

# TED<sup>x</sup> Speaker Guide

You've been selected to give a TEDx Talk. Congrats! You're doing great so far. Now what?

Over the years we've come up with a few dos and don'ts on how to give a great talk. Though these steps are in no way comprehensive, they contain some guiding principles that have been known to work.

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## 1) Get familiar with the form

### What is a TEDx Talk?

TEDx Talks are a showcase for speakers presenting well-formed ideas in under 18 minutes. If you haven't seen a TEDx Talk, go to [TED.com](http://TED.com) and watch at least one. Like this one: [Phil Plait: How to defend Earth from asteroids](#)

### Why 18 minutes?

Because it works. An audience is good at focusing on one subject at a time in relatively short chunks.

### But, really, can I go over 18 minutes?

No -- it wouldn't be a TEDx Talk. The time limit is part of what makes TEDx Talks work. And remember: Shorter talks are not lesser talks. It may only take 5 minutes to make your point unforgettably. Like this one: [Joe Smith: How to use a paper towel](#)

## 2) Develop an idea

### What makes a good idea for a talk?

Like a good magazine article, your idea can be new or surprising, or challenge a belief your audience already has. Or it can be a great basic idea with a compelling new argument behind it.

An idea isn't just a story or a list of facts. A good idea takes evidence or observations and draws a larger conclusion.

### Do I need to be an expert on my topic?

You do not need to be the world's foremost expert on the topic, but you do have to be an expert. Please remember that the audience relies on you to give accurate information, so whatever you say in your talk, please fact-check — especially facts you may take for granted: statistics, historical anecdotes, scientific stats. If you're drawing an example from a discipline that is not your main area of knowledge, use research from widely accepted and peer-reviewed sources, and, if at all possible, consult with experts directly.

### Is my idea ready?

Write your idea down in one or two sentences. Ask yourself three questions:

*Is my idea new?*

Are you telling people something you're pretty sure they have not heard before?

*Is it interesting?*

Think about how your idea might apply to a room full of varied kinds of people. Who might be interested in it?

*Is it factual and realistic?*

If you are presenting new research, make sure your idea is backed by data and peer-reviewed. If you are presenting a call to action, make sure it can be executed by members of your audience.

If you answered “no” to any of these questions, refine your idea. Ask someone you respect who doesn't work in your field, and if they answer “no” to any of these questions, refine your idea. If your TEDx event organizing team answers “no” to any of these questions, refine your idea.

### **3) Make an outline and script**

What is the best structure for a talk?

There are many theories on the best structure for a great presentation. ([Nancy Duarte presents one here.](#)) There's no single trick to it, but here is at least one structure that we've found to work particularly well:

1. Start by making your audience care, using a relatable example or an intriguing idea.
2. Explain your idea clearly and with conviction.
3. Describe your evidence and how and why your idea could be implemented.
4. End by addressing how your idea could affect your audience if they were to accept it.

Whatever structure you decide on, remember:

1. The primary goal of your talk is to communicate an idea effectively, not to tell a story or to evoke emotions. These are tools, not an end in themselves.

2. Your structure should be invisible to the audience. In other words, don't talk about how you're going to talk about your topic – just talk about it!

### *Introduction*

A strong introduction is crucial.

- Draw in your audience members with something they care about.
  - If it's a topic the general TED audience thinks about a lot, start with a clear statement of what the idea is.
  - If it's a field they never think about, start off by invoking something they do think about a lot and relate that concept to your idea.
  - If the idea is something fun, but not something the audience would ever think about, open with a surprising and cool fact or declaration of relevance (not a statistic!).
  - If it's a heavy topic, find an understated and frank way to get off the ground; don't force people to feel emotional.
- Get your idea out as quickly as possible.
- Don't focus too much on yourself.
- Don't open with a string of stats.

### *Body*

In presenting your topic and evidence:

- Make a list of all the evidence you want to use: Think about items that your audience already knows about and the things you'll need to convince them of.
  - Order all of the items in your list based on what a person needs to know before they can understand the next point, and from least to most exciting. Now cut out everything you possibly can without losing the integrity of your argument. You will most likely need to cut things that you think are important.
    - ▶ Consider making this list with a trusted friend, someone who isn't an expert in your field.
- Spend more time on new information: If your audience needs to be reminded of old or common information, be brief.
- Use empirical evidence, and limit anecdotal evidence.
- Don't use too much jargon, or explain new terminology.

- (Respectfully) address any controversies in your claims, including legitimate counter-arguments, reasons you might be wrong, or doubts your audience might have about your idea.
- Don't let citations interrupt the flow of your explanation: Save them for after you've made your point, or place them in the fine print of your slides.
- Slides: Note anything in your outline that is best expressed visually and plan accordingly in your script. See **Step 4**.

### *Conclusion*

- Find a landing point in your conclusion that will leave your audience feeling positive toward you and your idea's chances for success. Don't use your conclusion to simply summarize what you've already said; tell your audience how your idea might affect their lives if it's implemented.
- Avoid ending with a pitch (such as soliciting funds, showing a book cover, using corporate logos).
- If appropriate, give your audience a call to action.

### *Script*

Once you're settled on your outline, start writing a script. Be concise, but write in a way that feels natural to you. Use present tense and strong, interesting verbs.

## **4) Create slides**

### Should I use slides?

Slides can be helpful for the audience, but they are by no means necessary or relevant to every talk. Ask yourself: Would my slides help and clarify information for the audience, or would they distract and confuse them? Some great examples of slides can be found in the talks by Dan Phillips, Jarrett Krosoczka and Rick Guidotti on TED.com. The most important rule for slides: Keep it simple.

### I've never made slides before. Where do I start?

Assess your own skill level. You can make great simple slides if you stick to photographic images, running edge-to-edge. If your slide ideas are more complex and involve type, consider working with a designer. Your event organizer should be able to help.

## What goes in my slides?

- Images and photos: To help the audience remember a person, place or thing you mention, you might use images or photos.
  - People will understand that the images represent what you're saying, so there is no need to verbally describe the images onscreen.
- Graphs and infographics
  - Keep graphs visually clear, even if the content is complex. Each graph should make only one point.
- No slide should support more than one point.

## What should the slides look like?

- Use as little text as possible -- if your audience is reading, they are not listening.
- Avoid using bullet points. Consider putting different points on different slides.

## How should the slides be formatted?

- Check with your event organizing team about tech specs (resolution and aspect ratio) before you start making your slides. If in doubt, make them 1920x1080 pixels at a 16:9 aspect ratio.
- Use the broadcast-safe zones in PowerPoint or Keynote. Don't put any information or visuals in the far corners of your slides.
- Use font size 42 points or larger.
- Choose a common sans serif font (like Helvetica or Verdana) over a serif font (like Times).
  - If you use a custom font, make sure to send it to the TEDx event organizers ahead of time.

## I want to use an image I found off Google Image Search but I don't know where it came from. It's of the Simpsons.

Don't. This is important: Only use images that you own or have permission to use. If you use an image under a Creative Commons license, cite the source at the bottom of your slide.

## **5) Rehearse**

I've said my talk once in my head. Is that enough?

Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse! We can't stress this enough. Rehearse until you're completely comfortable in front of other people: different groups of people, people you love, people you fear, small groups, large groups, peers, people who aren't experts in your field. Listen to the criticisms and rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. If someone says you sound "over-rehearsed," this actually means you sound stilted and unnatural. Keep rehearsing, and focus on talking like you're speaking to just one person in a spontaneous one-way conversation.

### Timing

Time yourself. Practice with the clock winding down in front of you. Do it until you get the timing right every time.

### Posture

Practice standing still, planted firmly in one spot on stage. Have a friend watch you and stop you from pacing back and forth or shifting your weight from leg to leg.

### Stage time

Ask your organizer to get as much time as you can for dress-rehearsal, on stage, with the clicker and the confidence monitor. The closer to the actual conditions on stage, the better.

## **6) Give your talk**

Inhale. Exhale. Do it like you practiced.

## **7) Savor the glory**

Congrats, you're done! Bask in the praise you get over how you seemed so relaxed and spontaneous.