

Why should you talk the Ted Talk?

One of the main platforms for academics to communicate ideas is at conferences and major events through presentations. It is the biggest missed opportunity in academia. While we often stick with the same 'PowerPoint' delivery, we forget to consider how our audiences consume ideas and information. Through stories, anecdotes and facts and a clear idea.

Even when audiences are familiar with the topic, there is no way they will take in the message through countless bullet points. In fact, the thing that they remember may not be the point you were trying to make. If you want your audiences to take away comprehensive information, give it to them to take away and read, and absorb at a later point. But do not miss the opportunity to share your big idea with a captive audience.

How should you go about developing a 'Ted Talk'? (Anderson, 2016)

Writing and preparation

What's your big idea?

Decide this, and it will help your talk stay focused and give your audience a clear sense of the message you want them to take home with them – it will also allow you to structure your talk by selecting anecdotes etc that are relevant to the narrative.

Throughline

The throughline is the theme that pulls your talk together. Before you start writing spend some time developing this. Write it down in 15 words (what precise idea do you want your audience to take away) and keep reflecting on it as you develop the piece to stay on track.

For example, 'child marriage campaigns are missing the point by focusing on a universal age limit'

Find the right place to begin

Here's the start of a talk thrown together without a throughline

I want to tell you about my time at the Putting Children First Conference, where I learnt and shared knowledge about child poverty in Africa...

Compare that with

Children across the world are most likely to be poor, with 50 percent of extremely poor children living in sub-Saharan Africa. At the Putting Children First Conference we came together to actually find solutions to change this...

Show why it matters... what's the question you're trying to answer, the problem you're trying to solve, the experience you're trying to share?

First and last impressions count

Spend some time preparing a good opening and closing, and practice them. If you can start and finish strongly, this will give you confidence, and your audience will stay with you throughout.

Flesh out each point you make with real examples, stories and facts.

Break down your big idea and then rebuild it for your audience. You may be so invested in the topic that it can be hard to separate yourself off and try and build it as a new concept. But imagine you're hearing this for the first time. Take your idea and bring in your points one by one to build on it.

You are the presentation, not the PowerPoint

Use pictures, diagrams or video when they are meaningful and visually engaging, otherwise keep the screen blank and let the audience focus on what you have to say.

Write and rewrite

Don't be afraid to edit and edit again. Remember the purpose of your talk is to keep people's attention and share your idea with them, so it will need to be clear and avoid repetition.

Delivery

Practice

Sit in front of a mirror, film yourself or find an empty room and record yourself on your phone. It is awkward but worth it.

Be yourself

You have to be able to show a bit of vulnerability – this is where the practice comes in. Your personality and experience will undoubtedly be the strength of the talk, so bring that to the fore.

Your script or notes should not shape how you deliver

Bullet points can work on flashcards to guide you through. It is ok to read from a scripted speech (especially if you don't have the time to memorise it) but make sure you are familiar with it and relaxed at reading it and looking away from the script at intervals.

Useful resources and links:

- **6 speaking tips for scientists and engineers:** *In this TED blog post, Kate Torgovnick May, outlines six tips on presenting for scientists and engineers* <https://blog.ted.com/6-tips-on-how-scientists-and-engineers-can-excite-rather-than-bore-an-audience/>
- **Hans Rosling: the best stats you've ever seen:** *Hans Rosling is famous for the way he presents data on global health trends in a memorable and eye catching way.* https://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_shows_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen
- **8 Classic storytelling techniques for engaging presentations:** *This blog and handy drawings by Ffion Lindsay describes eight storytelling techniques you could use to structure your presentation.* <https://www.sparkol.com/en/Blog/8-Classic-storytelling-techniques-for-engaging-presentations>
- **Presentation matters:** *This is a collection of resources created and pulled together by Health Systems Global with the support of ESRC-DFID Impact Initiative on writing and preparing presentations.* <http://healthsystemsresearch.org/hsr2016/training-resources/presentation-matters/>

References:

Anderson, C. (2016) *Ted Talks: The Official Guide to Public Speaking*, Headline Publishing Group: London

Harford, T. (2016) 'Why everyone should give a TED talk and how to do it', *Financial Times*, 4 May