some students quickly figure out the organizational patterns of the two speeches, while others need slightly more time. Answers to the questions in this and other tasks are summarized in the unit. Students generally don’t read the answers before carrying out the task. However, those who do should be asked to refer to them for review instead.

**A First Look at Linking Words: Time Connectors** focuses on time connectors used to initiate a topic shift. **Task 2**, which can be done quickly, asks students to identify time connectors that initiate a topic shift. The term *topic shift* is used here to mean a shift from one subsection of the speech to another. In example 1, the shift is from Wei’s professional experience to his educational background. It is marked by the time connector, *In 1998*. In example 2, the topic shift is from Adrienne’s high school extracurricular activities to her work experience. It is marked by *While she was in high school*. In example 3, the shift, which is marked by *Before*, is from Marc’s studies to his professional experience. Notice that the speaker makes a shift backward in time and thus the use of *Before*. We can guess that the speaker is using both classification and chronological order to organize information, whereas the first speaker is probably using only chronological order.

Presenters will attempt to use other linking words that are not taught in this unit, such as *Now let me* (tell you something about Marc’s professional experience). This and other linking words are introduced in future units. In the meantime, instructors can give individuals feedback on the suitability of their choices. One mistake some students make in their introduction speeches is to use the linking word *about* to indicate a topic shift, as in *About Marc’s professional experience . . .*. *About* is sometimes used casually in lectures to discuss a topic that the audience has shared knowledge of, such as *Oh, about the exam. It’ll be next Friday*, or *About the question you raised earlier. Let me attempt to answer it*. The phrase *as for* could be used as a more appropriate substitute (*As for Marc’s professional experience . . .*).
The box entitled **Time connectors:** *the following, following* discusses these two frequently used time connectors that are sometimes overlooked by nonnative speaker presenters. This section can be omitted or assigned for homework if time is short.

**Organization Indicator Statements** or discourse indicator statements are common in both academic writing and speaking. The indicator statement discussed in this section is used by the speaker to inform listeners of the number of jobs they are about to hear. In this activity, which can also be done quickly by the class as a whole, students are asked to examine the two excerpts to discover how they are the same or different. Both speakers discuss the three jobs Sonya has had, using chronological order and time connectors. However, one uses an organization indicator statement (*Following graduation, Sonya had three laboratory positions*), which is used to inform the listeners that the speaker is about to discuss Sonya’s three lab jobs. In general, organizational indicator statements prepare the audience for upcoming information and give some indication of how it is organized. While speakers quickly understand how organization indicator statements are used, many do not use them in their speeches. Because of their importance, they are covered again in other sections of the text.

The speech introductions and conclusions provided in this unit under **Beginning Your Speech** and **Concluding Your Speech** are somewhat formulaic but helpful for novice presenters. Notice that the speaker in the fourth example first tells the audience what his partner is currently doing. This useful strategy first situates the partner in the present but doesn’t preclude the use of chronological order or further discussion of the position later in the presentation. The speaker can shift to the past and talk about events in the person’s life that led up to his or her present educational or job position. Before beginning this section, instructors may wish to have presenters write out an introduction to their own speech for discussion alongside the examples in the text. (Also see activity 1 under **Additional Activities** below.)

Ways to develop appealing speech introductions and closings are discussed at length in other units in the text.

While interviewing their partners, students can take notes on the chart provided in **task 3, Gathering Information**. Or they can use their own paper and note-taking system. Instructors are free to decide the best time to do these partner interviews. Some instructors may prefer that interviews take place immediately after the introduction to the unit. Others may want to discuss some of the information in the unit first in order to give students an idea of what they will be expected to do for their final presentation. Keep in mind that, in order for students to begin work on their speeches, they need to (1) understand the main goals of the assignment and (2) have information about their partner.
If interviewees are undergraduates, they may have little work or university experience. Interviewers should be encouraged to ask undergraduates questions about their participation in high school and community organizations, awards, travel, volunteer work, and short-term jobs. If all students are from the same discipline, speakers may want to focus on their partner’s professional experience and outside interests.

Additional guidelines for giving an introduction presentation are incorporated into task 4, Further Considerations. This short task can be done quickly in groups or as a class, assigned for homework, or eliminated if time is short. It involves a fabricated introductory excerpt that contains some inappropriate information (a reference to the person’s physical attributes, the use of the word lady, and the person’s address) and missing information (Carolina’s last name and the name of her country). It also contains a humorous anecdote about the person being introduced. Humor is not discussed further in the text since it is difficult to teach. However, it is worth pointing out that humor can be an invaluable public speaking tool. But the appropriateness of a humorous remark may be determined by factors such as the audience and purpose of the speech. Here, the cat story seems appropriate since the speech is informal. The listeners are likely peers of the person being introduced.

The purpose of task 5, Nervousness, is to allow students to acknowledge their main concerns about standing in front of an audience. Concerns listed here will be addressed in the text. However, students should be reassured that the more they give presentations, the more confident they will feel.

Nonverbal Behavior is a useful guide for evaluating a speaker’s distracting nonverbal behavior. Some students may want to use the lists in this section as an additional checklist when watching their tapes. It should be noted that this section emphasizes behavior that can detract from a presentation, although some tips for improving nonverbal behavior are also included. Gestures are also discussed in unit 4 on pages 115–17.

Students will be asked to assess their eye contact throughout the course. They should be encouraged to make eye contact with all members of the audience, no matter where they are sitting. (Also see activity 2 under Additional Activities below.)

Task 6, Approaches to Preparing and Delivering Your Speech, may take more time than some of the other activities in the unit. Discussion is intended to help students adopt more useful strategies and relinquish less effective ones, for example, practicing a speech from notes rather than writing it out and memorizing it, and practicing out loud rather than to oneself. This activity can also be done after the first presentation, allowing students to discuss and evaluate strategies they used in preparing and delivering their speech.
The importance of practice emphasizes the need for students to practice aloud and a lot. Students who are asked to tape their speeches with a cassette recorder before their presentations may complain at first, but generally find this to be a very useful exercise. Some less prepared students attempt to read sections of their speeches but should be discouraged from doing this. Instead, they should be encouraged to write notes on a note card.

Task 7 gives presenters specific guidelines for preparing the introduction speech. Instructors are encouraged to modify these guidelines in this and all the other units to meet the needs of their own students. In this unit, for example, students can introduce their partner to a small group or introduce themselves, rather than their partner, to the class. Except for the first speech, some students may exceed their allotted time. Instructors may have to devise strategies to deal with this potential problem.

Evaluation forms (For a prespeech evaluation and a final evaluation) are found in each unit and can be photocopied for the instructor’s convenience. Students should evaluate their speeches both before and after presenting them in class. Class members should also be encouraged to evaluate each other. Instructions for using the forms are included in units 1 and 2. A sample of a completed evaluation is included in unit 1. Instructors may also wish to use a copy of the final evaluation form for writing their own comments. A completed teacher evaluation is found in Notes for Unit 2. This activity is not meant to replace in-class discussion of student presentations.

Supplementary Materials

The unit 1 Supplementary Materials include pronunciation practice and the introduction of a guest speaker.

Some students feel that their pronunciation problems interfere with their ability to give a successful presentation. For this reason, pronunciation tasks have been included in each of the units. Instructors who do not have their own pronunciation materials may find these tasks useful. Lessons are designed to focus on typical problems students encounter when facing an audience. Pronunciation: Pausing deals with the importance of pausing and grouping words effectively. Pausing is defined and two tasks, task 8, Excerpt from an Introduction Speech, and task 9, are included for in-class or at-home practice.

Introducing Colleagues at Conferences and Seminars presents an introduction given at a conference at the University of Michigan on integrating teaching, information, and technology. Notice that this speech differs from the general introduction speech discussed earlier in unit 1 in its emphasis on classification. For the most part, information isn’t presented in chronological order. While the speaker mentions the professor’s educational background, the focus is on what the profes-
sor currently teaches, his recent awards, and his research interests and latest publication. It includes praise from the university community. The speaker also uses listing to organize information within several of the categories.

**Task 10, Introducing a Speaker at a Conference**, may be useful for Ph.D. students or graduate students planning to become graduate student instructors (teaching assistants). The length of an introduction may vary depending on the context, audience, the speaker’s position, etc.

Instructors can also create a simulation where the speakers introduce themselves as guest speakers. This type of simulation gives the speakers the opportunity to discuss their recent academic and job performance using terminology from their own field.

### Additional Activities

Some instructors may want their students to participate in shorter speech tasks before giving their final presentation. The following is a list of suggested additional activities:

1. Ask students to present the introduction of their speech to their group or the class and explain how they plan to organize the rest of the speech. How will they transition from the introduction to the body of their speech? What linking words will they use? The class can comment on the effectiveness of each introduction.

2. In class, play a videotape of an introduction speech. Videos can be collected of native and nonnative speaker introductions for use in class. Ask students to evaluate the speaker’s nonverbal behavior, including eye contact, hand gestures, and any distracting behavior. Or, after students do their presentations, ask the class as a whole to evaluate several videos specifically for nonverbal behavior.

3. Assign students to practice their speech outside of class with a partner before giving it to the entire class. The partner can use an evaluation sheet to provide feedback.

4. Plan a series of role-plays in which students must introduce themselves and provide information about their background. For example, *Tanya contacts a professor that she doesn’t know to ask him to be on her thesis committee.* Or, *Tong, a young undergrad, tries to convince her professor that she is ready to take an upper-level course by describing her background in the area.*
Using the Unit with Future Teaching Assistants or Graduate Teaching Instructors

It is customary for faculty members to introduce themselves on the first day of class. Their introduction may include background information about their professional and academic accomplishments. This information provides evidence of their expertise (especially in the area of studies they are teaching in) and may help solidify their relationship with their students. Pre-TAs/GSIs may wish to write a questionnaire for faculty members in their department to find out what sorts of information they tell their students about themselves on the first day of class and their reasons for doing it. Using the results of the questionnaire as a guide, they can devise a first day introduction of themselves.

In unit 1, the following topics are extremely important for TAs/GSIs: friendly demeanor, good eye contact, an audible voice, and appropriate gestures. TAs/GSIs may find task 10 more challenging than task 7.

Using the Unit with Native Speakers

Strategies taught in this unit are generally beneficial to both nonnative and native speakers. Instructors of native speakers may wish to focus on topics from the following list: audience, purpose, organization, organization indicator statements, nervousness, nonverbal behavior, and approaches to preparing and delivering a speech. While most of the pronunciation tasks in the text will not be relevant to native speakers, unit 1’s Pronunciation: Pausing on speaking too quickly is especially useful for native speakers who are unaware that they are speaking too fast.