

Peer Assessment in English for Specific Purposes Lessons: An Effective Tool for Master's Students to Develop Their Presentation Skills

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Alternative assessment encompasses a variety of nontraditional methods for evaluating student language learning, often emphasising practical skills, critical thinking, and creativity over the linguistic focus of standard exams. Examples for alternative assessment include portfolios, project work, and presentations (Stiggins, 1991). It aims to provide more comprehensive insights into student understanding beyond conventional tests. Unlike traditional methods of assessment, alternative assessment focuses on real-life language use, emphasising students' performance and the development of skills necessary for their professional growth. It requires a high-quality product, involves problem-solving, and combines various skills in different ways (Rousseau, 2018, p. 3). It helps students improve their current performance by using learning-oriented criteria to evaluate their work (Dellar & Walkley, 2017, p. 121). University educators often believe that alternative assessment methods align with modern trends, making English learning more interactive, personalised, and engaging. They emphasise that these approaches promote student independence, confidence, and creativity, offering more tailored evaluations. However, they also recognise that successful implementation depends on careful planning and awareness to ensure maximum effectiveness (Chugai & Kukharets, 2025, p. 847).

Peer Assessment

A form of alternative assessment that fosters student engagement is peer assessment. It has emerged as a significant pedagogical strategy in higher education. It develops critical thinking skills and promotes self-regulated learning (Topping, 2009). In the context of Master's programmes, where autonomous learning and advanced analytical skills are essential, peer assessment offers students an opportunity to assess their peers' work while reflecting on their own learning process (Liu & Carless, 2006). Peer assessment is the evaluation of each other's work or performance using rubrics (Chin, 2007, p. 13). It involves students assigning grades to enhance learning through critical evaluation and reflection (Topping, 2009). Despite its benefits, peer assessment remains inconsistent in postgraduate education, often hindered by concerns about reliability, fairness, and students' willingness to participate (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). This paper aims to explore the effectiveness of peer assessment among Master's students at a technical university in Ukraine, examining its impact on academic performance and perceptions of fairness and motivation.

Research indicates that peer assessment can enhance learning outcomes by encouraging active engagement and deeper understanding of course content (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Topping (2009) highlighted that when effectively structured, peer assessment promotes critical evaluation skills and fosters collaborative learning. In the context of Master's education, Liu and Carless (2006) found that peer assessment facilitates reflective practice, which is vital at advanced levels of study. However, concerns about the reliability of peer evaluation persist, with some studies suggesting that students may lack the necessary skills to assess their peers accurately or may be influenced by personal biases (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). Furthermore, students' perceptions of fairness and their motivation to participate actively are critical factors influencing the success of peer-assessment initiatives (De Grez et al., 2012). Understanding these dynamics is essential for

designing effective peer-assessment systems that maximise educational benefits for postgraduate students.

Constructive Feedback and Formative Assessment

Research findings (Hattie & Clarke, 2019; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Liu & Carless, 2006) confirm the importance of offering constructive feedback. When instructors and peers give constructive feedback to students, it may encourage students to reflect on their performance. When students offer feedback on the course, it provides teachers with insight into students' attitudes towards the instruction they received (Chugai, 2023, p. 24). Feedback from instructors and peers can significantly enhance the student learning process and offer many educational benefits. For instance, nongraded narrative descriptive feedback provided by instructors consists of qualitative comments that describe strengths and suggestions for further development, without assigning a grade (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). It aims to guide student learning and foster self-regulation. This can be contrasted with graded assessment, which refers to evaluative procedures that assign a score or grade to a student's performance, contributing to their overall course grade or academic record (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2003). It is primarily used to measure achievement against predefined learning objectives. Importantly, feedback should not be mistaken for marking or grading; its primary purpose is to guide students towards improved outcomes (Hattie & Clarke, 2019).

Formative assessment is an ongoing process of providing feedback during learning to improve students' understanding and performance (Black & Wiliam, 2010). Summative assessment, on the other hand, evaluates learning at the end of an instructional period, often through exams or final projects, to determine overall achievement (Harlen & Deakin Crick, 2003). Getting points for preparing and delivering a presentation counts as summative assessment, whereas nongraded, narrative, descriptive feedback falls under formative assessment.

Peer Assessment Example: ESP Presentations

In what follows, an example will be described of how peer assessment was used to provide feedback on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) presentations. A presentation on a research project is an obligatory assignment required for the module Practical English Course for Scientific Communication at a university in Ukraine. Master's students specialising in various applied sciences are aware of this requirement as one of the goals of the Practical English Course is to develop and demonstrate their ability to deliver individual presentations on a wide range of scientific and professional topics.

However, using a traditional assessment approach whereby an ESP teacher evaluates each student's presentation can be time-consuming and subjective as students often complain that they deserve a better grade. Such lessons involve mostly the teacher and the student presenter, leaving other students isolated and disengaged. While one student presents, the others remain passive observers and are not involved in the evaluation process. They just wait for their turn to present, and their grade fully depends on their teacher's decision. This kind of pressure can be demotivating for both teachers and students, potentially impacting academic performance and attendance.

Using peer assessment in ESP lessons turns the tables, with students being responsible for evaluating their peers' work. At first, it may take time, especially for students with no experience of peer assessment, but it is worthwhile. The teacher becomes an observer and facilitator, intervening only when necessary, monitoring the process, and making sure students are respectful and constructive.

In the Practical English Course, peer assessment was used in both a summative and a formative way. For the former (i.e., summative assessment), students awarded points for their

peers' presentations using a set of clearly defined criteria. For the latter (i.e., formative assessment), peers provided nongraded, narrative, descriptive feedback, adding comments to justify the number of points they assigned to each presentation.

The requirements for the presentation are clearly outlined for the students. They should present a research project and include the topic of their research, its relevance and aims, the methods they used, as well as the potential difficulties and outcomes of the project. Providing the students with the criteria for peer assessment also helps them to become aware of the expectations for a presentation before creating it. Five criteria (i.e., Content, Structure, Visuals, Accuracy, and Body Language) are provided to the students with feedback descriptors of the points awarded. Each criterion will be discussed separately below, and the descriptors will be shown in tables.

First, the criterion Content is used to assess the extent to which Master's students' presentations address the topic of their research and cover all the necessary information in a given area. The feedback descriptors for Content are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptors for the Content Criterion

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Content	5	Content is comprehensive, insightful, and well-developed
	4	Content is accurate, detailed, and relevant
	3	Content is partially accurate or relevant
	2	Content covers some basic points but lacks depth or relevance
	1	Content is incomplete, inaccurate, or irrelevant

Second, a presentation should be well-structured and have the following five sections: a topic outline, an introduction, a main part, a conclusion, and references. These elements are reflected in the Structure criterion, which students use to assess how well the presentation is

organised. Table 2 shows the descriptors for providing feedback on the structure of a presentation.

Table 2

Descriptors for the Structure Criterion

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Structure	5	All five sections are well-developed
	4	One section is missing or inadequate
	3	Two sections are missing or inadequate
	2	The organisation is minimal
	1	The presentation is unclear and disorganised

Third, the audience is more likely to understand the material when diagrams, pictures, graphs, or short videos are included. In PowerPoint presentations, each slide should have an amount of information which is easily visible and readable. Master's students use the descriptors in Table 3 to assess the Visuals criterion of a presentation.

Table 3

Descriptors for the Visuals Criterion

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Visuals	5	Highly effective, relevant, and visually appealing
	4	Clear, relevant, and well-integrated into the content
	3	Visuals could be clearer or more engaging
	2	Somewhat relevant but lack clarity or quality
	1	Visuals are absent or irrelevant

Next, the presentation should be in English at B2 level, ideally with no linguistic mistakes on the slides or in the speech. The criterion Accuracy seen in Table 4 encompasses correctness, fluency, intonation, and related aspects of the language of the presentation.

Table 4*Descriptors for the Accuracy Criterion*

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Accuracy	5	Completely accurate, no mistakes
	4	Occasional minor grammatical mistakes
	3	Frequent minor grammatical mistakes
	2	Significant mistakes affect the overall understanding
	1	Largely inaccurate, mistakes impede understanding

Finally, various body language techniques are important for the effective delivery of public speech. Using a range of body gestures such as hand and arm movements is essential for different types of talk. Factors such as facial expressions, voice projection, and eye contact also significantly impact the success of a speech (Kilag et al., 2023, p. 404). Master's students apply the descriptors shown in Table 5 to assess the Body Language criterion of a presentation.

Table 5*Descriptors for the Body Language Criterion*

Criterion	Points	Descriptors
Body Language	5	Highly engaging, natural, and purposeful
	4	Confident, supportive, enhances communication
	3	Generally appropriate but needs improvement
	2	Awkward, ineffective, or minimal
	1	Distracting, inconsistent, or dismissive

Procedure

Before assessing their peers' presentations, Master's students need to use the descriptors to evaluate a sample presentation provided by the teacher so as to develop the skills to assess accurately and avoid personal biases (Falchikov & Goldfinch, 2000). Besides assigning points, Master's students also provide nongraded descriptive feedback, which includes recommendations for improving the presentation. Some comments may relate to the

content (e.g., “a narrow topic that not everyone can understand”, “some implementation details are missing”), structure (e.g., “no references at the end”), visuals (e.g., “different fonts on the slides”, “problems with colour choice”), or accuracy (e.g., “mispronunciation of ‘queries’”).

After using the criteria to assess a sample presentation, students assess their peers’ presentations. They take turns presenting and conducting peer assessment based on the descriptors. They take notes and share their constructive feedback. Creating a Google Document for students to use allows all participants to keep track of comments and maintain interaction between presenters and assessors. It also solves the problem of equal participation as those who cannot attend a lesson can still present online asynchronously. Those who are absent or experience technical issues may watch an online presentation recording, complete the peer assessment, and provide feedback via a Google Document.

Feedback on Feedback

It is important for students to reflect on the feedback they received after delivering their presentation. They may share what they enjoyed about their performance, what could be better, and what comments they expected. They also provide feedback on their peers’ comments after their presentations. Finally, the ESP teacher shares feedback on the entire procedure, encouraging students and highlighting the positive aspects of peer assessment. It is true that some students do not provide critical comments to avoid damaging their relationships with groupmates. However, through practice and the guidance of a teacher, they can see how constructive feedback can help them become better presenters and how transparent assessment and constructive feedback strengthen their relationships.

Conclusion

In closing, peer assessment as a form of alternative, formative assessment can be an motivating pedagogical tool when used regularly and consistently for ESP presentations in higher education, as my observations in a Master's programme at a technical university showed. In my experience, Master's students appreciate constructive peer feedback because the peers are experts in the same field, whereas an ESP teacher may focus mostly on language aspects. Peer assessment has had a positive impact on my Master's students' presentation performance, perceptions of fairness, and motivation. Master's students will be required to work in teams and present the results of their work at their future workplaces, which makes peer assessment attractive and beneficial for them and a valid and authentic form of assessment for the tutor.

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