

PERESENT YOURSELF1: EXPERIENCE BY S. GERSHON

Gershon, S. (2008). *Present Yourself 1: Experiences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. iii + 87. List price: \$23.00

Reviewed by
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Presentation skills come naturally for some, but for the majority of us the mere idea of public speaking incites discomfort and apprehension. The task becomes that much harder if we are asked to speak in our L2. *Present Yourself 1: Experiences* (2008) is aimed at low-intermediate students who may be unfamiliar with American presentation styles or public speaking. This textbook is the first in a two part series on presentation skills with the stated goal of giving young adult, non-native English speakers the tools to organize, prepare, and deliver speeches on select topics in American English.

The image the book cover is presenting is one of people living active lives who presumably want to talk about them. While the second book of the series is aimed at discussing viewpoints, this introductory text only asks students to speak about topics that are known and experienced. This idea of lived experience may create a comfort zone for students who have a large vocabulary, but it may also prove to be a bane for others who do not feel as comfortable talking about personal experiences.

The book is divided into units that give students a chance to speak from six different interest areas. Each unit contains a few model questions and statements as well as listening, matching, and cloze activities that may be checked vis-à-vis the audio compact disc. At the end of each unit the student is asked to put the preceding information together into a formal presentation. The preface and first unit, *A new club member*, give students a few quick tips about presentation organization and how to make introductions. These first sections prove to be most useful for students who are just getting started. While the text provides some examples of how to set-up a presentation using the standard introduction, body, and conclusion formatting style, it is very likely that students who are unfamiliar with American public speaking may need more time to familiarize themselves with these formatting concepts. Further discussion may be needed regarding ideas such as how to engage the audience, using gestures, and appropriate pronunciation.

After introductions are made, the next three units generate discussion about personal topics: *A favorite place*, *A prized possession*, and *A memorable experience*. It is important for the teacher to keep in mind the audience throughout these units as some people may not be prepared to talk about themselves so much. If students are uncomfortable with the topic, they may mask their discomfort by mimicking the models that are laid out in the activities and examples. For the most part, these units and the final units: *Show me how* and *Movie magic*, should allow for some creativity as well as anonymity if the teacher supplements these discussions with other examples of presentation topics.

Other than the potential stumbling blocks presented by the themes of the topics, there is one other weakness in *Present Yourself 1: Experiences* (2008) worth addressing. While it is nice to have a model when thinking about mapping out a presentation, witnessing those presentations which have not strayed one hair away from the model's didactic forms quickly become boring and ineffectual. If the teacher is solely concerned with introducing these forms, then this textbook may be sufficient. However, if the students are ready to move beyond mimicry to a level of fluency that includes rapport with the audience, hesitation devices, idiomatic language, and heightened pronunciation awareness, then this textbook may not suffice.

Overall this is a textbook that introduces its topic with great initiative, colorful photos and charts, and models of American youth culture. All of these qualities may be appreciated by the student who is concerned with being able to model American presentation behavior. However, the lack of higher skill development will eventually create a roadblock for the student who is trying to express personal values from their native tongue or more in depth presentation topics. Keeping the individual students' fluency goals in mind will help the teacher determine whether the breadth of *Present Yourself 1: Experiences* (2008) will be sufficient to meet their presentation needs.

Reviewer

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