Introduction

Many university-enrolled students find themselves unprepared for the task of giving oral presentations on academic material in their area of studies. *Giving Academic Presentations* is an academic speaking text specifically written to prepare university-level students to make presentations in an academic setting. To carry out this goal, the text addresses a range of skills and strategies that speakers of academic English need to become successful presenters. It provides information and hands-on tasks designed to enhance a speaker’s performance and thereby maximize communication with members of the audience—faculty, fellow students, and colleagues.

*Giving Academic Presentations* was primarily written for advanced nonnative speakers of English who are attending or will attend a university-level academic program in English and who are expected, as part of their studies, to make academic presentations. The text has been classroom tested primarily with graduate students but has also been used successfully with undergraduates. The materials were designed for presenters from a range of academic fields; discipline-specific material has been excluded. Instructors who work with international students planning to become teaching assistants (TAs) or graduate student instructors (GSIs) may also wish to consider using this book. While the text does not address teacher-student classroom interaction, it does focus on a number of skills needed for good teaching. The text has been used and perhaps would best be used with students who are not yet ready for advanced TA or GSI English courses. For suggestions for using the text with pre-TAs/GSIs see the Notes to the Instructor that are available on the Web.

*Giving Academic Presentations* can also be successfully used with native speakers. However, since it was written with nonnative speakers in mind, instructors of native speakers should be cautious when using the text. They may have to add, eliminate, or adapt materials through a process of trial and error. Suggestions for using the text with native speakers are provided in the Notes to the Instructor.

This book teaches skills as diverse as choosing an appropriate topic, creating effective visuals, using the blackboard, and designing a speech opening. While some aspects of speech giving are emphasized, such as awareness and use of common speech types and organizational strategies, one important aim of the text
is to make presenters aware that giving an effective presentation requires mastery of a broad range of skills.

The diversity of skills included in *Giving Academic Presentations* is reflected in the following summary of its contents.

- Analysis of speeches to help speakers become more aware of the thought process involved in speech planning
- Examination of major speech types and accompanying organizational strategies
- Work with linking words or signposts and discussion of how they can be successfully used with different types of speeches to enhance the speech flow
- Examination of introductions to speeches, including designing openers and choosing and organizing introductory material
- Discussion of the importance of overviews or summary outlines of speeches; suggestions for designing overviews and visuals to accompany them
- Ways to improve nonverbal behavior
- Suggestions for speaker-listener interaction including checking for understanding, requesting questions from the audience, preparing and responding to questions from the audience, interrupting the speaker to ask questions or ask for clarification
- Discussion of the importance of using evidence in academic speaking and the advantage of using certain types of evidence
- Examination of ways to qualify claims and strategies for making weaker or stronger claims
- Definition and discussion of fillers
- Advice on preparing, improving, and using visual aids and making transparencies
- Presentation of practical information about when and how to use an overhead projector and blackboard as well as a discussion of LCD players
- Pronunciation work on pausing, stress, and intonation
• Practical advice about preparing and practicing speeches

• Opportunities for presenters to evaluate their own and others’ work

The text is organized into six units; the first five highlight different types of speeches. A typical unit begins with a brief introduction that explains the rationale for choosing the speech type and its relevance to users of the text. The introduction is followed by a speech to be analyzed and questions to guide the discussion. Answers to the questions are then briefly summarized. The rest of the unit concentrates on specific speech-making skills. Suggestions for preparing the presentation are also offered. The final task is the presentation itself. Evaluation sheets and checklists are included in each unit. Each unit contains a “Supplementary Materials” section that includes additional teaching materials and, in all units but the last, a pronunciation section.

The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE)

Sections of the text, especially those related to improving speaker-listener interaction, incorporate examples from the University of Michigan English Language Institute’s collection of academic spoken English, the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). (R. C. Simpson, S. L. Briggs, J. Ovens, and J. M. Swales, compilers. 1999–2000. The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English. Ann Arbor, MI. The Regents of the University of Michigan. Reproduced with permission of MICASE.) MICASE contains speech events in various academic settings, including lectures, student and faculty panels, and one-on-one discussions. The first of its kind in the United States, this corpus is extremely useful for textbook writers because it contains language that speakers of academic English have actually spoken. Information about MICASE and currently available transcripts are on the Web: <www.hti.umich.edu/m/micase/>.

Notes to the Instructor

A teacher’s manual, Notes to the Instructor, is available on the Web for use with this text. It gives both general advice on how to use the text and specific suggestions for using and supplementing material in each unit. Suggestions for additional instructor-designed activities are also included.

Comments and feedback on the text can be sent to susanrei@umich.edu.