

Ya-Ping (Amy) Hsiao,
Brenda den Oudsten &
Cor Sluijter (ed.)

A Practical Guide to Quality Assessment in Dutch Higher Education

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Tilburg University

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Editors

OPEN PRESS TiU

Open Press Tilburg University
Tilburg, The Netherlands

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Design and typesetting: LINE UP boek en media bv
Cover image: Jean-Paul Wettstein (www.pexels.com/)

ISBN: 9789403935164
DOI: https://doi.org/10.56675/9789403935164



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3.5
A More Neuro-Inclusive Assessment of Presentation Skills

Yvette Drissen, Hanne Jacobs, Sinsemilla Blokvoort, Frea van Dooremaal,

Minne Bakker, and Ya-Ping (Amy) Hsiao

Introduction

In this chapter, we present an educational innovation developed to improve presentation skill training and **assessment** in the Bachelor program of Philosophy. The innovation was implemented in the first-year course called 'Contemporary Social and Political Philosophy'[54], which already contained a presentation skill component. In the original setup, students received information on the expectations and the grading **rubric**, after which they were 'thrown in at the deep end'. Throughout the course, each student had to give a 30-minute presentation on a primary philosophical text followed by a 15-minute Question and Answer session (Q&A). In order to pass the course, the students needed to pass the presentation assignment meaning that they had to get at least a grade of 5,5 for this component (30% of total grade).

Through feedback from students and the study advisor, we learned that several students found giving a high-stake, one-off presentation daunting and that certain aspects of our grading rubric and the format of the assignment might disadvantage neurodivergent students. More specifically, the rubrics and setup mostly seemed to benefit students who already felt comfortable giving presentations in the traditional neurotypical way (e.g., making eye-contact, speaking with an animated voice, demonstrating self-confidence, responding on the spot to questions). The grading rubric and assignment setup hence appeared to erect barriers in the educational environment for neurodivergent students to develop presentation skills in a way that feels authentic to them. The student feedback supplemented with insights from the academic literature (see Blokvoort et al., 2025) urged us to rethink what a 'good presentation' even means and made it questionable whether the standard way of training and assessing presentation skills is flexible and inclusive enough in that it allows for a variety of successful presentation styles. In response, we completely revised the way we train, teach, and assess presentation skills. These changes were implemented during the academic year of 2024-2025. While our innovation continues to work in progress, we invite other lecturers to reuse the materials we have developed and adapt them to their particular context.

54 https://uvt.osiris-student.nl/onderwijscatalogus/extern/examenprogramma/16300/7A200-2025?taal=nl

The Innovation

The course learning goals focusing on presentation skills remained the same as before, namely:

- The student can analyze a complex philosophical text and reconstruct the most important argumentation structure.
- The student can give a clear presentation in academic style that relates to, but also goes beyond, the content of the lectures.

However, the path that students need to follow to achieve these goals has changed substantially. Importantly, we first adjusted the rubrics/evaluation criteria. Engaging presentations come in different forms and formats. We wanted to encourage students to explore and develop their own authentic presentation style, which allows for flexibility in how they deliver a clear and effective presentation, while maintaining high standards. So, instead of grading students on the extent to which they make eye-contact, they are now evaluated on how their "non-verbal communication strategies support their message". This can include walking around (rather than standing in one place, if this is what is helpful for the student to deliver their message effectively), holding a pen in one's hand (in case a student does not know what to do with their empty hands), or looking at the wall behind the audience (instead of looking into people's eyes). The rubric now also includes an interaction element, urging students to think about how they deliver their message and ensure that it is inclusive and suitable for a diverse audience. See Table 3.5.1 for the whole rubric of the final presentation.

The instruction and training of presentation skills throughout the semester follow a modular structure that aligns with the content of the course. The first four lectures are about justice (module 1), the following three lectures are about democracy (module 2), the three lectures after that are about power (module 3), and the final three lectures are about freedom (module 4). The *presentation skill component* of this course aligns with these content modules. That is, the texts that the students use in developing their presentation skills are also the required literature for the course, which gives them an extra opportunity to study the material. Moreover, the tutorial in the module on 'power' is used to reflect with the students on how power dynamics play a role in a presentation (who is given a stage to begin with and what does a stereotypically 'good' presenter look like?).

To facilitate the students' development towards the final presentation, the students now work on their presentation skills on a gradual, step-by-step basis through a set of assignments that lead up to the final presentation.

Module 1 is mostly focused on the *form* of the presentation. In terms of assignments, students select a video of a presenter they recognize themselves in and look up to. They are asked to analyze the presentation style, including what they can learn from the presenter, to formulate their own personalized learning goals and action points, and to give peer feedback on the same assignment submitted by a fellow student.

The deliverables for module 1 are as follows:

- Video analysis of the presentation form: individual assignment, graded by the lecturer.
- Self-reflection report, learning goals, and action points: individual assignment, pass-or-fail , but the lecturer provides qualitative feedback.
- Qualitative peer feedback on self-reflection, learning goals, and action points of one other student. This is an individual assignment that needs to be completed within one week after handing in the other two assignments. This element is pass-or-fail. The lecturer merely checks whether the student fulfilled the assignment and gives qualitative feedback where needed.

Table 3.5.1
Grading Rubric Final Presentation

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Sufficient (2)	Insufficient (1)
CONTENT				
Focus	Key elements are highlighted exhaustively and with precision. Attention is perfectly distributed according to the importance of the elements.	Key elements are clearly highlighted. Attention is largely in line with the importance of the elements.	Key elements have been highlighted reasonably well. Attention is partly in line with the importance of the elements.	Key elements are poorly or incompletely highlighted. Attention is not commensurate with/attuned to the importance of the elements.
Argumentation	The author's arguments are fully understood and excellently explained. Transitions between arguments are very clear and coherent.	The author's arguments are well understood and well explained. Transitions between arguments are clear and reasonably coherent.	The author's arguments are partly understood and explained. Transitions between arguments are somewhat clear and coherent.	The author's arguments are poorly understood and explained. Transitions between arguments are unclear and incoherent.
Conceptual clarity	Relevant terms are used correctly and appropriately. Crucial terms are defined in an exemplary manner.	Relevant terms are used correctly. Crucial terms are well defined.	Relevant terms are sometimes used correctly. Definitions of crucial terms are reasonably clear.	Relevant terms are used incorrectly or unclearly. Definitions of crucial terms are unclear or absent.
Text analysis	The selection of text passages is excellent and they are clearly explained.	Crucial text passages are selected and well explained.	Crucial text passages are reasonably well chosen and explained.	Crucial text passages are poorly chosen or unclear in their explanation.
Critical reflection	Critical considerations are highly relevant and argued for in a compelling way.	Critical considerations are relevant and well-argued.	Critical considerations are partly relevant and reasonably argued.	Critical considerations are irrelevant or poorly argued.
FORM				
Conveying the message	Highly accessible, appropriate language register, and nonverbal communication facilitate the speaker's message.	Accessible, mostly appropriate language register and nonverbal communication helps get the speaker's message across to some extent.	Mostly accessible, sometimes appropriate language register and nonverbal communication facilitates the speaker's message to a limited extent.	Inaccessible, inappropriate language register and nonverbal communication hardly facilitate the speaker's message.
Structure	The objective, context, and structure are clearly stated. The conclusion is well defined and provides a good overview and feedback. The structure is logical and easy to follow.	The objective, context, and structure are clearly stated. The conclusion is well defined and provides an overview and feedback. The structure is reasonably logical and easy to follow.	The objective, context, and structure are reasonably well defined. The conclusion is somewhat limited and offers a restricted overview and feedback. The structure is somewhat logical and easy to follow.	The objective, context, and structure are unclear. The conclusion is poorly defined and does not provide an overview or feedback. The structure is not logical and difficult to follow.

Visual support	Slides are well-designed and support the message, contain an appropriate amount of information, and have very clear structural indicators.	Slides are well-designed, usually contain an appropriate amount of information, and have clear structural indicators.	Slides are reasonably well-presented, sometimes contain too much or too little information, and have somewhat clear structural indicators.	Slides are poorly designed, contain too much or too little information, and have unclear structural indicators.
Time management	The allocated time has been strictly adhered to and the time spent on each component is perfectly balanced.	The allocated time was well respected and the time spent on each component was well balanced.	The allocated time has been reasonably respected and the time spent on each component is somewhat balanced.	Allotted time is poorly respected and time spent per component is not balanced.
Interaction	The student captures the interest of a diverse audience and takes into account different ways in which people engage information. Answers during the Q&A are very clear and well-founded. The student asks enough relevant questions during the Q&A from fellow students.	The student generates a certain degree of interest among a diverse audience. Answers during the Q&A are clear and well-founded. The student asks a reasonable number of relevant questions during the Q&A session with fellow students.	The student generates limited interest from the audience and pays little attention to the different ways in which people engage information. Answers during the Q&A are reasonably clear and well-founded. The student asks somewhat relevant questions during the Q&A session with fellow students.	The student barely arouses the interest of a diverse audience and does not take into account the different ways in which people engage information. Answers during the Q&A are unclear and poorly substantiated. The student asks no questions or irrelevant questions during the Q&A with fellow students.

The instructions of the video analysis as well as the assessment criteria used by the lecturer can be found in the online supplement folder of this chapter (i.e., Instructions and Rubric Video-Analysis Module 1). The instructions for the reflection report, learning goals, action points, and the peer-feedback rubric can be found in the online folder (i.e., Instructions Self-Reflection, Learning Goals, Action Points, and Rubric Peer-Feedback Module).

In Module 1, the lecturer creates small groups consisting of 4 students. Students can indicate in an online form with whom they would like to collaborate. The lecturer makes sure that each of them is in a group with (at least) 1 classmate of choice. The remainder of the assignments in the upcoming modules are executed within these groups.

Module 2 is about the *content* of the presentation. The lecturer selects a few videos that align with the course material and asks students to write a group analysis of one of the videos. This analysis includes a summary after which the students answer questions such as, "how well did the speaker succeed in comprehensively explaining complex ideas?", "did the speaker provide context?", "was it easy to follow the argumentative steps?" and "(how) did the speaker use quotes?" Here, the students are graded *as a group*. The students can also adjust their individual learning goals in light of their content analysis and need to write a reflection on how they are going to incorporate the insights from the content analysis in their own presentations.

The deliverables are:

- Video-analysis about the presentation content: this is a group assignment, and all group members receive the same grade.
- Self-reflection report and (adjusted) learning goals: this is an individual, pass-or-fail assignment (as always, the lecturer provides qualitative feedback where needed).
- Peer-feedback on self-reflection and learning goals of 1 other student. This is an individual, pass-or-fail assignment and needs to be completed within one week after handing in the other two assignments.

The instructions and rubrics of the video-analysis can be found in the supplement materials (i.e., Instructions and Rubric Video-Analysis Module 2). The instructions for the self-reflection, (adjusted) learning goals and the peer-feedback rubric can be found in the online folder (i.e., Instructions Self-Reflection, Learning Goals and Peer-Feedback Rubric Module 2).

In module 3, students get their first opportunity to practice their presentation skills in the form of a panel discussion. Each group chooses a text from the required readings and divides it into sections, after which each group member presents one section. Every presentation takes about 5 minutes. Then, a group discussion takes place in which the students are expected to ask each other clarificatory questions and engage in a discussion. Afterwards, the students write an individual report in which they reflect on their learning goals.

The deliverables for module 3 are:

- Recording panel discussion: one group member hands in a video file on behalf of the group. This video file contains a 5-minute presentation of each group member and a 15-minute Q&A. Each student is graded individually for this assignment.
- Slides of the assignment: that same group member also uploads a document that contains a compilation of the slides of the whole group.
- Self-assessment: after uploading the video and slides, the student has one week to complete a self-assessment. This self-assessment is only qualitative in nature (so the student does not provide a grade for their presentation) and the handing in of the self-assessment is graded pass-or-fail.
- Peer-feedback: after uploading the video and slides, the student has one week to give peer-feedback to 1 other student. The feedback is only qualitative in nature (so the student does not provide a grade on their peer's presentation) and the handing in of the peer-feedback is graded pass-or-fail.

The document, Instructions Panel Discussion and Rubrics for Students and Teacher Module 3 (see the supplement materials) show the instructions students received and the rubrics that the students and the lecturer used.

Finally, in module 4, students give a final presentation in their own group. Each group member selects a unique and new text from the required readings of their choice. The individual presentation should last for about 15 minutes and is followed by a 15-minute Q&A. Afterwards, students write an individual reflection report in which they look back on their progress.

In short, the student delivers the following materials:

Final assignment: Recording of their presentation and the Q&A (which the lecturer grades individually).

A final reflection report (an individual, pass-or-fail assignment on which the lecturer provides qualitative feedback).

The grading rubric the lecturer uses to assess the final presentation can be found in Table 3.5.1. The instructions for the final reflection report are included in Box 3.5.1. Students do not need to provide peer feedback.

Box 3.5.1
Final Reflection Report Module 4

You have now almost completed the presentation skills component of Contemporary Social and Political Philosophy. All that remains is a reflection report of no more than one page in which you look back on your final presentation and your development throughout the course. Reflecting on what you have learned helps you to retain this knowledge better.

Answer the following questions in your report:

1. Refer to the assessment form for the final presentation (see Table 3.5.1). To what extent do you think you have met the various criteria? What went well and where is there room for further development? You only need to highlight 3 to 5 criteria that are most relevant to you.
2. Review your own course learning goals. To what extent have you achieved them?

> 3. How do you look back on the process from February to now? What was it like to work on your action points? For all three questions, be specific. Link your reflections to actual situations, behaviors, thoughts, and/or feelings in recent months.
> You do not need to provide peer feedback on a classmate's report.
>
> *Upload supporting documents:*
> • Your reflection report

All assignments, reflection reports, and peer feedback together form a portfolio. The reflection reports and peer feedback are all pass-or-fail. Students are required to receive a pass on all the reflection reports and peer feedback. For each assignment, the students receive a grade. Every module contains one such assignment, meaning that the student receives four grades in total. The final grade for the presentation skill component consists of a weighted average of those four assignments. The individual analysis of an inspirational speaker (module 1) counts for 10% towards the final grade. The group analysis of a presentation (module 2) also counts for 10% towards the final grade. The small presentation (module 3) counts for 20% and the final presentation (module 4) for 60%. The reason that each component has an increasing weight is because we wanted to give students the room to practice in a lower stakes environment first, slowly working towards their final higher stakes presentation.

Just like in the original setup, the students need to get a passing grade of a 5.5 or higher on the portfolio in order to pass for the course. Yet, with the introduction of the different sub-components, the stakes feel much lower compared to before. By the time the students reach the final presentation, they already had plenty of time to practice. For an overview of the course setup per module, including the deliverables, timeline, and the weight of each component, see Table 3.5.2.

The students must hand in all their work in FeedbackFruits, which they can access through links in the Canvas environment. The platform allows students to hand in videos of their presentations, written documents, as well as (PowerPoint) slides. It also offers various peer-feedback options. Throughout the course, students were required to provide individual peer-feedback on other people's learning goals and reflection reports (three times in total, for modules 1-3). To be clear, the lecturer did not attend any presentation 'live'. They assessed all the material through the platform.

The contact hours between the lecturer and the students all took place during tutorials scheduled over the course of one semester. In total, there were five tutorials, two during the first module and one at the beginning of each consecutive module. The goal of these tutorials was to explain the new assignments that were coming up and let students know what they expected. It was also an opportunity to practice different elements of the presentation. The very first tutorial, for example, is dedicated to the correct formulation of learning goals and action points. It also provided the students with tips on how to formulate proper (peer) feedback. Other tutorials were dedicated to text analysis and the analysis of power dynamics at play when giving a presentation. And in yet another tutorial, we did all kinds of small exercises. For instance, students were given a short text in Esperanto, which they were asked to read out loud in front of others. Even though no one spoke Esperanto (or rather, *because* no one spoke Esperanto), we could focus on one's posture, gestures, and intonation, and even experiment a little (putting your hands in your pocket, holding them in front of your chest and making little movements as you speak, etc.). The students worked on their portfolio assignments outside of the 'tutorial time', but we did keep a room available at a fixed moment each week, in case students wanted to make use of it (and we heard that some groups did make use of it).

The course was designed with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in mind. The goal of UDL is to encourage learner agency, understood as "the capacity to actively participate in making choices in service of learning goals" (CAST, 2026). In practice, this meant that students were given various choices to shape their own learning process: they could pick their own inspirational speaker (module 1), could choose between different videos (module 2), or select their preferred text which they then had to present (modules 3 and 4). The lecturer also gave students the

option to indicate *one* other classmate with whom they'd like to be in a group, so that there would be at least one familiar face. Moreover, students were asked to formulate their own personalized learning goals (within the bounds of the more general assessment criteria) and work on those things that were important or meaningful to them. While one person may want to practice speaking at a slower pace, another person may benefit more by developing strategies for how to handle nerves. They were also invited to hand in their work in a variety of creative formats, beyond the 'typical' written format. One student made use of this and handed in a video-essay instead of a written report for module 1. The course provides multiple ways to engage with the material: by *listening* to the lectures, by *reading* the texts, and *presenting* (some of them) in turn. The benefit of UDL is that the educational design is flexible enough so that every student can adapt it to their own needs and preferences (regardless of whether you are autistic, in a wheelchair, a non-native Dutch speaker, shy, someone who is already very experienced or not experienced at all).

Finally, oral assessments are more prone to bias, due to the impossibility of anonymizing the presentations (Gerlt et al., 2023). We tried to mitigate bias in a few ways, for instance, by complementing presentations with anonymized

Table 3.5.2
Overview Course Setup

Module	Presentation skills component	Tutorial number	Date	Content of the tutorial	Deliverable portfolio (FeedbackFruits)	Deadline portfolio assignment	Weight
1	Form	1	31/1	Explanation of portfolio Explanation of personal learning goals and peer feedback	Self-reflection, learning objectives, and action points (INDIVIDUAL) Video analysis form (INDIVIDUAL) Peer feedback (INDIVIDUAL)	28/3 (21:00)	10%
		2	14/2	Analysis of text module 1	Nothing, but the skill that is being practiced is crucial for subsequent modules	*x*	*x*
2	Content and structure	3	28/2	Explanation and practice with content analysis presentation	Video analysis content (GROUP) Learning objectives and reflection report content (INDIVIDUAL) Peer feedback (INDIVIDUAL)	28/3 (21:00)	10%
3	Communication	4	17/4	Power dynamics based on text module 3	Recording of panel discussion (SUBMITTED AS A GROUP, BUT ASSESSED INDIVIDUALLY) Slides (SUBMITTED AS A GROUP, BUT ASSESSED INDIVIDUALLY) Self-reflection (INDIVIDUAL) Peer feedback (INDIVIDUAL; WITHIN GROUP)	2/5 (21:00)	20%
4	Everything together	5	2/5	Final presentation of a text from module 3 + 4	Recording of your presentation and Q&A (INDIVIDUAL) Self-reflection (INDIVIDUAL)	30/5 (21:00)	60%
							100%

written assignments. Besides, students needed to hand in recordings of their presentation(s), thereby allowing the lecturer to only grade a limited number of them at the time to avoid fatigue. Moreover, following Gerlt et al., (2023), self-reflection and actively questioning stereotypes may help as well, which is even an explicit component of the course.

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

Looking back, students who followed the course during the academic year of 2024-2025 did not receive significantly different grades than the ones who followed the course in the prior year. As such, students from the 2024-2025 cohort as well as the students who came before achieved the course learning goals. The biggest difference lies in how these goals are achieved. By listening to the students and incorporating literature on UDL, authentic assessment methods, and internal and peer feedback, the training and assessment of presentation skills now became a much more fulfilling process *for the students*, as evidenced by informal feedback from the students themselves. For example, they indicated that the course encouraged them to step outside of their comfort zone. They also shared that they gained insight into what is needed for an academic presentation and that they feel more confident in front of groups now. They liked that, by practicing their presentation skills, they also had to study the course material at the same time, thereby killing two birds with one stone. This feedback suggests that achieving the learning goals in this renewed way is experienced as much more fruitful than through a scary one-off presentation without having the room to experiment and grow.

At the same time, the lecturer and the students also identify room for improvement. For example, due to the various subcomponents that needed to be uploaded in FeedbackFruits (two assignments per module + a separate deadline for peer-feedback in each module), one loses oversight quite easily. This requires students and lecturers to keep a more extensive admin than usual.

Additionally, in the pilot version, it was simply assumed that students know how to collaborate. While the collaboration in most groups went well, this was certainly not the case for all. In the future, extra attention could be paid to collaboration. For instance, it would be good to let the students discuss the role each of them wants to fulfil in the group and let them reflect on that in their reflection report.

Something else that will be incorporated next year, is the opportunity for students to present in front of a bigger group, with the lecturer present. Some students indicated that they did not really get the chance to challenge themselves, because of the small-scale setup. So, even though they still achieved the learning goals, they personally wanted to take on this extra challenge, which will be provided in the upcoming edition(s).

Then, regarding the evaluation criterion of 'interaction' (see Table 3.5.1), it turned out that it was rather difficult for the lecturer to judge whether the student indeed considered a diverse audience in their presentation. For a future version of the course, the lecturer should either operationalize this criterion more or remove it altogether and include it as a requirement in the self-reflection.

Finally, FeedbackFruits has a lot of functionalities and works very intuitively. However, there are still some limitations. For example, if you create a 'peer-feedback module', the lecturer cannot give direct feedback on the student's work, only on the peer feedback *other* students have provided. And if you create a 'lecturer feedback module', then the students cannot give peer feedback as well. It would be inconvenient to ask the students to hand in the same work twice, once in every type of module, especially when uploading large video files. This led the lecturer to formulate their feedback and grades for module 3 in a separate Word-document and send it to every individual student by mail. This is something to consider when setting up the course in the future.

All in all, our current way of assessing presentation skills is an improvement compared to before but remains work in progress as well. We therefore mostly want to invite presentation skill lecturers in other programs to draw from our innovation what they need and adjust it to their own context.

This practical guide provides unified and evidence-informed advice for designing high-quality course assessment. Designed for all stakeholders involved in assessment, it offers accessible explanations of theoretical rationales, attention to contextual considerations, and rich, workable examples of both course-level assessment design and commonly used assessment types.

- Section 1 introduces the foundational framework, key constructs, and criteria for effective assessment.
- Section 2 presents the theoretical background of commonly used assessment types.
- Section 3 focuses on application through real course assessment designs. Each chapter includes learning goals, guidance on transparency, reliability, and validity, and concludes with real-world examples, including detailed design cases and examples.

By consolidating existing school-level handbooks, this resource refers to general assessment policies in Dutch higher education and helps lecturers and examiners apply evidence-informed principles in practice. It strengthens professional judgment, enhances student-centered learning, and addresses emerging challenges, including workload pressures and the integration of generative artificial intelligence into assessment.

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