# Using the digital storytelling app and software Moxtra to extend student presentations beyond the classroom

Tim Knight[1]

**Abstract**. This paper explains how the mobile app and computer software Moxtra[2] has augmented presentation and oral communication classes at the university level. Even the free version of Moxtra allows students to compile a digital portfolio of presentation and storytelling work, involving voice and visuals, to which both the teacher and fellow students have access. In a Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) set up in particular, the app provides a workspace of language exploration where students can encounter each other beyond the classroom, and actively participate in the benefits of multimedia learning (Mayer, 2009). Feedback can be given after a presentation, and also beforehand during vital preparation time. The app encourages students to practice their presentations and helps the teacher when it comes to the assessment of students' work.

**Keywords**: MALL, presentations, digital portfolio, blended learning.

## 1. Introduction

Presentation assignments are a common task for students at the tertiary level and they fit well into increasing demands from education ministries for 'active learning' by students (Jones & Palmer, 2017), as the "core elements of active learning are student activity and engagement in the learning process" (Prince, 2004, p. 1). Researching a topic and preparing a presentation on it involves students in an active process, and being able to present to an audience is an important skill. And yet public speaking is often cited in surveys as one of the scariest prospects for most people (e.g. Burgess, 2013).

1. Shirayuri University, Tokyo, Japan; tknight@shirayuri.ac.jp
2. http://moxtra.com/

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Thus, language teachers need to think about various things before requiring students to make presentations. Apart from the matter of stress, which many students feel when having to present (King, 2002), "whole class talks […] take time and limit individuals' speaking opportunities" (Knight, 2018, p.113). Having students present in a round-robin fashion allows more speaking time. This is achieved because each student presents to three or four students only, and being an active audience member when the others in the group do their presentation. Then new groups are made and everyone presents again. Everyone presents three or four times. The round-robin format also creates a more informal, intimate and more relaxed atmosphere in which to present, which is useful when the students are lacking in confidence.

The biggest problem with the presenting-to-small-groups format, however, is that the chance for each presentation to be seen by everyone (including the teacher) is restricted. In a class of about 20 students, it is likely that only about half will see each presentation. This is where the free mobile app and computer software Moxtra comes in: it allows and encourages student interactions and appreciation of each other's work beyond the classroom. The aim of this paper is to explain how Moxtra has benefited the author's presentation classes at the university level.

## 2. Tools and procedures

After researching an agreed topic, students prepare slides of pictures, text, and graphs on their phones using one of the slideware apps – Keynote, PowerPoint, or Google Slides. The research and preparation is done partly in class and partly as homework. In class, the students download the Moxtra app and accept an invitation from the teacher to join 'a conversation'. One of the main attractions for this author to use Moxtra was the software's 'mobile-first architecture'[3]. It should be noted, however, that the first time administrators invite people to join, they have to type in the email addresses of the invitees. This is the one slightly time-consuming task, for which a computer is useful. Once the students have joined Moxtra (with an email address and password of their choosing), it is quick and easy to make a conversation with the same group, or other members, again.

Once students have joined the group conversation (it is best to make a new one for each presentation project), they should make a folder under their own name. If

3. http://moxtra.com/

they do not, the conversation will get disorganized, as files or pictures are uploaded and get mixed up. When each member keeps their own work inside their folder, everything is clear and tidy. Conversation members can upload various kinds of files from anywhere, including linked apps on their phone or from cloud storage.

Any other group member can immediately access everyone else's work, so even at this stage, feedback can be given on the proposed slides for the presentation. Spelling errors or information lacking from a presentation can be noticed and feedback swiftly given, and acted on.

The teacher can give feedback on students' slides, and suggest where more research is needed. Students can therefore develop the presentation more, making changes and corrections on their slides just as on a draft of an essay.

At this point in the course, in class students present 'live', in the small group format, as described in the introduction.

Once their visual aids are in order, students can record over them. Presenters simply swipe left as they speak to move to the next slide. While recording, presenters or storytellers can also make annotations on slides, and draw freely on the app's whiteboard. The free version of Moxtra allows a time limit of ten minutes for one recording. It is possible both to pause while recording, and to discard a finished recording if the speaker wants to try again. A saved presentation results in an mp4 file, which can be viewed on any group member's device or even downloaded and shared in other ways.

The final activity in the project is to require students to comment, within Moxtra, on class members' presentations. It gives them a chance to see and hear those presentations they were not able to experience live. Comments can be written or recorded, and responded to, at any time. Teachers can keep these digital presentations as a record, and use them when grading at the end of the course.

## 3. Discussion

The reason for introducing Moxtra into the course was as follows. In the first class of the course for second year, two classes of female Japanese university students, each with just under 20 students, have been asked about their attitudes to presenting. The survey was made and the data collected in a Google Form, with the link distributed through the class learning management system.

Students answered the questions on their phones. For three years (2016-2018), the results have been consistent. A little more than half have agreed that it is useful to have good presentation skills. However, about half declare that they do not like presenting. Thus, this author sees one of his tasks as creating a supportive atmosphere in which the students can start to enjoy the process of making presentations and building their confidence. The combination of using the round-robin presenting format, with shared digital presentations and written and spoken feedback given in Moxtra outside and beyond class meetings, seems to be working to this end. In the first year of using this framework, in 2016, the clear 'dislikes' for presenting had fallen from 43.3% at the start of the course to 11.8% three months later. The figures were similar among the most recent cohort. Furthermore, in a new follow-up survey about using Moxtra, answered by the 2018 cohort, after the students had completed two presentation projects, over 92% said they found the app very useful or somewhat useful "as a way of getting further language practice". At least from the perception point of view, these responses vindicated the author's decision to use Moxtra.

Moreover, by sharing their presentations in Moxtra, students could actively participate in the benefits of multimedia learning (Mayer, 2009). However, to benefit properly from the use of Moxtra in presentation projects, the students and teacher need to be comfortable with using mobile devices in class. Even a few years ago, Hockley (2013) referred to this form of "mobile literacy" as "an increasingly important skill" (p. 4). Most students seem to have acquired it. They are able to use presentation apps with dexterity, and quickly find their way round Moxtra after a brief demonstration on the big screen. However, it should be acknowledged that the occasional student says they find it 'difficult' to use at first. A future step will be to examine the digital portfolios closely to see how instrumental Moxtra was in the actual development of the students' speaking and presentation skills.

## 4. Conclusions

This paper has explained how using the free app and software Moxtra can augment the process of student presentations. This is especially true when the round-robin presentation format is used, a format particularly suited for students who lack confidence or do not like presenting. Moxtra is a convenient medium for providing feedback both before and after presentations, for providing language practice for presenters and listeners, and as a means for students in a class to view all their classmates' presentations. It may also be helpful for teachers when grading students.

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