Business English

These units are intended for German-speaking students who wish to improve their command of Business English. They are the result of my teaching at various universities, consultancies or companies. All units are freely available for study but copyright.

Abbreviations used are: **e.g**. = exempli gratia (Latin), for example, for instance, and **i.e.** = id est (Latin), that is, that means. German translations are usually in brackets.

Unit 7: Presentation Techniques

First tell them what you want to tell them, then tell them, then tell them what you told them.

This saying is old but still true. In a good presentation in business you want to convince the audience of your product, services or any research you have done. The better the presentation, the higher are the chances for success. A clear structure, clarity in general and well designed slides without information overload are key to an exceptional presentation. The rule is simple: a) either the famous **5 Ps, P**rior **P**lanning **P**revents **P**oor **P**erformance, or b) **If you fail to plan, you plan to fail**. So true indeed! So make sure you are well prepared, and have a plan B in case things go wrong. This could, for example, be a more detailed well-prepared handout for everybody in case your IT technology crashes…so that the audience has at least something to take home.

Let us now look at the tools first. You will have your **notes** (Notizen, Unterlagen) with you and may use a **flip chart** (to flip = umdrehen, überschlagen), **felt pens** (Filzstifte), **handouts** (gedruckte Unterlagen), a **screen** (Bildschirm, Leinwand), a **pointer** (Zeigestock) or a **laserpointer**. Personally I always prefer a presenter to use an ordinary pointer and point clearly for several seconds to whatever needs to highlighted, instead of quick erratic small light dots which are difficult to catch up with. Do not rush through your presentation, new information needs some time to be processed.

Overhead or **silde projectors** (Folienprojektor) are rarely used these days but can still be found from time to time. Your graphic information will often be arranged in **visuals** (visuelle Hilfsmittel) or **slides** (Folien), such as **tables** (Tabellen), sometimes with **figures** (Grafiken, Zeichnungen), **numbers**

(Zahlen), **drawings** (Zeichnungen), **diagrams** (Diagramme), **bar charts** (Balkendiagramme), **pie charts** (Tortendiagramme) or **flow charts** (Flussdiagramme), or a **chart** or **graph** (Liniendiagramm) with a **horizontal** and **vertical** axis.

After welcoming the audience and before you begin your presentation you should make clear that everybody can follow you well, by e.g. asking *Can everybody hear and see me alright?* If not, make sure that everybody in the audience can. Maybe you have to change seating arrangements or speak up a bit more.

Next you may tell them what is on the menue, what you want to talk about and in which order. Then you should clarify a very important point, that is **when to ask questions**. There are two possibilities here: either you tell the audience to keep questions until the end, and that there will be enough time at the end to deal with any questions. Possible, but not my preferred choice because you risk that your listeners may have forgotten their questions once you have reached the end of your presentation.

The alternative is to allow your audience to interrupt you at any time, so that they can put to you any question they may have. That requires that you are very familiar with your subject and confident enough not to be thrown off track by any such questions, but is a far more professional way of dealing with questions.

We also have to look at how to deal with **questions** in general, for there are various types of questions. A positive constructive question may come up which you cannot answer at the moment. You can then offer the person to see you after the presentation to discuss this point, and/or offer the person to volunteer their contact details and you can research the question and then send the person an email a bit later on. Then you may have a nasty or unhelpful question, often from competitors who may want to discredit you or your presentation. In this case you could turn the whole thing round and return the question by saying *So, what do you think about this? What has your experience been so far with this problem?* This may also give you a few seconds of breathing space during which to think about how to get out of this trap.

A good presentation should have a **clear structure**, and again there are various options here. You may choose the traditional way, ie:

1 welcome the audience, tell them how you want to handle questions, introduce them to the topic,

2 then the main part with several sections, the main content of the presentation,

3 finally the conclusion, maybe with a discussion and/or questions at the end.

There is nothing wrong with this approach, and it may give you stabilty and a bit of steadiness during your presentation. In this case you will have a **Table of Content** (Inhaltsverzeichnis) on one of your first slides, so that the audience knows what to expect.

However, you may want to start differently with a kind of opener or "bombshell", i.e. an exceptional short film sequence, a set of images, a provocative question…to grab your audience's attention. Not always possible, but certainly an eye-catching way of beginning.

When you give your presentation you will probably use visuals or sildes to present some of your content. There are some simple rules for the design of your slides. They should be clear and readable, so avoid small fontsize, information overload and poor contrast. Three to four bullet points per slide is a good rule of thumb.

Be careful with colours for text passages (some people have reduced colour vision), so a black background and white letters or vice versa is always good. If you are not sure about your visual arrangement or the size of your slides on the wall a good thing to do is moving to the back of the audience or the room to see for yourself how visible your material is – you may then have to adjust the projector or screen. And there is nothing wrong with giving an important presentation first to some of your relatives and friends – as a trial run – and ask them for feedback.

Never ever rush through your presentation, that most often renders it pretty much useless. Even the most intelligent people can only take in a certain amount of information per minute – let alone process and understand it. Unfortunately in the professional world we often have to act under severe time pressure, so think carefully what you want to include in your presentation and how long you want it to be, including time for questions and debate.

At the end of your presentation you should have a **conclusion** (Schlussfolgerung), or at least a **summary** (Zusammenfassung) of the most important points. Be careful with the word *resumé* here, this is the American expression for a *CV* or *curriculum vitae*, the German word *Resümee* is best translated by *summary* or *recap* – short for *recapitulation*.

Finally if you want to go deeper into presentation techniques and the respective expressions and phrases, *Presenting in English* by Mark Powell, published by Thomsen Heinle, is very recommendable.