

Impromptu Speech—So Easy!

Topic: What I did for my mother on Mother's Day

Speaker: Zhiwei Jiang, a third-year major in Japanese Language and Culture

Last weekend was Mother's Day. I was thinking what to do for my mom before it was coming, but unexpectedly, I was given an urgent task to perform at school that weekend. So I celebrated this special day with my mom one week before the big day.

First, I bought some carnation blossoms for her. The flowers were made of soap, not real flowers, but their beauty could last much longer than real ones. Moreover, when my mom washes her hands, she could use them. As I gave my mom the gift on "our" Mother's Day, she complained about the cost. However, I could see the smile on her face. She liked it.

Then, I took my mom to a great restaurant in town for lunch. Because she usually spends a lot of time in the kitchen preparing meals for us, on this special day, she deserved sitting at a table and enjoying nice, delicious food.

Finally, I took her to an extraordinary garden to see some beautiful lily blossoms. My mom likes to appreciate flowers. When she saw the different kinds and colors of lily flowers, she told me she loved them.

In conclusion, my mom has taken good care of me all my life. Although she has never asked me to do anything for her in return, on Mother's Day, at least I could do something special for her. I'm glad we celebrated the wonderful day together. It was unforgettable¹.

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I work for English Language Center at Tunghai University in Taichung. We offer various kinds of English courses to all students at the school. For many years, the Center has been enforcing a regulation that any part-time teacher must teach at least one required course if they would like to request an elective. After I retired from the Center, I, now a part-time instructor, except for the first semester after my retirement, have been teaching every semester a two-credit required course, *Sophomore English for Non-Majors* (SENM), and my favorite three-credit elective, *English Animated Film Appreciation and Discussion* (EAFAD).

At the end of last academic year, as we were making our course requests to the Center's Curriculum Planning and Review Committee for the fall semester of this year, apart from EAFAD, I applied for an elective, *Impromptu Speech*, which was under *Presentation and Public Speaking*, one of the SENM modules. I used to teach impromptu speech for several semesters. It was based on my experiences in teaching English composition skills. I made the speech skills practical and easy to learn for students of any level. I was quite proud. This time I would like to teach the course once again and was feeling confident and

excited. As a result, the two courses I requested were approved and the procedure was completed. All I had to do was wait for the start of the new semester in September.

In July, however, the University informed me abruptly through English Language Center that the course *Impromptu Speech* I requested had to be cancelled according to a university policy. Reason: No student chose it during the preregistration period! Hearing this, I was dumbfounded. I couldn't believe my ears. I did specify in my online course description that the course was designed for students of all levels. Nevertheless, no student wanted to take it! No one wanted to learn this lifelong-useful skill! Did students get cold feet as soon as they saw the course title? In the past, I had used the same name and had been able to get enough students to make the class fly every time! Now, I was at the mercy of the school policy. Despite my disappointment, I accepted the cancellation. Immediately, I inquired the assistant, who relayed to me the bad news, if I was allowed to teach the film course without the speech class. Smiling, she assured that it wasn't a problem. I breathed a sigh of relief.

The fall semester began and I started to teach the film course. One day at lunch in the teachers' lounge, I was chatting with the coordinator-in-general of the SENM modular project, Chiu Miao-chin. She mentioned that after my speech class was cancelled, the modular classes at that time slot became larger than normal, increasing the load of the teachers concerned. She encouraged me to offer the modular speech course in the spring semester in order to reduce the class size. I was overjoyed. I couldn't hide my happiness. Then, with a warm smile, she changed her tone and hoped that I could rename the course. She added that the title, *Impromptu Speech*, might be a bit intimidating to students, which was hard for us teachers to imagine, and suggested that I search on the Internet for something easier and lighter for the students such as the titles of oral textbooks. At that instant, a surge of realization jolted me, and I nodded immediately.

I followed her advice and found numerous titles for speaking textbooks covering various topics. Very quickly, I selected an easy and stress-free name, which was the opposite of impromptu speech, *Speak English: Easy to Learn*, as the class title. In the meantime, I revised part of the course description. A speech giver, normally, is supposed to stand in front of a group of people, give their talk, and interact with them. To make students less nervous, thanks to the movable seats, I arranged the whole class, including myself, in a large circle. Each of us spoke while seated, creating an atmosphere similar to a game or discussion. When writing my course proposal, I even avoided using the word "impromptu." Soon after I submitted it to the Committee, it was approved.

During the winter break, eager to learn how it turned out, I went online frequently to check if any student signed up for my speech class. First, there were three. Then, the number started to increase as the class starting date approached. On the day before school began, there were eleven. The following day, as if there was magic, it was nineteen! Knowing the course could finally fly, I was thrilled! Miao-chin was really intelligent! She knew not only what the problem was but also how to solve it!

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Topic: The most unforgettable moment in my life

Speaker: Zijie Kang, a second-year major in Applied Mathematics

One day last summer, a good friend of mine from the university and I planned to travel to the east coast, Hualien. And we did go and had great fun there. Most of all, I experienced the most unforgettable moment in my life.

On the first day, we went to many exciting places including a hot spring spot and a night market. We both felt exhausted at the end of the day, but we still got up very early the next morning to watch the famous sunrise. In the darkness, we walked to the nearby seaside and waited. Then the magical moment happened. In front of us were the rocks, the ocean, and the slowly rising sun. The view was so beautiful that we screamed and jumped up and down.

Although the event took place a year ago, I still remember it very clearly. It was really the most unforgettable moment I've had in my life².

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In the first session of the class, there were twenty-three students enrolled altogether. I almost shrieked with delight. After I asked the students to sit in a circle, I taught them how to make an easy, yet meaningful self-introduction in English, based on their short, written answers to a series of questions about them. Holding the paper with my own short answers and making them into sentences, I demonstrated first, locking eyes with my audience. Then the students took turns introducing themselves. The bell rang before all the students could perform. Nevertheless, those who performed were very brave; no one backed out or complained. It was amazing. Very pleased, I gave them a big hand.

In the second week, the number of students remained the same, signifying that no one had dropped out or transferred to another section of the program. I grinned, feeling more confident in the revised course plan.

The first thing I did that day was let the students who didn't get a chance to speak the week before perform their self-introductions. Then I began to teach how to give a formal speech. I stressed that in speech giving, content and structure are the most important. Upon knowing the topic, a speaker should brainstorm and organize ideas. A speech can be divided into five major parts—introduction, the first main point, the second main point, the third main point, and conclusion. Any kind of speech must have one central idea, called main idea. It is an attitude or opinion about the topic; therefore, it must be in the form of a sentence and placed at the very end of introduction. The three main points, just like three paragraphs, develop three different aspects of the main idea. For each main point, there must be a topic sentence, located at the very beginning. After the topic sentence, there must be discussion on the topic sentence. The discussion can be an anecdote, some examples, or points of comparison and contrast. In addition, there should be the words, "First", "Second", and "Finally", in front of the three topic sentences respectively so that the three main points will be aligned clearly and the audience will not get confused. As I explained this, I drew some graphs on the board at the same time. I pointed out that

while preparing a speech, the speaker should not write out the entire speech and then memorize it. Instead, the speaker should make an outline, set down the pen, and repeatedly make the speech orally using only the outline. This is the proper method for giving a speech, as it allows for the incorporation of new ideas, audience interaction, and the enhancement of one's speaking skills.

That day I instructed the students to use only the main idea and the three main points to deliver a speech. The part before the main idea, called attention-getting opener, and conclusion would be discussed in the following week.

I wrote the topic "the reasons why I like my hobby" on the board. Then, I demonstrated how to brainstorm and organize ideas. Next, I gave a speech with my own outline. Given fifteen minutes for preparation, the students started to give a talk on the same topic one by one. At the end of each speech, I gave the speaker a grade and comments openly so that all the students could learn from the presentation. That day, most of the students did not meet the requirements. Most of them lacked the discussion for the three main points. However, I understood. It was the first formal speech for them, and they had a long way to go. I encouraged them to keep trying.

In the third week, like the previous week, I let the students who did not get to talk do their presentations on the same topic. These students might have practiced at home. They did wonderfully, especially on the part of fluency.

Then I taught attention-getting opener in introduction. I introduced an easy, but effective method—contrast. I also explained to the students how to connect the attention-getting opener and main idea and gave several examples. On the new topic—what I have learned at the university, students started to practice. Owing to the fact that attention-getting opener was new, the majority of the students didn't perform satisfactorily. Nevertheless, to my amazement, most students discussed the three main points in detail and logically!

At the beginning of week four, I asked the students who hadn't spoken the previous week if anyone would like to perform first. To my utter astonishment, six students, yes, six, raised their hands simultaneously! They were not afraid of giving a public speech! This is one of the classroom situations that make a teacher all over the moon. Laughing from the bottom of my heart, I raised my head, looked up, and said thanks to heavens for giving me so many great, diligent students. The students found it amusing and all beamed. Later, these volunteers performed wonderfully. I told them that it was just the fourth week and they had made quite a progress. I added that even they themselves could feel their speedy improvement. They nodded and smiled broadly.

In the same week, I taught how to conclude a speech with a quotation—what someone said or a proverb. Before the class was adjourned, I assigned homework with the topic "what I did during the spring break." They were supposed to ponder on the topic during the upcoming break and make a meaningful speech with all the five parts when they return to the classroom. Normally, when students hear they have an assignment for a holiday, they would protest—groaning loudly simultaneously. Today, in this lovely

class, however, none of my wonderful students frowned or complained. Not even one! They all gave me a nod bravely and confidently . . .

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Topic: What I would like to do after I graduate from Tunghai University

Speaker: Zhiwei Jiang, a third-year major in Japanese Language and Culture

In just one more year, I will graduate from Tunghai University and enter a new stage of life. Some people would like to go to graduate school. But not for me, I think there're some more important things for me to do.

First, I would like to find a job. After several part-time job experiences I've had, I don't think I could sit in an office for eight hours. As a Japanese major, I would prefer to work as a Japanese interpreter, earning some money by taking some cases. I might make less money than work in an office, but somehow I know interpreting is more suitable for me.

Next, I would like to make some videos of my adventures by driving my motorcycle around in Taiwan. I know I might be surrounded by many onlookers while filming, but I don't mind. I've had the dream for a long time, and I don't mind spending a lot of time to do it.

Finally, I would like to travel in Japan driving my motorcycle. My friend and I planned that while we were freshmen in university. I've never been to another country before, and I don't know if the Covid would come to an end when we graduate. Anyway, I'm excited about this adventure. Moreover, it would be a great opportunity for me to use my Japanese speaking and reading skills.

I don't know if I'll regret my plans or not, but I do know these are what I truly want to do after I graduate. Life is made of many decisions. Even if my decisions are wrong, I could still learn something from the experiences³.

1, 2, 3 Some logical, grammatical, and wording problems in the three speeches have been revised by the author Hsiu-yao Wu. The content of the speeches, however, remains the same.