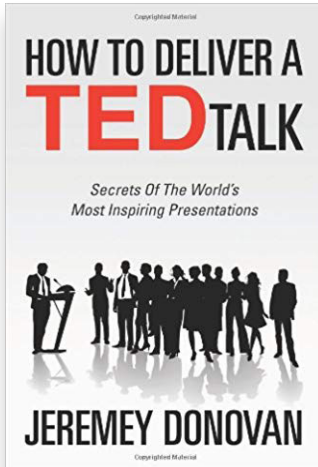


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# How to Deliver a TED Talk

## THE NUTSHELL

Jeremy Donovan 2012

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?”

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.

# How to Deliver a TED Talk

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The most consistently successful opening is the personal story. 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.

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"; 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.

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.

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.

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.

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..."

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

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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.

In the same way that watching a lot of 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.