

# **Excerpts From**

## **TED Talks: The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking**

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Your number one mission as a speaker is to take something that matters deeply to you and to rebuild it inside the minds of your listeners.

We call that something, an idea. A mental construct that they can hold on to, walk away with, value and in some sense be changed by.

### **The Throughline – What’s Your Point?**

A throughline is a connecting theme that ties together each narrative element. Every talk should have one. Think of it as a strong cord onto which you will attach all the elements that are part of the idea you’re building.

A good example is to try to encapsulate your throughline in no more than fifteen words. What is the precise idea you want to build inside your listeners? What is their takeaway?

Example of a throughline: Real estate investing is the best option for achieving financial freedom by generating passive income.

Every thought presented should tie into and support the throughline.

- Explain why it matters
- Flesh out each point with real examples, stories, facts

Simple structure of a talk

- Introduction – getting started, what will be covered
- Context – why this issue matters
- Main Concepts
- Practical Implications
- Conclusions – call to action

A good speech answers three questions: What? So What? Now What?

As you’re developing your throughline, here’s a simple checklist:

- Is this a topic I’m passionate about?
- Does it inspire curiosity?
- Will it make a difference to the audience to have this knowledge?
- Do I know enough about this to make a talk worth the audience’s time?
- Do I have credibility on this topic?
- What are the fifteen words that encapsulate my talk?
- Would these fifteen words persuade someone they’d be interested in hearing my talk?

Once you have your throughline, you're ready to plan what to attach to it. There are five core tools that you can use:

1. Connection
2. Narration
3. Explanation
4. Persuasion
5. Revelation

## **Connection – Get Personal**

Your very first job as a speaker is to find a way to disarm your audience's skepticism, mistrust, dislike, boredom and incomprehension.

Here are five suggestions:

1. **Make Eye Contact, Right From the Start** – Eye contact with an occasional warm smile can transform how a talk is received.
2. **Show Vulnerability** – Acknowledge your feelings – nervousness, choking up. Admitting it will get the audience on your side.
3. **Make 'Em Laugh – But Not Squirm** – When you laugh with someone, you both feel you're on the same side. If you're not funny, don't try to be funny.
4. **Park Your Ego – Be Humble.** Self-deprecation in the right hands, is a beautiful thing.
5. **Tell a Story** – Tell stories about you or people close to you. Tales of failures, awkwardness, misfortune told authentically helps the audience to begin caring about you.

## **Narration – The Irresistible Allure of Stories**

When sharing a story, remember to emphasize four key things:

1. Base it on a character your audience can empathize with
2. Build tension, whether through curiosity or danger
3. Offer the right level of detail. Too little and the story is not vivid. Too much and it gets bogged down
4. End with a satisfying resolution

## **Explanation – How to Explain Tough Concepts**

These are the five steps for explaining difficult concepts to an audience

**Step 1. Start right where they are.** Assume the audience has little or no knowledge on the subject.

**Step 2. Light a fire of curiosity.** Curiosity makes people ask why? And how? It's the feeling that something doesn't quite make sense. That there is a knowledge gap that needs to be closed.

**Step 3. Bring in new concepts one by one.** Your audience can't understand the main concept without first being introduced to the pieces on which it depends. Begin with the basics.

**Step 4. Use metaphors.** For an explanation to be satisfying it must be tied to a connection of someone's existing mental model of the world. Metaphors and analogies are the key tools needed to do this.

**Step 5. Use examples.** Little stories help lock the explanation into place. This is like saying to the brain: You think you understand this idea? Then apply it to these facts. If it fits, you've got it figured out.

It's especially important to do a jargon check. Eliminate all jargon unfamiliar to your audience.

## **Persuasion – Reason Can Change Minds Forever**

Persuasion means convincing an audience that the way they currently see the world isn't quite right. And that means taking down the parts that aren't working, as well as rebuilding something better. When that works, it's thrilling for both speaker and audience.

## **Revelation – Take My Breath Away!**

Connection, narration, explanation, persuasion... all vital tools. But what's the most direct way of gifting an idea to an audience? Simply show it to them.

In a talk based on revelation, you might:

- Show a series of images from a brand new art project
- Give a demo of a product you've invented
- Show fifty stunning photos from your recent trip through the Amazon jungle

There's an infinite variety of possible revelation talks, and their success depends on what is being revealed.

## **Visuals – Those Slides Hurt**

The most obvious case for visuals is simply to show something that's hard to describe. The key is to set the context, prime the audience, and then let the visuals work their magic. Run them full-screen, with minimal adornment.

Often the best explanations happen when words and images work together. The key is to limit each slide to a single core idea. Be sure to design where the

audience's attention is going and make sure a high cognitive load on a slide doesn't fight what you're saying.

The main purpose of visuals can't be to communicate words: your mouth is perfectly good at doing that. It's to share things your mouth can't do so well: photographs, video, animations, key data.

**Presentation Software Tips** – change presentation software settings (PowerPoint) from the 4:3 ratio to 16:9.

**Fonts/Typefaces** – We recommend medium weight sans serif fonts like Helvetica or Arial. Sans serif means the type doesn't have a flourish on the ends, e.g., Times.

**Font Size** – Use 24 points or larger

**Font Color** – Use simple and contrast. Black on white or a dark color on white.

### **What Not To Do**

- Don't present more than one idea on a slide
- Don't use bullets or dashes
- Resist underlining and italics

**Transitions** – There are two transitions I do like: None (an instant cut) and dissolve. None is great when you want an instant response to your clicker, and dissolve looks natural if it's set to a time interval of less than half a second.

**Transporting files** – Send your presentation to your hosts and bring a USB stick with your complete presentation and your videos separate from your presentation.

Before sending over the internet, or copying to USB, put all these files into a folder and compress the folder into a .zip file. That will make sure PowerPoint will gather all the pieces of your presentation in one place.

## **Scripting – To Memorize or Not to Memorize?**

### Scripted Talks

Three main strategies open to you:

1. Know the talk so well it doesn't for a moment sound scripted.
2. Refer to the script, but compensate by looking up during each sentence to make eye contact with the audience.
3. Condense the script to bullet points and plan to express each point in your own language in the moment.

You haven't really memorized your talk thoroughly until you can do an entire other activity that requires mental energy while giving your talk. For example, I turn on

a TV interview show, slightly louder than usual, to create maximum cognitive interference.

**One final thought:** You know when you give a talk, you like certain parts more than others? You have to love every single sentence. You have to go through your script and your slides and ask the question, “Is this essential to advancing my message, and is this interesting, really interesting? Do I love saying this line? If anything lands in the maybe pile... it’s out.

## **Run-Throughs – Wait, I Need to Rehearse?**

There’s a very simple, very obvious tool you can use to improve your talk, but it’s one that most speakers rarely undertake: *Rehearse. Repeatedly.*

By the time you are ready to give your talk, you should have rehearsed it so many times that you feel as if you could do it in your sleep.

## **Open & Close – What Kind of Impression Would You Like to Make?**

### **Four Ways to Start Strong**

You want an opening that grabs people from the first moment. Here are four ways to stake your claim to the audience’s attention.

- 1. Deliver a dose of drama** – How can you tease up the idea of your talk in the most compelling way imaginable? If your talk was a novel, how would it open? By the end of the first paragraph, something needs to land.
- 2. Ignite curiosity** – If a talk’s goal is to build an idea in listeners’ minds, then curiosity is the fuel that powers listeners’ active participation. How do you spark curiosity? The obvious way is to ask a question. But not any question. A surprising question.
- 3. Show a compelling slide, video or object** – A gorgeous image captures attention. But the full impact often comes in revealing something surprising about it.
- 4. Tease, but don’t give away** – Instead of giving away the punchline of your talk at the beginning, imagine what kind of intro will seduce the audience into wanting to come along for the ride.

### **Seven Ways to End With Power**

It’s amazing how many talks simply fizzle out. And how many more go through a series of false endings, as if the speaker can’t bear to leave the stage.

1. **A figurative camera pull-back** – You’ve spent the talk explaining a particular idea. At the end, why not give a vision to the audience of what would happen if that idea were enacted?
2. **Call to action** – If you’ve given your audience a powerful idea, why not end by nudging them to act on it?
3. **Personal commitment** – It’s one thing to call on the audience to act, but sometimes speakers score by making a giant commitment of their own.
4. **Values and vision** – Can you turn what you’ve discussed into an inspiring or hopeful vision of what might be?
5. **Satisfying encapsulation** – Sometimes speakers find a way to neatly reframe the case they’ve been making.
6. **Narrative symmetry** – A talk build carefully on a throughline can deliver a pleasing conclusion by linking back to its opening.
7. **Lyrical inspiration** – Sometimes, if the talk has emotionally moved people, it’s possible to end with poetic language that taps deep into matters of the heart. An inspirational quote, a meaningful song lyric, a poem.

## **Mental Prep – How Do I Control My Nerves?**

To fight through your nervousness do these three things:

**Breathe!** To help with the adrenaline rush, take deep breaths, meditation style. Just take a deep breath right into your stomach, and let it out slowly. Repeat three times more.

**Drink water.** Five minutes before you go on, try to drink a third of a bottle of water. It’ll help stop your mouth from getting dry.

**Find friends in the audience.** Look out for faces that seem sympathetic. If you can find three or four in different parts of the audience, give the talk to them.

## **Voice and Presence – Give Your Words the Life They Deserve**

### **Speaking with Meaning**

Voice coaches speak of at least six tools you can use: volume, pitch, pace, timbre, tone and something called prosody, which is the singsong rise and fall that distinguishes, for example, a statement from a question.

The key takeaway is simply to inject variety into the way you speak, variety based on the meaning you’re trying to convey.

Avoid talking in which every sentence has the same vocal pattern. What this communicates is that no single part of your talk matters more than any other part. The end result of this type of talking is hypnotic droning. It simply puts your audience to sleep.

If your talk is scripted, try this:

- Find the two or three words in each sentence that carry the most significance, and underline them.
- Then look for the word in each paragraph and underline it twice more.
- Find the biggest single aha moment of the talk and inject a great big blob right before it is revealed.

Now try reading your script, applying a change in tone for each new mark.

The point is to start thinking of your tone of voice as giving a whole new set of tools to get inside your listeners' heads. You want them to understand your message but you also want them to feel your passion.

When you're introducing key ideas or explaining something that's complex, slow down, and don't be afraid to insert pauses. And be ready to accelerate in passages where it's natural to do so.

### **Recruit Your Body**

The simplest way to give a talk powerfully is just to stand tall, putting equal weight on both feet, and use your hands and arms to naturally amplify whatever you're saying.

Some speakers prefer to walk the stage. It helps them think. It helps them emphasize key moments. This can work well too, provided the walking is relaxed, not forced. Constant pacing can be tiring to watch. Pacing punctuated by stillness can be powerful.

### **Do it Your Way**

Give your talk in your own authentic way. Say it like yourself. Don't mimic someone else's style or conform to what you think is a particular "TED way" of presenting. Be you.