Take Time to Talk:
Using Audio Journals to Exercise Spoken Language

Audio Journals - Audio journaling is a technique that students can use for oral language practice and for self-assessment of speaking skills.

What is an audio journal and why is it useful?
Audio Journaling is using a recording device (e.g., your smartphone, tablet, or computer) to record yourself speaking with the goal of listening to your journal entry and evaluating your language. For many ICC students, speaking is often the skill that could benefit the most from practice, and audio journaling is a flexible way to develop and practice oral skills.

How do you start audio journaling?
- Establish a specific goal or goals to work towards. These goals can be very focused (improving an aspect of pronunciation like pausing or stress for emphasis) or more general (exercising your language by recording an audio journal entry once a day). Attending ICC seminars can help you be aware clear goals and strategies.
- Choose a topic and record yourself speaking for 1-5 minutes. Common topics include discussing your research; summarizing something you’ve read, watched, or learned in class; describing an object; describing a series of events; defining a concept for a learner; or talking about your day with different audiences in mind (advisors, friends, colleagues, students).
- Listen to the recording. Depending on your goal(s), there are different ways to assess your recording (see below). You may want to record yourself a second time after listening.

What are typical goals ICC students have when using audio journals?

Building Robust Fluency
An audio journal is a great tool for fluency building because it enables you to practice your spoken English and assess areas that need improvement. Here are strategies that can help with improving fluency:

Record a 1-minute recording describing your research in your native language and then record the same 1-minute description again in English.
- Is the content as robust in English as it is in your first language? If not, restate what you said in English to include more information to more effectively explain the topic.

Record an audio journal entry, and then assess the following while listening:
- Are you using redundant language (rewording, synonyms, paraphrasing)? If you are using terms that are unclear, practice rephrasing the idea orally. Use rewording and paraphrasing techniques to practice restating the original idea in more than one way.  
- When talking about concepts from your field, is there an overuse of jargon, technical language, or textbook language? Restate and simplify the concept as if explaining to someone outside of your field.

1 Heidish, Peggy Allen. “Redundancy Training: Making International TAs Fluent.”
Is the organization of the audio journal entry easy to follow due to use of signaling language? Are ideas clearly connected? Is there flow? If not, restate the ideas with more signal language and stronger connections between ideas.

Are there a lot of unnatural pauses or hesitations that make you hard to follow? Practice restating the ideas from your journal entry with fewer hesitations.

Grammar Monitoring
When using audio journals to monitor grammar, you can focus on different grammar points when self-assessing. Audio journals are a useful tool to identify frequent grammar mistakes that occur in your spoken language that you may not make when writing. Audio journals can help build awareness of the errors you frequently make and give you a chance to practice restating the ideas without those mistakes.

- Are you correctly using all tense forms when speaking? Restate using correct tense forms.
- Are you overusing pronouns; in other words, are they clearly connected to the nouns they are replacing? Be careful about overuse of words like “it” “this” “that” “these” “those.” Restate using specific nouns and concepts to aid clarity.
- Are your errors more cosmetic (such as missing –s endings) or do your errors confuse meaning? If you have frequent or consistent grammar errors, transcribe your audio journal entry and make the corrections in writing, or you can record the entry again while consciously avoiding the previous errors.

Pronunciation Practice
Audio journals are ideal for working on pronunciation strategies to improve clarity when speaking through practicing stress for emphasis: louder, longer (stretching the vowel), pause; pausing between thought groups; improving compound noun stress; and focusing on speed (slowing down!). It is important to have awareness of these strategies before using audio journals for pronunciation practice, and this awareness can be gained through ICC work.

- When listening to your audio journal entry, did you emphasize key terms or ideas? If not, restate by using more stress for emphasis.
- Did you pause between thought groups? If not, repeat but put longer breaks between thought groups. Practice taking a deep breath between thought groups.
- If you are having trouble emphasizing, you can write a brief journal entry, mark the words and phrases which should be stressed and mark where you should pause/breathe. Record yourself as you read it. Did you stress the words that should be stressed? Did you have pauses when necessary? Did you pause in unnecessary places?
- Find a good video model (such as on TED.com). Watch the video and use the transcripts to identify where the speaker is stressing words and pausing. Record yourself mirroring the speaker (a short, 1-minute recording). Compare your own recording to the original.

Remember, research has shown that taking the time to exercise your spoken language will develop your speaking proficiency, so start your audio journal today!