Empowering Students to be Agents of Their Own Learning

Comparing Microsoft Speaker Coach* and Google Slides* in improving student presentation skills

Executive Summary

Each day teachers work tirelessly to prepare students for a future full of varied demands and challenges. In response to these challenges and opportunities, employers and educators have developed important skills-based programs to assist young people in gaining evergreen skills for the workplace of the future such as critical thinking, collaboration, and written and verbal communication.

While teachers integrate communication workplace skills into instructional experiences, they must balance content-specific knowledge and skills as well as other classroom constraints like increased class sizes due to teacher shortages that are prevalent in many communities throughout the U.S. Automated tools can help students and educators overcome limitations and develop valuable skills based on feedback in many domains including world language acquisition or literacy. Though 96% of businesses identify communication skills as essential, they also report a distinct deficiency in many of their employees.[1] Using modern classroom technologies, students can develop communication skills by leveraging tools, resources, and strategies that provide on-demand support. To best develop core student agency traits such as autonomy and choice, students need access to tools and resources that allow them make decisions about their own learning and growth.

> **Students need freedom (with support) to exercise and opportunities to practice these skills in settings where their actions have actual and observable consequences from which students can learn."[2]**

The Microsoft® PowerPoint® tool Speaker Coach empowers students to practice public speaking in low-stakes environments whenever they want. After each attempt, students receive live feedback and a summative report on how they can improve areas such as pacing, filler words, pitch, and inclusive language. Equipped with their feedback data, each student can practice and refine their speaking skills after reviewing the suggestions in their summary.

By comparison, Google Slides* does not offer a built-in speaking coach or analogous service. To use similar features, students would have to sign up for third-party tools and complete steps taking far more time than in Speaker Coach. This could be a barrier for many students due to the complexity of the steps involved as best practices support fewer steps to increase adoption.

For students and educators alike, Speaker Coach provides an inclusively designed solution that develops important traits like student agency and essential communications skills.

[1] Source: Employers Rate Career Competencies, New Hire Proficiency
[2] Source: Accessibility & Student Agency: Critical Ingredients In Personalized Learning

Developing Workplace Readiness and Student Agency Skills

The evolution of workplace demands directly impacts the skills that students develop in classrooms; however, workplaces are quickly changing through disruptions. According to the World Economic Forum, up to 85 million jobs could be impacted or displaced by 2025 as employers respond to advances in automation and a dearth in skilled employees.[3] In order to prepare today's students for tomorrow's careers, teachers at all grade levels and disciplines must help students develop the essential skills that workplaces require such as critical thinking and communication. The National Association of Colleges and Employers report that while 95.9% of workplaces view communication as an essential skill, only 41.6% of entry-level employees are proficient in communication.[4]

Areas of Growth for Essential Workplace Skills

● **Essential Skill**   ● **Proficiency**

Critical Thinking/ Problem Solving: Essential Skill **99%**, Proficiency **56%**

Teamwork/ Collaboration: Essential Skill **98%**, Proficiency **77%**

Communication: Essential Skill **96%**, Proficiency **42%**

0% — 100%
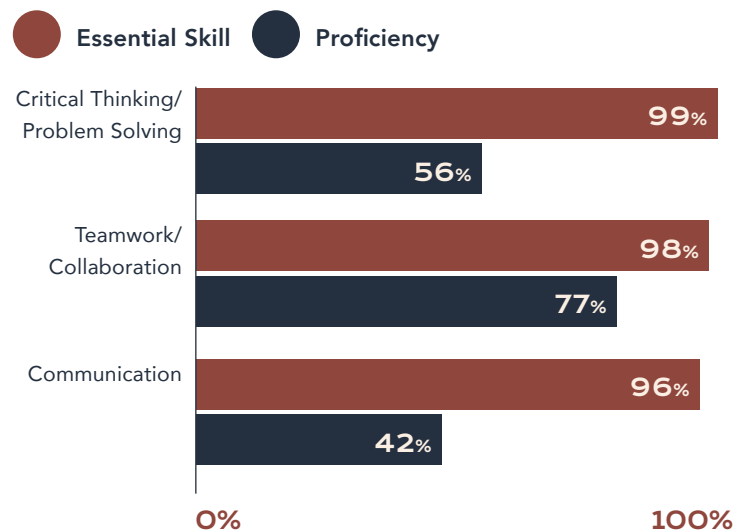
Chart 1: Chart that depicts essential workplace skills as identified by businesses as compared to the percent of workers who are proficient in the skill. Data source: Employers Rate Career Competencies, New Hire Proficiency

[3] Source: These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them
[4] Source: Employers Rate Career Competencies, New Hire Proficiency

As schools work to bridge the essential workplace skills proficiency gap, placing an emphasis on student agency is an integral part of the process. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development suggests that students who display agency "play an active role in deciding what and how they will learn, they tend to show greater motivation to learn and are more likely to define objectives for their learning."[5] In practice, student agency could take place at the community level by solving school and societal problems or individually as students make classroom decisions such as how to demonstrate mastery of a concept or how and when to use tools or accommodations.

According to The Reformer, there are three stages in building student agency mindset and skills: Develop, Support, and Sustain.[6] Essentially, as students begin their progression towards sustained agency, they must start with foundational skills that will be built upon at later stages. At this stage, it is important that students develop voice and choice, ownership, and autonomy of their learning. In order to accomplish this, students must first be aware of their unique needs, strengths, and preferences.

For some teachers, even addressing the initial stages of student agency can feel like a significant risk. Traditionally educators have held the majority of the power within classrooms: deciding what to teach, which resources will be used, how the content will be assessed, or the length of each unit. Teachers who dismantle these structures democratize learning and shift power, or agency, to their students. Dr. Felicia Darling states that "to foster student agency, educators can create inclusive, engaging learning environments where students feel safe to take risks, experiment, make mistakes, negotiate meaning, express their unique perspectives, and develop identities as powerful lifelong learners."[7] Inclusivity and taking risks are intrinsically linked as students who do not feel fully included in the learning process are less

likely to take the educational risks needed to reach their full learning potential and develop the essential skills needed for workplace success. When developing communication skills, it is important that students have the space to develop their skills without the social risk of an audience or the academic risk of a grade.

As schools develop student proficiency in essential workplace skills, they must ensure student agency as an equity practice. Consequently, schools should provide strategies and resources that deliver on-demand instructional support without depending on access to outside resources or limiting it to specific settings.

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[5] Source: Student Agency for 2030 | OCED Future Of Education And Skills 2030

[6] Source: Can Student Choice Promote Agency?

[7] Source: Student Agency Is Ownership

Learning Scenario

The following scenario compares the step-by-step process that a student in 10th grade would complete to prepare for giving a clear, concise, and inclusive presentation to a group. The scenario uses an AI-based speaker coach to provide feedback that helps the student reduce anxiety and prepare for their presentation by self-reflecting and taking ownership of their work.

At a Glance

Topic

Persuasive Speaking Presentation

Subject

English Language Arts

Grade Level

10th grade

Step by step Comparison

Test Devices

In conducting this comparison, the K-12 Blueprint team tested the following devices and configurations:

- **Dell* XPS 13 9310** running Windows 11 Pro* version 22000.856

- **Acer* Chromebook Spin* 513** running ChromeOS* 104.0.5112.83 (Official build) (32 bit)

Practicing Speaking Skills using Microsoft Speaker Coach

1. Open PowerPoint > Select Slide Show.
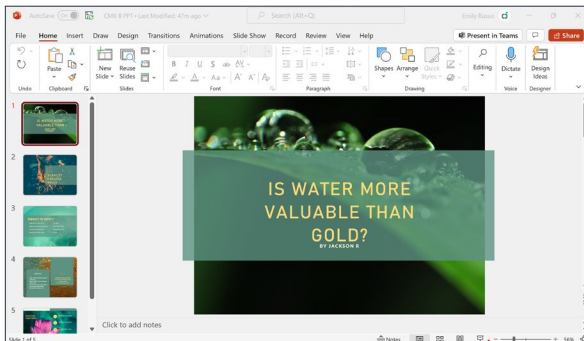
2. Select Rehearse with Coach.
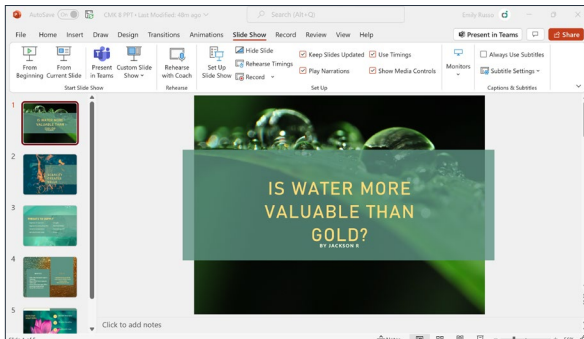
3. Select the checkbox to see live feedback.

4. Select Start Rehearsing.
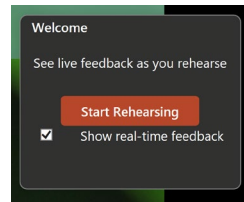
5. Practice presenting the slideshow.
6. Hit ESC to end rehearsing.
7. Review Rehearsal Report > Learn More to get even more tips.
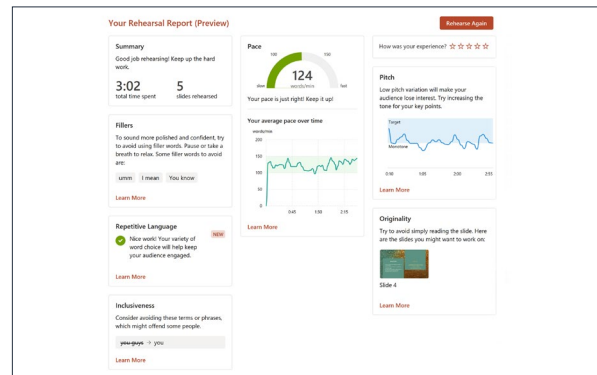
Optional: Select the Rehearse Again to practice the recommendations.
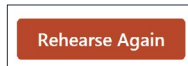
Optional: Use the Snip & Sketch tool to capture the Rehearsal Report as an artifact or to track growth.

Practicing Speaking Skills using Google Slides, Chromebook Screencast*, and Yoodli*

1. Open Slide presentation.
2. Open Screencast application from Apps Launcher.
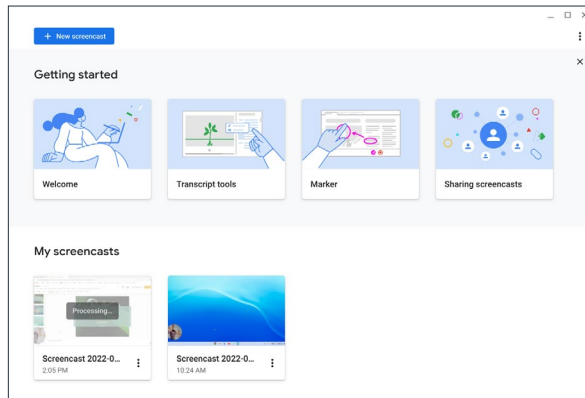
3. Select +New screencast.
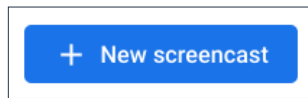
4. Adjust options > Click screen to start recording.
5. Present to Screencast, advancing slides as required > Click stop. The file will process and save to the Chromebook Files as well as Google Drive.
   Note: Process time varies but our testing indicated an average of 5 minutes for a 2 minute screencast.
6. Open Yoodli app.yoodli.ai > Select Sign In.
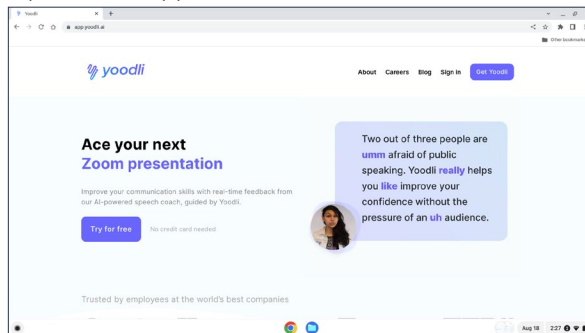
7. Select Sign in with Google.
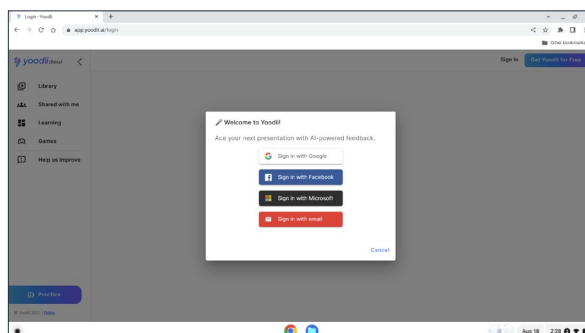
Live Feedback

Speaker Coach offers an option for Live Feedback while presenting, giving tips in real-time to the learner.
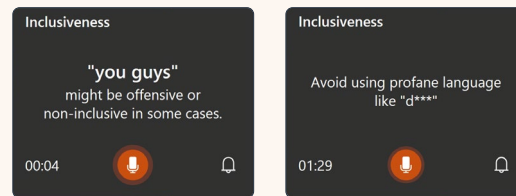
## Office 365* Body Language and Pronunciation Practice

Office 365 offers options for feedback on body language and pronunciation, specifically things like not reading off notes and listening to and practicing pronunciations. These tools are great for all learners–especially English Language Learners and learners with speech-language disorders–to build confidence in presenting!
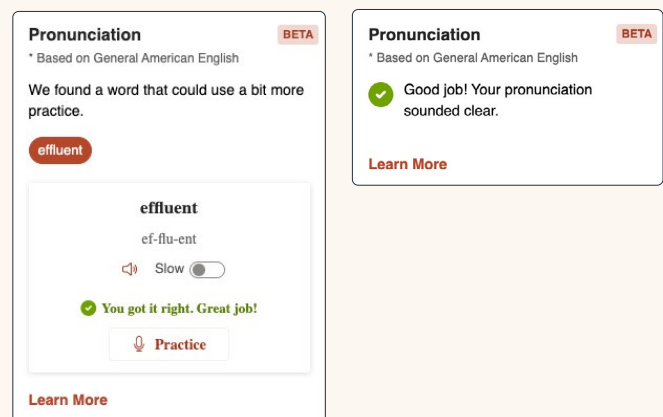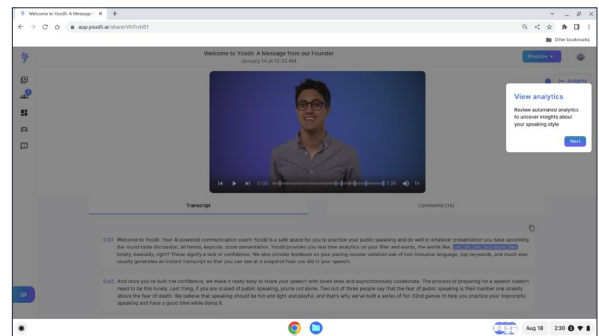
8. Select account to sign in.
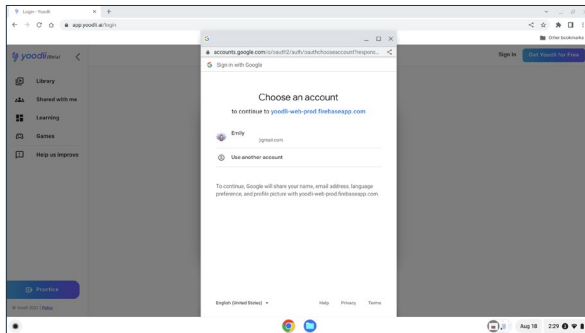
9. Click through 4 welcome screens providing information about why user is using Yoodli for 1st time user > On 4th slide Select Start Yoodling.
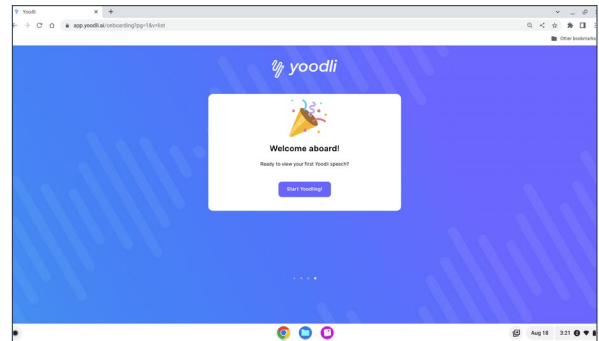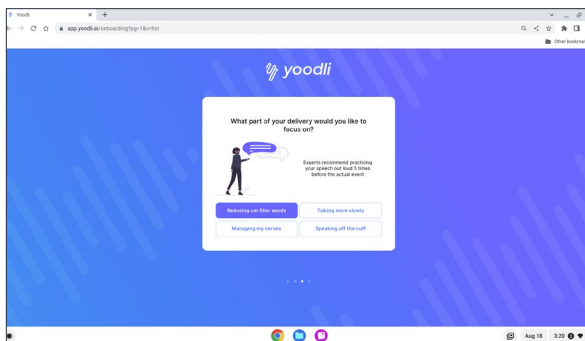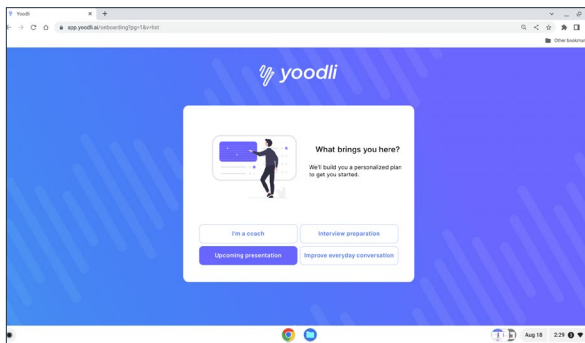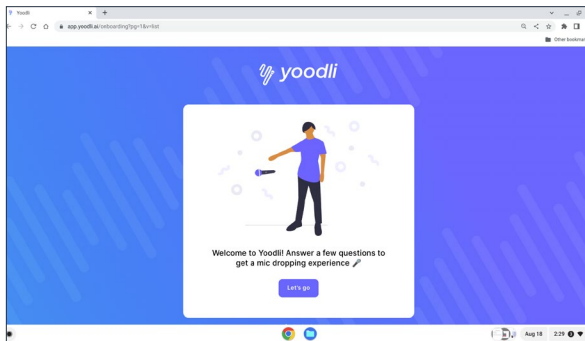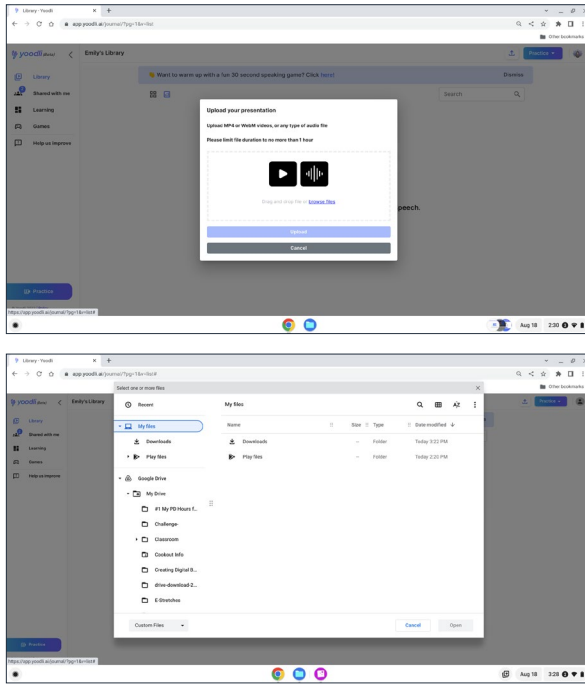

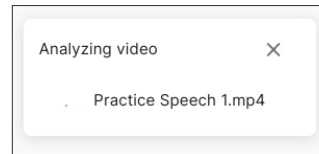10. Click through site introduction for 1st time user. Shows user how to playback their speech, view analytics and use shortcuts (3 clicks).
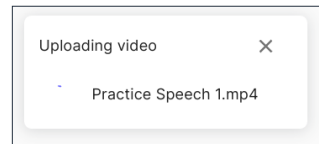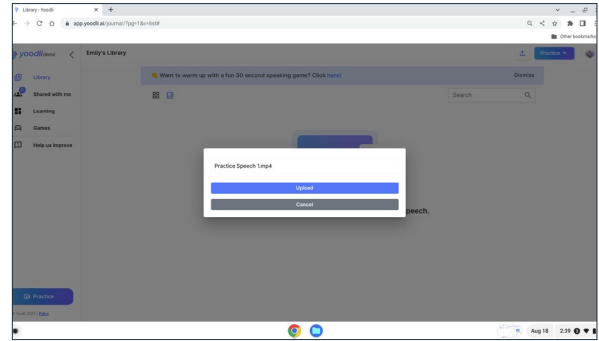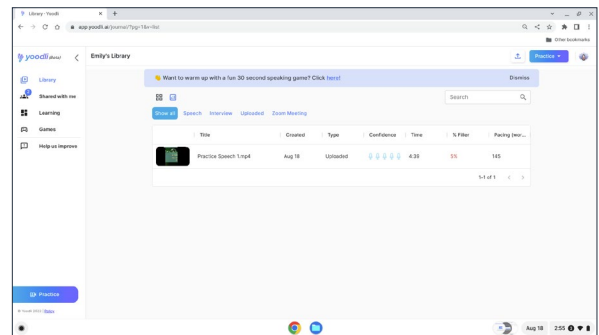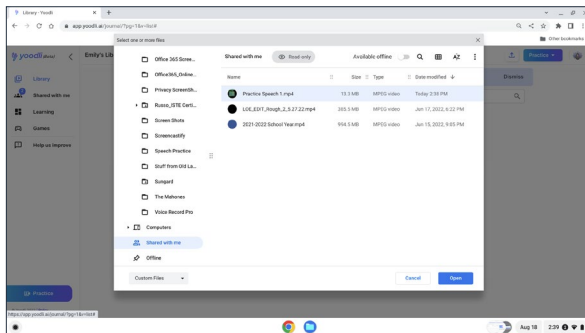

11. Select Library > Select Upload.

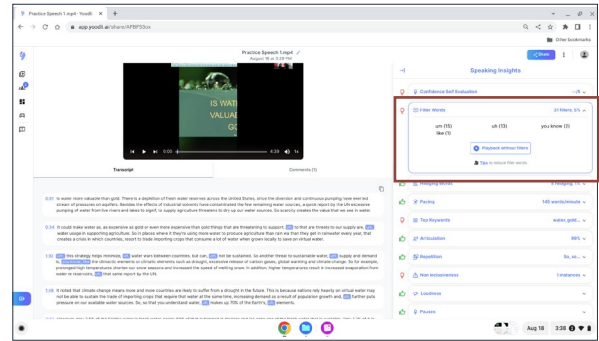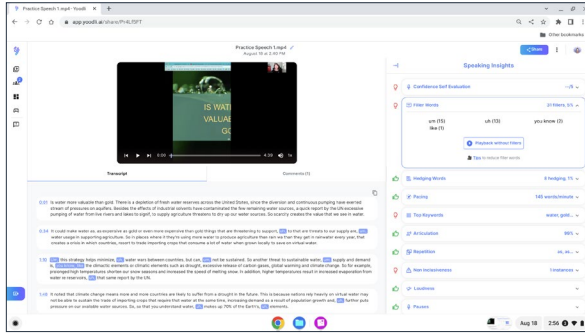**12.** Select Browse files >Locate screencast file.

13. Select Open.

14. Select Upload > Wait for file to load.

15. Review feedback.
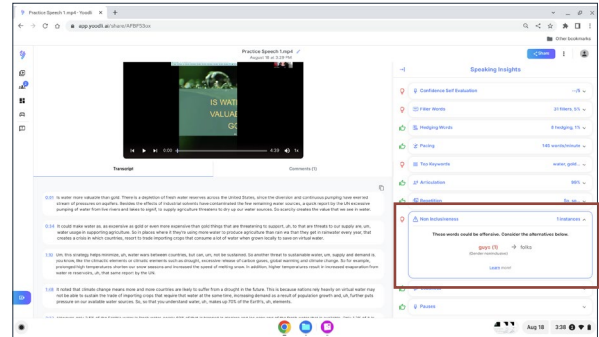
Conclusion

Communication skills, including public speaking, are essential for career and workplace readiness. To become strong communicators, students must have multiple opportunities to practice while receiving meaningful feedback. Providing opportunities for students to decide what they want to learn and practice and knowing what to do to achieve their goals helps develop their agency. Access to automated tools, like Speaker Coach, offers a low-stakes environments that allow students to build skills and agency.

Automated speaking coaches use AI technology to help students take ownership of their learning by allowing them to set goals and reduce overall anxiety. Microsoft Speaker Coach, built into PowerPoint, provides a report detailing statistics and suggestions for improving a presentation. Students can rehearse their presentation and receive real-time feedback on:

- Pacing;
- Use of filler words;
- Pitch and emphasis of their voice;
- Use of inclusive language;
- Repetitive words; and
- Reading directly from the slides.

By the Numbers

🔴 **Microsoft PowerPoint Speaker Coach**

⚫ **Google Chromebook using Yoodli website**

Number of clicks
- 5
- 22 (77% more clicks)

Number of tools
- 1
- 3
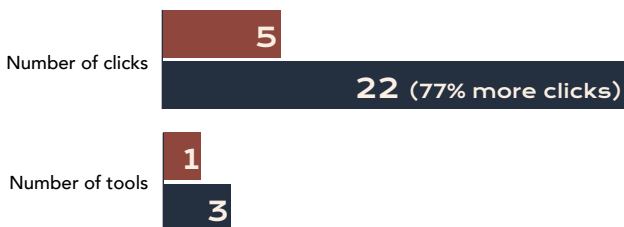
These real-time analytics allow students to self-reflect and adjust their speaking skills while building confidence. The online version of Microsoft PowerPoint even enables students to practice body language and pronouncing words flagged by Speaker Coach.

The Google Workspace for Education* equivalent requires combining Google Slides, Chromebook Screencast, and the third-party application, Yoodli. Students have to record themselves using a screen recorder, wait for the video to process, upload the file to a third-party website after creating a user account, and then wait for feedback. Yoodli requires students to complete 77% more clicks than Speaker Coach to get to the recommendations, a time-consuming and tedious process. The Google option lacks a simple, single interface built into their presentation tool, requires managing multiple accounts, and opens students up to potential issues using a third-party app including storing student presentation videos on Google's cloud servers.

Microsoft's Speaker Coach and Yoodli both provide meaningful feedback on student speaking and presenting performance for self-reflection and reducing anxiety. However, the additional time and effort spent with setup and configuration to use Yoodli makes Microsoft's Speaker Coach a better solution. Speaker Coach is nearly effortless in comparison, providing self-reflective data in minutes at the press of a button. Microsoft surpasses the equivalent Google solution in performance for learners in terms of feedback results, ease of use, security, and speed.