

In February and March of 2015, I had the pleasure of working with undergraduate and graduate students from the Department of Education who were preparing to present at the University of Tokyo and Stockholm University Joint International Seminar: Education in the Era of Globalization. As the coordinator of the Department of Education Academic Writing Support Desk at the University of Tokyo, I assist students with a wide range of support for academic works in English. Such works range from short reports and research abstracts, to international conference presentation preparation and publication in peer-reviewed international journals.

As I worked face-to-face with the students prior to their departure, I was truly impressed by how much they invested into the preparation of their presentations and how eager they were to present their research to those at Stockholm University. In regards to academic presentations—and arguably any type of expression—concise and specific use of language is critical; therefore, meeting the students directly and speaking with them about what they hope to express during their research presentation was mandatory in order to provide appropriate support. Each chosen word and grammar point has a distinct purpose and expresses the logic within their research. As such, even seemingly small mistakes often cannot be corrected without a clear understanding of the context. Furthermore, speaking with students about their research and presentation allows the students the opportunity to consider the key points within their research that they wish to express in the limited time of an academic presentation.

One of the key messages I wished to convey to the students during their preparation was that, “your slides are not the presentation, *you* are the presentation.” They took this message to heart and invested many hours actively practicing their presentations during, and after, their scheduled appointments using several basic guidelines that I provided regarding body language, eye contact, and time management. Some students prepared well over the 10-15 personal practice sessions that I recommended. As a result, they felt even more confident and comfortable with their presentation. A presentation is a performance; a performance that must flow naturally and comfortably to be effective, and this flow only comes through training and practice.

Yet, the presentation itself is only one part of an academic conference or seminar. Based on my own experience of both attending and working to arrange several academic conferences, there are three main aspects to consider: presenting one’s research, acquiring feedback, and professional networking. While giving an effective presentation is imperative, politely encouraging effective discussion afterward for the sake of receiving critical feedback is equally important. Lastly, academic conferences provide the perfect opportunity for networking with other professional individuals—an opportunity not to be neglected. Prior to departure, I was confident that the students bound for Stockholm understood all three of these aspects and the responsibilities required for a professional presentation. Upon their return from the joint international seminar, both the students and faculty have told me that it was a wonderful and fruitful experience.

I am proud to be a part of supporting the University of Tokyo students in their academic endeavors. Whether it be a career in academia, business, or government, concise expression in a professional environment is a critical skill for students to be competitive in this globalizing world. In the future, I hope to see further projects for students that are similar to the University of Tokyo and Stockholm University Joint International Seminar—projects that not only offer experience and professional opportunities, but the support and guidance required for making the most of such opportunities.

-Brian Berry,  
University of Tokyo Department of Education  
Academic Writing Support Desk Coordinator