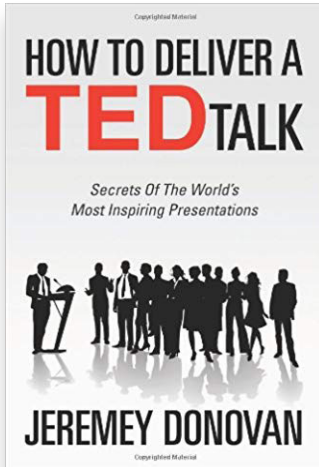


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

convenenow.com/executive-summaries



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeremy Donovan

Jeremy Donovan is Head of Sales Strategy at Gerson Lehrman Group, the world's largest membership network for one-on-one professional learning.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

THE SUMMARY

Jeremy Donovan 2012

Chapter 1: Spread Your Ideas

If you are an avid viewer of TED videos, then you probably remember what it was like to watch your first TED video. Eighteen minutes of pure inspiration. TED's mission is to share ideas worth spreading and its missionaries do not disappoint.

In the unlikely event that you have not yet watched one of their videos, TED is a nonprofit organization devoted to amplifying electrifying ideas from the domains of technology, entertainment, and design. Though TED has a variety of ventures, the two most notable are their highly exclusive conferences and their highly inclusive practice of posting presentations for free online.

If you have watched enough TED videos, you will notice that two distinctly different types of presenters grace the stage. People with amazing jobs or remarkable talents comprise the first type. The second type is people just like you and me who share their amazing stories.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

If you survived into adulthood, then you have countless stories of perseverance in the face of failure. You have loved and you have lost. You have harmed and you have been harmed. Ordinary lives are punctuated by extraordinary moments. Your stories can inspire others; you just need to learn to share them with full emotional force. This book will help you pick one remarkable idea and teach you how to share it in an inspiring way.

The TED conference organizers share a set of Ten Commandments with their invited speakers. Though these guidelines do offer a number of compelling best practices, they do not reveal how to give a TEDTalk. I have grouped the ten items into two categories below covering content and delivery:

Content

- Thou Shalt Not Simply Trot Out Thy Usual Shtick.
- Thou Shalt Dream a Great Dream, or Show Forth a Wondrous New Thing, or Share Something Thou Hast Never Shared Before.
- Thou Shalt Tell a Story.
- Thou Shalt Not Sell from the Stage: Neither Thy Company, Thy Goods, Thy Writings, nor Thy Desperate Need for Funding; Lest Thou be Cast Aside into Utter Darkness.
- Thou Shalt Remember All the While: Laughter is Good.

Delivery

- Thou Shalt Reveal Thy Curiosity and Thy Passion.
- Thou Shalt Freely Comment on the Utterances of Other Speakers for the Sake of Blessed Connection and Exquisite Controversy.
- Thou Shalt Not Flaunt Thine Ego. Be Thou Vulnerable. Speak of Thy Failure as well as Thy Success.
- Thou Shalt Not Read Thy Speech.
- Thou Shalt Not Steal the Time of Them that Follow Thee.

The pages that follow provide a “how-to” guide for delivering an inspiring speech based on intensive study of the most popular TEDTalks. In step-by-step fashion, you will learn how to select a topic, craft a narrative, master delivery, and refine design.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

PART I: CONTENT, STORY, & STRUCTURE

Chapter 2: How to Select Your Topic

To create a compelling TEDTalk, you need to begin with the end in mind. After each audience member leaves the auditorium or surfs on to the next website, you must have planted one seed that either awakens their consciousness to a new way of thinking or persuades them to take action. Your objective is to sow a single seed of inspiration.

Selecting a topic requires an act of deep introspection. Although stories are the centerpiece of every TEDTalk, asking “What is the most amazing story I can tell?” is the wrong question. Instead, begin by asking questions of self-discovery such as: What is the greatest lesson I ever learned? What is the greatest joy I ever experienced? The greatest misery? What is my life’s mission and how can I enlist others to join my crusade?

Once you have your central idea, work backward to build an audience-centric narrative with layers of stories and facts. Imagine you chose to share the greatest lesson you ever learned. Your story becomes how and when you learned it. Most importantly, your talk should include from whom you learned the lesson since the most inspiring stories position someone else as the hero. As you build out your talk, constantly play the role of a skeptical listener asking, “So what?” and “What is in it for me?”

Most of the time, the best way to approach topic selection is to pick a single unifying message that you want to deliver and then scour your brain for your amazing experiences that will add emotional depth to the logic of your message. If you get stuck, do it the other way around. No one will ever know. The key thing, and I cannot stress this enough, is that you need to have a crystal-clear understanding of your central idea before you do anything else. One of the biggest mistakes that speakers make is trying to pack a lifetime worth of learning into a single talk. Laser focus on a single concept will give you a fine mesh filter for editing your material. If you have a great concept or story that does not directly support your message, then you have to omit it, no matter how much you want to use it.

Chapter 3: How to Craft Your Catchphrase

So, what makes a great catchphrase? First, keep it short. Three words are best, but you can get away with up to twelve. Conjure up President Obama—this is his go-to recipe for sticky message pudding: “Hope And Change”, “Pass This Bill”, “We Can’t Wait”, “Yes We Can”. Get the gist?

The second defining characteristic of catchphrases is that they issue a clear call to action. “Start with why” is a great example of this. Johnny Cochran’s “If it doesn’t, fit, you must acquit” has remained in the public consciousness for over 15 years. Cochran’s jury instruction and Mr. Sinek’s observation “people don’t buy what you do...” share the third key characteristic of power-bites. They have a musical, often rhyming, quality that makes them catchy.

To truly understand that particular nearly rhyming “quality” requires a brief grammar lesson. To make a phrase musical, you can repeat a word or phrase at the beginning (anaphora) or the end (epistrophe) of successive clauses. If you want to get fancy, try symploue, which is the combination of anaphora and epistrophe. In plain language, symploue is repeating words or phrases at the beginning as well as repeating (generally different) words or phrases at the end of successive clauses.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

Simon Sinek's "People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it" uses another weapon in this rhetorical arsenal. He repeats the same word in different parts of the phrase. The grammar police call this traductio. If all that was too much, then just resort to the old standby and rhyme your catchphrase.

There are two more quick characteristics that are important and interrelated. When you construct a two-part catchphrase, make the second part positive and sharply contrasting with the first part. "People don't buy what you do.." is a negative statement that triggers one's brain to ask, "Well then, what do they buy?" "...they buy why you do it" satisfies the listener's immediate need to know.

The way you order these contrasting pairs matters. That is the last property of a viral catchphrase. Like a well-designed joke, you need to put the punch word or punch phrase at the end. "You must acquit if the glove doesn't fit" simply does not have the same oomph.

With a compelling, laser-focused single unifying message packaged into a catchphrase that makes it viral, you will have entered the upper echelon of speakers.

Chapter 4: How to be Introduced

Unfortunately, TED videos do not show the manner in which speakers are introduced. There is also not much in the way of information on the "TED-way" for speaker introductions in the public domain. Though a bad introduction will probably not sink a great talk, a great introduction lasting no more than a minute or two can provide a powerful launching pad into your speech.

Great introductions are relevant to the speaker's core message, are audience centric, and establish the speaker's credibility without placing him or her on a pedestal.

Constructive introductions are limited in scope to information that ties to the speaker's central unifying idea. People do not sit in a chair for hours on end listening to other people speak unless they are going to get a return on their investment of time and attention. A great introduction tempts the audience with a taste of the benefit they are going to get but does not go so far as to give away the bacon.

Emcees must establish the speaker's credibility without making them appear superhuman. Though we respect authority, we trust people who are similar. We are inspired to alter our perspective and to rise to action by people just like us who started out as skeptics but succeeded after embracing change.

Most of the time, the person who introduces you will not know you from Adam. In that case, you should provide a written introduction that follows the three tenets discussed above by sharing what is in it for the audience, by maximizing topical relevance, and by minimizing biographical information. Make sure to take the time to review the introduction with the emcee and even have him or her practice it once or twice to get the timing and delivery down. That last step is almost always skipped and sadly results in a bored audience.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

The final consideration in crafting an introduction for your emcee is that the content should match the tone of your speech. The synchronization between the introduction and the speech helps manage the energy level in the room. Once the emcee starts the applause and shakes your hand, it is time to open your speech.

Chapter 5: How to Open Your Talk

Of the countless ways to begin your speech, I am going to detail the three types of openings that the most compelling TED speakers use to engage their audiences. Remember that the first ten or twenty seconds of your speech is the peak of your audience's engagement level. It is not going to get any better as one by one your listeners will get distracted by their mental grocery lists or the next day's outfit. Hook them fast with benefits by giving them an implicit or explicit reason to pay close attention.

The most consistently successful opening is the personal story. Though we will go into much greater depth on storytelling in an upcoming chapter, here is what you need to remember. First, your personal story should really be personal. Tell your own story and share your observations. It is a good idea to make others the heroes in your stories. Second, make sure your story is directly relevant to your core message. If your goal is to inspire people to volunteer their time to feed the homeless, a cute story about how your dog can bark 'I love you' just does not belong. Third, fourth, and fifth, make your story highly emotional, highly sensory, and rich in dialogue. The story should be so specific that your audience is able to relive it with you.

In terms of effectiveness, the remaining two types of powerful openings pack an equally strong punch. In no particular order, let us address the shocking statement first. Though shocking statements most frequently rely on statistics, they can also express strong opinions that challenge conventional wisdom. The important thing is that your point must trigger a range of audience emotions. If you share a "what", then people will have a burning need to fill in the gaps on why, how, when, and where.

Asking a powerful question is the third reliable speech opening. In some ways, this is a variation of the shocking statement approach, but you are more explicit about what you want your audience to think about.

If you go the powerful question route, I recommend that you use "why" questions and "how" questions. "Why" questions are by far the most enticing since they tap into our natural curiosity to understand the world around us. Once we know why things happen, then we want to know how to make good things happen and how to prevent bad things from happening. If the "why" is implied or well understood, then you can open with a "how" question.

Your opening should have caused your audience to consider the benefits of your talk in an implicit way. The post-opening, which should always exist, provides an explicit promise of the benefits that your audience will get and how long it will take to get them. For the longest time, I followed one of the three standard openings with a statement such as: "In the next forty-five minutes, I will share with you the three secrets to happiness." That is a pretty good statement of benefits. "I will share" is lot better than "I will tell". However, it does have a couple of problems. First and foremost, it is speaker-centric and not audience-centric. The statement reveals what I am going to do, not what you are going to get. Second, it is not particularly sensory. A great post-opening should provide the audience with a visual metaphor of the

How to Deliver a TED Talk

structure of your speech. Applying these lessons, I would use the following: “Forty-five minutes from now, you will walk out of here with the three A’s of happiness in your toolbox.” That statement is audience centric, it queues them to listen to my speech to pluck out the three A’s and has given them an action-oriented visual.

Catchy mnemonics, such as acronyms or frameworks like the “three A’s”, are a great way to provide a roadmap to your listeners. Resist the temptation to share what the acronym stands for at the beginning of your talk. The pleasure for the audience is in the progressive reveal over the course of your speech.

Since there is limitless variety to the way you open your speech, you should know at least a few bad openings so that you do not commit the same sins as your forbearers. Do not open with a quote—it is cliché even if it is relevant. Do not open with a joke, for the same reason. Do not open with anything even mildly offensive to your audience. Do not open with a Dilbert cartoon—oh, if I had a penny for that one... Do not open with “Thank you...”—if you want to thank your audience, do it at the end. Do not open with “Before I begin...”—since you just began.

Chapter 6: How to Build Your Speech body and Transitions

The body of your speech is your opportunity to deliver the “tell them” part of the framework. In most cases, your opening will share the “what” and the body must then deliver the “why” and the “how”. I strongly recommend that you build the body of your speech with three sections regardless of the length of your speech. If you have eighteen minutes, you need to provide more detail in each of the three sections than if you only have six minutes. Having no more and no less than three pieces will help you remember where you are going and will help your audience remember your message.

Though it does not really matter what narrative structure you choose for your talk, it is incredibly important that you choose one. The three most effective are the situation-complication-resolution framework, the chronological narrative, and the idea-concepts description.

The situation-complication-resolution structure offers the most efficient way to lead people on a three-part journey that changes their perspective or calls them to action. In the first part, you describe the situation at hand in a fairly neutral way. A good way to do this is to imagine that you are providing background context to a person who is intelligent and interested but does not have significant prior knowledge. In the second part, the complication section, you hook the audience by revealing why the current state of the world is flawed. Flaws not only may be problems but also may be hidden opportunities. In the final part, you offer the solution that neatly and completely resolves the problems or harnesses the opportunities you cited earlier.

The chronological narrative is a second, highly effective way to organize the flow of your TEDTalk. Some speakers reach back into history, as *Eat, Pray, Love* author Elizabeth Gilbert did in her TED2009 talk. In urging her audience to reject their fear and “keep showing up”, Ms. Gilbert stepped through a timeline of human attitudes toward creativity spanning from Ancient Rome to the Renaissance to modern time. More commonly, speakers cast the spotlight on formative experiences in their own lives that relate to their central idea.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

Shorter TEDTalks tend to rely on the idea-concepts format. Think of this as the David Letterman top ten list style of presenting. This structure offers a very efficient way to enumerate best practices, facts, or arguments when there is not enough time to tell a complete story. Often the sequence of the concepts is interchangeable.

Regardless of the narrative structure chosen, the best TED speeches treat each section as a bundle of “right brain” and “left brain” stimulation. Stories or activities pique the emotional right brain. Facts, strategies, tips, and techniques convince the left brain. You need either to persuade people to change their perception or to incite them to action. As your speech progresses, you are taking your audience on a primarily emotional journey; The facts allow you to anticipate, state, and acknowledge the logical objections that arise in naturally curious and instinctively skeptical human brains.

During the course of each section, you should frequently ask questions to get the audience to reflect on their own lives. In smaller forums, you can actually solicit verbal, responses. With larger audiences, you still want to ask questions. This is the way to transform a speech into a conversation. Audience members are still able to reply in their minds and with their body language.

Remember to interpret any statistics, particularly large numbers, with vivid, emotional, personally relevant analogies or metaphors. There is a huge difference between saying that “70 million Americans live every day with heart disease” and saying “Look at the three people closest to you. Odds are that one of the four of you has heart disease and that it will kill you.”

To recap, one key to a smooth transition is employing a tease that holds the audience’s interest. Openings are short enough that the transition tease is usually sufficient. However, when moving from one section of your speech body to the next, you need to do a little more. Speech body sections are typically longer in duration. In an eighteen-minute TED speech, perhaps as long as five minutes. In that case, you need to summarize the section with call backs to the story you used or to the facts you revealed.

Chapter 7: How to Conclude Your Talk

Now, it is time to draft your conclusion. When you provide a clear signal that you are moving to the end of your speech, people will increase their level of attention. Thus, the language you use is critical. You can certainly get away with saying “And, in conclusion...” However, you can do better. For example, you could use “And so we come to the end of our journey today and to the beginning of your future...” or “Now it is time for you to make a decision...”

The conclusion is your final opportunity to inspire your audience to change their perspective or to call them to action. You must create a sense of urgency. One way to do that is to shorten your sentences and add passion to your voice. In addition, every aspect of your speech conclusion must tie to your central unifying theme. Your goal should be to reinforce the benefit to your audience, the “why”, in your conclusion. Since change is hard, give your audience an easy next step they can take today to get moving in the right direction. If needed, you might want to pull out the fear card by including “The consequences of failure are...”

How to Deliver a TED Talk

You built a case for change in your speech. Place yourself in your audience's shoes and ask yourself what final objections people may have. As a speaker, it may be hard to do this, so you may wish to engage a friend to play devil's advocate. You must address these final doubts.

One final thought on closing out your speech. An eternal debate rages as to whether or not the last words out of your mouth should be "thank you." In the yes camp, supporters say it is a final act of gratitude to cement your bond with the audience. In the no camp, detractors retort that it steals from your central message and may expose a little crack in your armor of confidence. They are both right and there really is no correct answer. What I can say is that almost every TED speaker ends their speech with "thank you" so you may wish to also follow this unwritten rule. A good alternative is the way that Nigel Marsh ended his talk on achieving work life balance: "And that, I think, is an idea worth spreading."

Chapter 8: How to Tell Stories

If you would like to bore people to tears until they tear out their hair and claw their eyes out, then hammer them with facts for the entire eighteen minutes of your TEDTalk. Of course, the TED organizers will never let you get away with that. Every part of your speech, the opening, the body and the conclusion, offers an opportunity to tell a story. You may choose to tell a single, drawn-out story as Jill Bolte Taylor did when she described studying her own stroke. Or you may wish to tell a sequence of stories as many equally excellent TED speakers have done.

As a speaker, one of the worst things you can do is put yourself on a pedestal. Position yourself as an equal, perhaps a guide, but not superior to your listeners. Making someone else the hero in your personal stories or in the stories of others you choose to tell is a great way to do that. That allows you to become human by sharing your failures, your flaws, and your frustrations. One of my favorite speaking experts is Craig Valentine, the 1999 Toastmaster World Champion of Public Speaking, who says that you should "come across as similar (to your audience) but with a special process." The special process is the how that you are selflessly sharing.

Once you have chosen the general type of story to tell, you have to structure the plot. You will never go wrong with the tried and true approach of starting with characters, putting them in emotion-provoking conflict, and then providing a conclusion. This is the classic hero's journey or quest.

Authentic characters, with all of their warts and complexity, are the basis for any riveting story. By identifying with specific character traits, listeners imagine themselves or people they care about as the protagonists. To help your audience form this bond, introduce your characters at the beginning of your story with highly descriptive language. Though human beings are the most effective characters for this purpose, you can easily substitute companies, animals, settings, or whatever suits your purpose. In order to set the stage for the coming conflict, make sure to clearly communicate the needs and desires of your characters.

Invite the audience into your story to relive it with you by re-enacting characters and their reactions. Each character should have a distinct personality. This includes: what is seen including posture and gestures; what is heard, the tone of their voice; what is implied such as their traits and desire. Instead of narrating what the characters do, give them dynamic, conversational dialogue. It is alright to embellish it to a degree.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

Note that your characters should also have fixed locations on the stage. When you embody a particular character, go stand in his or her spot on the stage. When you need to narrate, a nice technique is to step forward toward the audience and then step back into character.

By putting obstacles between your characters and their needs, you inject conflict in a way that triggers your audience's sense of empathy and their desire to problem solve. Presenting even a single obstacle can be highly effective when you have limited time to convey a story. However, your best strategy is to build progressively more intense barriers for your characters to overcome, all the while keeping the carrot just in front of their noses. This will fuel intensity and suspense. The barriers you erect can involve intrapersonal, interpersonal, or societal conflict.

Every story should have a complete positive or negative ending. (Yes, a cliffhanger is the third option, but that is best saved for movies with planned sequels.) Stories with positive endings are highly effective for inspiration. They make people believe, 'I can do that.' In contrast, cautionary tales are more effective for teaching. Since pleasure is a more powerful long-term motivation than pain, I recommend telling stories with positive endings the vast majority of the time. Your story conclusion is your opportunity to transfer wisdom. By ending with the way the story you described made you feel, you add additional depth through emotional disclosure.

The time to pull out the calamity tale is when you are trying to instill the virtues of safety to audiences that work in dangerous professions like construction or law enforcement. Nothing says "pay attention" more than 'listen up, or you might be the next one to die in a careless, preventable accident.' If you do tell a story that ends in disaster, spend time at the end exploring ways that the characters could have avoided their fate.

The mark of a great story is that it allows the listener to discover layer upon layer of wisdom through interpretation. This subtlety lies in not being overtly outcome-focused. To enable the listener to peel the onion, you must make your stories rich in personal, emotional content as well as vivid sensory detail.

In your talk, every key point should be delivered with a powerful one-two punch of story and fact. These techniques will help you weave an emotionally powerful, dialogue rich narrative.

PART II: DELIVERY & DESIGN

Chapter 9: How to Master Your Verbal Delivery

Most TED presenters adopt the tone of a passionate one-on-one conversationalist. To pull this off, speak in your own voice with authenticity, interest, and humility. Use clear, every day, jargon-free language packaged into short, complete sentences. The average TEDTalk employs language at a sixth-grade level. Your own enthusiastic interest should shine through with infectious curiosity, wonder, and awe. To demonstrate humility, assume the role of a guide who freely shares expertise, not ego. Even the whiff of self-promotion will turn off your audience.

If you are like most people, then your speech has become infected with filler words. People use filler words because they are uncomfortable with silence. The most common are "umm" and "uh", but the more evolved have masked these with "so" "actually" and even the occasional lip smack. More insidious, though in the same category, are the words and

How to Deliver a TED Talk

phrases “like,” “you know,” “sort of” and “kind of” since they express uncertainty, not to mention immaturity, in what you are saying.

The most potent cure for the filler word plague is the “burst and pause” method. Speak in bursts punctuated by pauses. The pause not only replaces filler words, but also gives you an aura of self-control. A brief silence provides time to collect and structure your next burst of thoughts. Beyond the personal benefits, the pause gives your audience the time they need to process what you are saying. Longer pauses add dramatic emphasis like a subtle yet powerful exclamation point. They grab your audience’s attention. The pause is a gift that keeps on giving.

Once you have eliminated most filler words by mastering the art of the pause, you must add vocal variety to make your speech interesting. Start by modulating your volume. If you speak softer, you will actually cause people to lean forward in their seats and take notice. If louder, then you command attention. Either way take full, deep breaths and project so that people in the last row can hear you. Next, vary the speed. For example, you can gradually increase the speed and shorten sentences to add excitement. To add even more drama, vary pitch (high and low) and cadence (rhythmic rise and fall of voice inflection).

Your verbal delivery extends beyond speech mechanics into the words that you use. To enhance your audience’s interest, you should make liberal use of vivid, descriptive, sensory detail. Sights, sounds, and smells are the easiest to incorporate. In some situations, you may even be able to weave in taste and touch. The small penalty you pay in being verbose is more than made up for by the impact you have of allowing your audience to form a mental picture.

Chapter 10: How to Add Humor to Your Talk

The fundamental principle to remember is that humor is rooted in surprise. As human beings, we delight in a twist that challenges our expectations and our sensibilities. That is why you find the punch-line or punch-word at the end.

Self-deprecating humor is easy and effective. As a society, we are conditioned to keep up appearances. So, we laugh with automatic delight when speakers let their guard down and reveal that they are in fact human. We laugh when others reveal their bad judgment. We laugh when they share their character flaws. We even laugh when people share stories of their physical pain—as long as they managed to survive.

Exaggerated reality is always good for a laugh. The simple way to express humor through exaggerated reality is to put a normal person in an extraordinary situation or an extraordinary person in a normal situation. Some examples of this are nonchalantly ignoring extreme danger, reacting excessively to minor offenses, and relentlessly pursuing futility.

You are likely to ask the question: “How funny do I need to be in a keynote?” To answer that question, consider the extremes. Professional standup comics deliver four to five jokes per minute. That is too much for a keynote and actually quite superhuman. In contrast, Bill Gates delivered one joke every ten minutes in a TEDTalk that felt a bit flat.

In my moderately scientific analysis, the most viewed TED speakers deliver an average of one joke per minute in their keynote speeches. The best speakers deliver around two jokes per minute. The secret is that the jokes are not evenly spread out. When they hit a funny theme, they ‘riff’ on the theme with clusters of three, progressively funnier quips.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

As speakers, we sometimes forget that we have more than just words at our disposal. Especially with humor, there are several non-verbal techniques that you can use to amplify the laughs you get. The simplest adjustments are to synchronize your facial expressions and your gestures with your humor. Jim Carey is the greatest contemporary comic genius in the use of facial expressions. However, you do not need to go that far in your presentations. Even more subtle queues like wide, flashbulb eyes combined with raised eyebrows give your audience the signal to laugh. Since your humor will likely be embedded in stories, show your facial reactions in response to other character's dialogue. Physicality and movement can have the same amplifying effect. For example, you can make a character appear nervous or skittish through frenetic movement.

Outside of being offensive, there is only one other major aspect of humor to avoid in your public speaking. At all costs, avoid telling jokes that you heard or read somewhere else. This type of joke is often referred to as a public domain joke or a street joke. People that have heard a joke before will dismiss you as unoriginal. Those who have not heard the joke will instantly sense that it is canned.

Public Speaking can be nerve wracking and trying to tell jokes often heightens your anxiety level. But, you just need to ask yourself, what is the worst that can happen? The worst is that one of your jokes will bomb and no one will laugh. So what? No one is going to remember. No one is going to talk about your failed attempt at humor at the water-cooler. You will not end up destitute. The next time you get a chance to speak, try to be funny. As with inventions, the secret to getting more laughs is simply to attempt more jokes. Just remember to keep it clean.

Chapter 11: How to Manage Your Physical Delivery

To be comfortable with what you do with your arms when not gesturing, just do what you do when you are having a conversation with somebody you trust. When people speak to one another, their rest position is to have their hands comfortably down at their sides. This is the most effective base position in public speaking.

Rather than hands down comfortably at their sides with elbows slightly bent, many people believe that the correct base position is to keep their hands above the waist at all times. Some people put their hands together, some people keep them apart. You can most certainly be a good speaker if you do this, but it is just a bit unnatural. Whatever rest position you choose, make sure that you are able to maintain symmetry; otherwise your nervous tension will become obvious to the audience.

Though many rest positions are acceptable, there are some that you should definitely avoid:

- Fig leaf: Holding your arms down but with your hands coupled in front suggests that you are timid.
- Pockets: Hands in pockets makes you appear passive or disinterested.
- Parade rest: Holding your arms down but with your hands coupled in back suggests that you are hiding something.
- Hips: Hands on hips makes you appear defiant.
- Crossed arms: Crossing your arms is a negative, challenging position.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

Next, you want to make natural gestures above the waist, but below the neck. Unless you are acting out a nervous, self-conscious character in a story, avoid touching your face, head, hair, and the back of your neck. For about half the population, hand gestures are a natural part of the way they converse. If you fit into that group, just keep doing what you are doing. If you are in the other half like me, then you are going to have to force yourself to make hand gestures lest you stand uncomfortably fixed like a soldier. It is going to feel awkward initially, but I promise your discomfort will disappear in no time. The only difference between what you do with your arms in normal conversation versus what you do in public speaking is that you should scale your hand gestures up to suit the size of the room. The bigger your audience, the more dramatic your gestures need to be for people to see them.

Effective use of your arms is just one component of physical delivery. Another is projecting positive body language. For starters, you should shower your audience with a genuine smile. Smiles not only communicate calm confidence but also build trust between you and your audience. Of course, you cannot smile all the time. Make sure that your facial expressions are synchronized with your message. Though there are many aspects to positive body language, the most important factor beyond your smile is your ability to keep your body square and balanced. Face your audience, keeping your shoulders square with your feet planted shoulder width apart. One final tip; after you ask questions, pause and nod to acknowledge your audience's unspoken thoughts. This will sustain a two-way dialogue even though your audience cannot respond verbally.

Once you master your smile and your stance, you must develop your eye-contact skills. The key to being expert at eye-contact is to imagine that you are having a series of conversations with individual audience members lasting for the duration of one sentence or one thought. Doing so will prevent you from scanning the audience or staring at the floor or ceiling. This means locking eye contact for three to five seconds with individuals in a random pattern around the room. By the end of your talk, you should strive to talk to everybody at least once. Make sure that your body is completely facing the individual you are speaking to and look them in the eye, not the eyes.

You can transform yourself into a true professional through the use of effective movement. Your goal is to make your movement fluid and natural while still retaining discipline. Move with purpose, not simply for variety. Free yourself from the tyranny of the lectern and the screen.

I recommend that you view the space you have as a theatrical stage with defined and consistent locations for the different parts of your speech. If you are telling a story, then your characters should occupy fixed physical locations. If you are explaining a timeline, then start at your audience's left and work your way to their right. Note that moving toward your audience is a powerful technique for emphasizing key points and for establishing a deeper personal connection.

Remain in one spot with your body and feet pointing towards your audience as you make a point. Then pause and move on transitions. Once you have stopped, begin speaking again. Rather than being awkward, this pause gives your audience time to process your last point a prepare to for next one. Of course, there are times when you may wish to travel a longer distance. In those instances, you can speak while moving. However, when you get to your new position make sure to stop and square up your body so that you do not appear to be wandering or pacing.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

Another critical stylistic tip to bear in mind is that you are on stage any time your audience can see you. Your manner of dress, grooming, and conduct should be consistent with your message. In addition to the rapport building that you do before the presentation, your performance includes everything you do from the moment you stand up from your chair to the time you sit down. Walk tall when coming and going, and if the situation warrants, smile liberally.

Chapter 12: How to Create Visuals that Inspire

In the best TEDTalks that employ slides, you will find three distinct design approaches. They are known by their popular names as the “Godin Method”, the “Takahashi Method”, and the “Lessig Method.” Though you can be a purist and stick to just one approach in your presentation, I recommend blending two or even three to add contrast and variety. Remember to avoid clipart at all costs and minimize the use of builds, animation, and video since all of these practices take attention away from you.

To apply the “Godin Method”, fill an entire slide with a fully licensed photograph of sufficiently high resolution. A nice trick is to have the photograph bleed off the page, thus prompting the audience to use their imagination to complete the picture.

The second TED-worthy slide design, approach available to you is the “Takahashi Method”. Named for Japanese computer programmer Masayoshi Takahashi, this method simply requires you to build slides with a few words of very large text. It is a design enlightened update to the very inelegant 7x7 rule. The 7x7 rule calls for creating slides with no more than seven bullets and no more than seven words per bullet. In comparison to a lot of slides out there, 7x7 is a dramatic improvement. However, it is too amateur for a TED presentation where bullet points are frowned upon.

The “Lessig Method” is a hybrid of the “Godin Method” and the “Takahashi Method”. As you have probably guessed, it involves blending a full screen image with very simple text. For example, if you have a person or an animal looking up and to the right in the image, you should place text in their line of sight.

Regardless of which method you use, the most critical rule of graphic design that applies to slide building is “less is more.” Be generous with whitespace. Strive for individual slides to be simple and elegant and for the entire deck to form one harmonious whole. For starters, use the minimum possible number of words or directly relevant graphics that you need to get your point across. Again, your voice will be the soundtrack providing additional detail. Minimalism extends to limiting the number of fonts, colors, and images used.

Minimalism also applies to concept density. Great slides have only one “so-what” message. If you have a slide with two pie charts, then split it into two slides. Professional speaking coach Craig Valentine offers a great guideline: “Use slides as a place where you take off and land.” Nothing more.

The “less is more” rule also applies to the use of color. Choose a limited palette of at most five colors. To maintain consistency among images, fonts, and backgrounds, an excellent practice is to draw the colors from an image or set of images in the presentation. Many of the most effective palettes are actually monochromatic where the color (hue) stays the same, but the lightness / darkness (tone or value) and brightness / dullness (saturation) vary. Alternatively, you can go for subtle but clear contrast with an analogous color scheme—one in which colors are adjacent on a color wheel. For bold contrast, to be used sparingly, employ complementary colors that sit on opposite sides of the color wheel.

How to Deliver a TED Talk

You should also be thoughtful about the colors used in slide backgrounds and foreground. As a general rule, use cool colors such as blue, green, or silver for backgrounds and warm colors like red, yellow, and orange for foregrounds. Neutral colors like black and white may also be suitable for backgrounds. When presenting data, use a solid color that does not interfere with the message.

Chapter 13: How to Overcome Your Fear

Controlling public speaking anxiety actually begins with what you do long before the day of your presentation. In particular, if you are giving a TEDTalk, you should practice in a feedback rich environment a minimum of three times. A single expert speaker qualifies as a feedback rich environment though you may wish to gather a small group of your friends and peers. Practicing multiple times will give you familiarity and confidence with your content. Since your goal should be to speak conversationally, avoid memorizing or reading off a script.

Your fear will likely intensify when you arrive at your venue. Public speaking is a performance that you are giving for your audience. Just as stage directors ensure that everything is ready before the curtain comes up on a play, great presenters take control of their environment. You must arrive early so that you have adequate time to assimilate or modify the technology and physical space.

If you are using technology, leave no stone unturned. Test your microphone. Run through your slides in presentation mode to ensure the computer is functioning and that graphics are displaying as expected. It IS easy to fall into complacency.

As you start your actual presentation, remember that the audience wants you to succeed. Though I do not recommend memorizing your entire presentation, you should memorize your introduction. When you start strong, your confidence will carry forward. A great tip is to keep the outline of your speech in your pocket. Though you will probably never need it, just knowing it is there gives you an added boost. If you have your speech down cold and are feeling confident, then follow the practice of professional speakers and empty your pockets completely before taking the stage.

Finally, remember that nervous speakers have a tendency to speak too fast. Slow down and make liberal use of pauses. Pauses give your audience time to catch up with your message and they give you time to take slow, deliberate breaths.

Chapter 14: Stop Reading and Start Speaking

While creating this book, I studied TED videos. A lot of TED videos. In the same way that watching a lot Iron Chef will not make you a gourmet cook, watching a lot of great speakers will not make you a great speaker. Reading a library of books on public speaking will not make you a great speaker either. You need to practice in a feedback rich environment. Go spread your ideas.