

20 Images x 20 Seconds: A Terrific Teaching Tool

by Sylvan Payne

Tired of “death by PowerPoint?” Do you struggle with dull, endless, listless, droning presentations? It doesn’t have to be that way.

If you’ve attended a PechaKucha Night in one of the more than 800 cities around the globe, it’s probably occurred to you already that this could maybe work in the classroom to make things a little zippier.



“What’s [PechaKucha](http://www.pechakucha.org) (PK)?” you ask. Well, it’s a presentation format that started in Tokyo in 2003. Each presentation is made up of 20 slides and each slide advances automatically after 20 seconds. The result is a high-speed, high-energy experience for both presenter and audience. (Check out the PK website for lots of example presentations.)

<http://www.pechakucha.org/watch>

I’ve used the PK 20x20 format in a university setting with Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) students. The results have been overwhelmingly positive: improved skills, increased confidence, engaged audiences, and heightened community satisfaction. [Here](#) is a student 20x20 presentation.

As an EFL teacher doing a lot of content-based instruction, I’m mostly concerned with teaching language skills. If there’s time and energy remaining, I’ll work on critical thinking skills. I sometimes ask my students to do reflective discussions and/or journaling for feedback. Sometimes I’ll ask students to prepare questions for post-presentation discussions. All these are concerned with language skills primarily. I use 20x20 because it meets so many needs while being an entertaining, engaging experience.

Why it works for me:

1. **The slides are highly visual and low on text.** Presenters tend to *talk about* the ideas illustrated by the visuals instead of *reading* the screen to the audience.
2. **The time factor helps the teacher manage things on presentation days.** When you know it’s going to be 400 seconds exactly, you can easily plan how many presentations to work into a class period.
3. **Nobody dies of boredom.** If it’s bad, it comes to a merciful end at 6’40”.

4. **The time factor makes practice do-able.** Practice is the single most important issue determining whether a presentation succeeds or fails. A presenter can practice one of these eight or nine times in one hour. Supervised practice can be part of classroom work. And with increased practice, presenters tend to do better in areas of voice inflection, gestures, posture, movement, and eye contact—all vital parts of a successful presentation.
5. **The time factor also forces presenters to work within strict boundaries to create something compelling.** As one of my students put it, it reminded her of [haiku](#). What she meant is: it's compact, it follows rules, and in doing so, the meaning somehow overflows the boundaries.
6. **And yet it's flexible.** It's possible to work it out in teams with say, two or three people working on one 20X20 presentation together. Or doing mini PKs of ten slides.

Try it out with your students, your colleagues or at your next meeting; attend a PechaKuchaNight; or, create a 20x20 and present it yourself. It's fun, easy to use and helpful.

(Call to action part) I'm curious how this might work in a non-EFL/ESL learning environment. Or if you don't think it would work, why not?

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For a fuller understanding of PechaKucha and the 20x20 presentation tool, read [the article](#) "Helping Students Develop Skills for Better Presentations: Using the 20x20 Format for Presentation Training" by Mark Christianson and Sylvan Payne (Language Research Bulletin, 26, ICU, Tokyo).

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