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Dekan Fakultas Kependidikan dan Humaniora Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana Yogyakarta, dengan ini memberi tugas kepada dosen yang namanya tersebut di bawah ini untuk membuat Modul Mata Kuliah pada semester Genap Tahun Akademik 2019/2020:

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Yogyakarta, 13 Februari 2020

Dekan FKHum,



Dra. Mega Wati, M.Pd.

Tembusan disampaikan kepada Yth.:

1. Ketua Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris

AP/sn_2020



Module of **Public Speaking**



Compiled by
Arida Susyetina, S.S, M.A.
The 2nd semester of 2019/2020 academic year



English Language Education Department
Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana
2020

Module of

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Compiled by:
Arida Susyetina, S.S., M.A

This module is intended for
Public Speaking course at the
English Language Education Department
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UNIVERSITAS KRISTEN DUTA WACANA

HALAMAN PENGESAHAN

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- a. Nama Modul Ajar : *Module of Public Speaking*
- b. Jumlah Penyusun : 1 (satu) orang
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Penyusun Modul

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to be 'Arida Susyetina', is written over the text 'Penyusun Modul'.

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DAFTAR ISI

Sampul dalam	
Halaman pengesahan	i
Daftar isi	ii
Kata Pengantar	iii
RPS	iv
<u>Bagian inti modul</u>	
Presentation Literacy	Hal. 1-5
COMMON TRAPS: Four Talk Styles to Avoid	Hal. 6-9
Connecting with an Audience	Hal. 10-30
CONNECTION: Get Personal	Hal. 31-39
EXPLANATION: How to Explain Tough Concepts	Hal. 40-46
VISUALS: Those Slides Hurt	Hal. 47-55
RUN-THROUGHS: Wait, I Need to Rehearse?	Hal. 56-59
VOICE AND PRESENCE: Give Your Words the Life They Deserve	Hal. 60-64
Daftar Pustaka	

Kata Pengantar

Berbicara di depan publik adalah hal yang sangat menantang, bahkan bagi sebagian orang bisa menjadi momok yang menakutkan, terutama bagi penderita “Glossophobia.” Pada dasarnya semua orang dapat berbicara, tetapi tidak semua orang dapat berbicara dengan lancar dan menarik di depan umum. Apalagi ketika harus menyampaikan presentasi atau pidato dalam sebuah acara formal yang membuat anda menjadi pusat perhatian dalam acara tersebut, merasa gugup atau grogi tidak dapat dihindari.

Mata kuliah “Public Speaking” memberikan gambaran dan kesempatan berlatih bagi mahasiswa mengenai konsep dan praktik “Public Speaking” dalam kehidupan sehari-hari dengan memadukan seni, teknik, dan keterampilan menyampaikan pendapat, ide, kritik, dan pernyataan di depan umum. Selain itu, mata kuliah ini juga mendorong mahasiswa untuk menjadi lebih percaya diri dengan teknik pengenalan potensi diri, memahami kelebihan dan kekurangan diri, serta mengolah potensi diri untuk menyampaikan presentasi, pidato, dan berbicara kepada public dalam berbagai macam situasi yang otentik.

Yogyakarta, 31 Januari 2020

Arida Susyeta

Foundation

PRESENTATION LITERACY

The Skill You Can Build

You're nervous, right?

Stepping out onto a public stage and having hundreds of pairs of eyes turned your way is terrifying. You dread having to stand up in a company meeting and present your project. What if you get nervous and stumble over your words? What if you completely forget what you were going to say? Maybe you'll be humiliated! Maybe your career will crater! Maybe the idea you believe in will stay buried forever!

These are thoughts that can keep you up at night.

But guess what? Almost everyone has experienced the fear of public speaking. Indeed, surveys that ask people to list their top fears often report public speaking as the most widely selected, ahead of snakes, heights — and even death.

How can this be? There is no tarantula hidden behind the microphone. You have zero risk of plunging off the stage to your death. The audience will not attack you with pitchforks. Then why the anxiety?

It's because there's a lot at stake — not just the experience in the moment, but in our longer-term *reputation*. How others think of us matters hugely. We are profoundly social animals. We crave each other's affection, respect, and support. Our future happiness depends on these realities to a shocking degree. And we sense that what happens on a public stage is going to materially affect these social currencies for better or worse.

But with the right mindset, you can use your fear as an incredible asset. It can be the driver that will persuade you to prepare for a talk properly.

That's what happened when Monica Lewinsky came to TED. For her, the stakes couldn't have been higher. Seventeen years earlier, she had been through the most humiliating public exposure imaginable, an experience so intense it almost broke her. Now she was attempting a return to a more visible public life, to reclaim her narrative.

But she was not an experienced public speaker, and she knew that it would be disastrous if she messed up. She told me:

Nervous is too mild a word to describe how I felt. More like . . . Gutted with trepidation. Bolts of fear. Electric anxiety. If we could have harnessed the power of my nerves that morning, I think the energy crisis would have been solved. Not only was I stepping out onto a stage in front of an esteemed and brilliant crowd, but it was also videotaped, with the high likelihood of being made public on a widely viewed platform. I was visited by the echoes of lingering trauma from years of having been publicly ridiculed. Plagued by a deep insecurity I didn't belong on the TED stage. That was the inner experience against which I battled.

And yet Monica found a way to turn that fear around. She used some surprising techniques, which I'll share in chapter 15. Suffice it to say, they worked. Her talk won a standing ovation at the event, rocketed to a million views within a few days, and earned rave reviews online. It even prompted a public apology to her from a longtime critic, feminist author Erica Jong.

The brilliant woman I am married to, Jacqueline Novogratz, was also haunted by fear of public speaking. In school, at college, and into her twenties, the prospect of a microphone and watching eyes was so scary it was debilitating. But she knew that to ad-

vance her work fighting poverty, she would have to persuade others, and so she just began forcing herself to do it. Today she gives scores of speeches every year, often earning standing ovations.

Indeed, everywhere you look, there are stories of people who were terrified of public speaking but found a way to become really good at it, from Eleanor Roosevelt to Warren Buffett to Princess Diana, who was known to all as "shy Di" and hated giving speeches, but found a way to speak informally in her own voice, and the world fell in love with her.

If you can get a talk right, the upside can be amazing. Take the talk that entrepreneur Elon Musk gave to SpaceX employees on August 2, 2008.

Musk was not known as a great public speaker. But that day, his words marked an important turning point for his company. SpaceX had already suffered two failed launches. This was the day of the third launch, and everyone knew failure could force the company's closure. The *Falcon* rocket soared off the launch pad, but right after the first stage fell away, disaster struck. The spacecraft exploded. The video feed went dead. Some 350 employees had gathered and, as described by Dolly Singh, the company's head of talent acquisition, the mood was thick with despair. Musk emerged to speak to them. He told them they'd always known it would be hard, but that despite what had happened, they had already accomplished something that day that few nations, let alone companies, had achieved. They had successfully completed the first stage of a launch and taken a spacecraft to outer space. They simply had to pick themselves up and get back to work. Here's how Singh described the talk's climax:

Then Elon said, with as much fortitude and ferocity as he could muster after having been awake for like 20+ hours by this point, "For my part, I will never give up and I mean never." I think most of us would have followed him into the gates of hell car-

rying suntan oil after that. It was the most impressive display of leadership that I have ever witnessed. Within moments the energy of the building went from despair and defeat to a massive buzz of determination as people began to focus on moving forward instead of looking back.

That's the power of a single talk. You might not be leading an organization, but a talk can still open new doors or transform a career.

TED speakers have told us delightful stories of the impact of their talks. Yes, there are sometimes book and movie offers, higher speaking fees, and unexpected offers of financial support. But the most appealing stories are of ideas advanced, and lives changed. Amy Cuddy gave a hugely popular talk about how changing your body language can raise your confidence level. She has had more than 15,000 messages from people around the world, telling her how that wisdom has helped them.

And young Malawian inventor William Kamkwamba's inspiring talk about building a windmill in his village as a fourteen-year-old sparked a series of events that led to him being accepted into an engineering program at Dartmouth College.

THE DAY TED MIGHT HAVE DIED

Here's a story from my own life: When I first took over leadership of TED in late 2001, I was reeling from the near collapse of the company I had spent fifteen years building, and I was terrified of another huge public failure. I had been struggling to persuade the TED community to back my vision for TED, and I feared that it might just fizzle out. Back then, TED was an annual conference in California, owned and hosted by a charismatic architect named Richard Saul Wurman, whose larger-than-life presence infused

every aspect of the conference. About eight hundred people attended every year, and most of them seemed resigned to the fact that TED probably couldn't survive once Wurman departed. The TED conference of February 2002 was the last one to be held under his leadership, and I had one chance and one chance only to persuade TED attendees that the conference would continue just fine. I had never run a conference before, however, and despite my best efforts over several months at marketing the following year's event, only seventy people had signed up for it.

Early on the last morning of that conference, I had 15 minutes to make my case. And here's what you need to know about me: I am not naturally a great speaker. I say *um* and *you know* far too often. I will stop halfway through a sentence, trying to find the right word to continue. I can sound overly earnest, soft-spoken, conceptual. My quirky British sense of humor is not always shared by others.

I was so nervous about this moment, and so worried that I would look awkward on the stage, that I couldn't even bring myself to stand. Instead I rolled forward a chair from the back of the stage, sat on it, and began.

I look back at that talk now and cringe—a lot. If I were critiquing it today, there are a hundred things I would change, starting with the wrinkly white T-shirt I was wearing. And yet . . . I had prepared carefully what I wanted to say, and I knew there were at least some in the audience desperate for TED to survive. If I could just give those supporters a reason to get excited, perhaps they would turn things around. Because of the recent dot-com bust, many in the audience had suffered business losses as bad as my own. Maybe I could connect with them that way?

I spoke from the heart, with as much openness and conviction as I could summon. I told people I had just gone through a massive business failure. That I'd come to think of myself as a complete loser. That the only way I'd survived mentally was by

immersing myself in the world of ideas. That TED had come to mean the world to me — that it was a unique place where ideas from every discipline could be shared. That I would do all in my power to preserve its best values. That, in any case, the conference had brought such intense inspiration and learning to us that we couldn't possibly let it die . . . could we?

Oh, and I broke the tension with an apocryphal anecdote about France's Madame de Gaulle and how she shocked guests at a diplomatic dinner by expressing her desire for "*a penis*." In England, I said, we also had that desire, although there we pronounced it *happiness*, and TED had brought genuine happiness my way.

To my utter amazement, at the end of the talk, Jeff Bezos, the head of Amazon, who was seated in the center of the audience, rose to his feet and began clapping. And the whole room stood with him. It was as if the TED community had collectively decided, in just a few seconds, that it would support this new chapter of TED after all. And in the 60-minute break that followed, some 200 people committed to buying passes for the following year's conference, guaranteeing its success.

If that 15-minute talk had fizzled, TED would have died, four years before ever putting a talk on the Internet. You would not be reading this book.

In the next chapter, I'll share why I think that talk ended up being effective, despite its evident awkwardness. It's an insight that can be applied to any talk.

No matter how little confidence you might have today in your ability to speak in public, there are things you can do to turn that around. Facility with public speaking is not a gift granted at birth to a lucky few. It's a broad-ranging set of skills. There are hundreds of ways to give a talk, and everyone can find an approach that's right for them and learn the skills necessary to do it well.

THE BOY WITH THE LION-HEART

A couple of years ago, TED's content director, Kelly Stoetzel, and I went on a global tour in search of speaking talent. In Nairobi, Kenya, we met Richard Turere, a twelve-year-old Maasai boy who had come up with a surprising invention. His family raised cattle, and one of the biggest challenges was protecting them at night from lion attacks. Richard had noticed that a stationary campfire didn't deter the lions, but walking around waving a torch did seem to work. The lions were apparently afraid of moving lights! Richard had somehow taught himself electronics by messing around with parts taken from his parents' radio. He used that knowledge to devise a system of lights that would turn on and off in sequence, creating a sense of movement. It was built from scrapyards parts — solar panels, a car battery, and a motorcycle indicator box. He installed the lights and — presto! — the lion attacks stopped. News of his invention spread and other villages wanted in. Instead of seeking to kill the lions as they had done before, they installed Richard's "lion lights." Both villagers and pro-lion environmentalists were happy.

It was an impressive achievement but, at first glance, Richard certainly seemed an unlikely TED speaker. He stood hunched over in a corner of the room, painfully shy. His English was halting, and he struggled to describe his invention coherently. It was hard to imagine him on a stage in California in front of 1,400 people, slotted alongside Sergey Brin and Bill Gates.

But Richard's story was so compelling that we went ahead anyway and invited him to come give a TED Talk. In the months before the conference, we worked with him to frame his story — to find the right place to begin, and to develop a natural narrative sequence. Because of his invention, Richard had won a scholarship to one of Kenya's best schools, where he had the chance to

practice his TED Talk several times in front of a live audience. This helped build his confidence to the point where his personality could shine through.

He got on an airplane for the first time in his life and flew to Long Beach, California. As he walked onto the TED stage, you could tell he was nervous, but that only made him more engaging. As Richard spoke, people were hanging on his every word, and every time he smiled, the audience melted. When he finished, people just stood and cheered.

Richard's tale can encourage us all to believe we might be able to give a decent talk. Your goal is not to be Winston Churchill or Nelson Mandela. It's to be you. If you're a scientist, be a scientist; don't try to be an activist. If you're an artist, be an artist; don't try to be an academic. If you're just an ordinary person, don't try to fake some big intellectual style; just be you. You don't have to raise a crowd to its feet with a thunderous oration. Conversational sharing can work just as well. In fact, for most audiences, it's a lot better. If you know how to talk to a group of friends over dinner, then you know enough to speak publicly.

And technology is opening up new options. We live in an age where you don't have to be able to speak to thousands of people at a time to have an outsized impact. It could just be you talking intimately to a video camera, and letting the Internet do the rest.

Presentation literacy isn't an optional extra for the few. It's a core skill for the twenty-first century. It's the most impactful way to share who you are and what you care about. If you can learn to do it, your self-confidence will flourish, and you may be amazed at the beneficial impact it can have on your success in life, however you might choose to define that.

If you commit to being the authentic you, I am certain that you will be capable of tapping into the ancient art that is wired inside us. You simply have to pluck up the courage to try.

Foundation**COMMON TRAPS***Four Talk Styles to Avoid*

There are countless ways to build a great talk. But first some essential safety tips. There are ugly talk styles out there, dangerous to both a speaker's reputation and an audience's well-being. Here are four to steer clear of at all costs.

THE SALES PITCH

Sometimes speakers get it exactly backwards. They plan to take, not give.

Several years ago a famed author and business consultant came to TED. I was excited to hear his presentation on how to think outside the box. What happened instead horrified me. He began talking about a series of businesses that had apparently made a significant leap forward as a result of an action they took. And what was that action? They had all booked his consultancy services.

After 5 minutes of this, the audience was getting antsy and I'd had enough. I stood up and began to interrupt. Every eye turned my way. I was sweating. My microphone was on. Everyone could hear everything.

Me: I have a request here. Perhaps you could tell us about the actual type of thinking you recommend? We want to

know how it actually works, so that we've got a takeaway. As is, it's a bit too much of an ad.

[Nervous applause. Awkward pause.]

Speaker: It takes three days to go into it. In 15 minutes, there is no way I can tell you all about how to do it. My purpose is to tell you that these things can work and therefore motivate you to look further into them.

Me: We believe you that they work. You're a rock star in this field! Give us an instance, or just tease us with the first 15 minutes of it. Please!

At this point, the audience starts cheering and the speaker's left with no choice. To everyone's relief, he finally begins to share some wisdom we can use.

Here's the irony. This greedy approach to speaking doesn't even serve the speaker's interest. I'd be amazed if he got a single booking from anyone in that audience. And even if he did, it had to be offset by a loss of respect from others in the room. Needless to say, we never posted the talk online.

Reputation is everything. You want to build a reputation as a generous person, bringing something wonderful to your audiences, not as a tedious self-promoter. It's boring and frustrating to be pitched to, especially when you're expecting something else.

Usually, of course, pitches happen much more subtly. The slide showing a book cover; the brief mention about the speaker's organization's funding shortfall. In the context of an otherwise great talk, you may even get away with these little nudges. (And, of course, if you've been specifically asked to talk about the book or the organization, that's another matter.) But you're taking a big risk. That's why at TED we actively discourage speakers from doing these things.

The key principle is to remember that the speaker's job is to *give* to the audience, not take from them. (Even in a business context where you're genuinely making a sales pitch, your goal should be to give. The most effective salespeople put themselves into their listeners' shoes and imagine how to best serve their needs.) At a conference, people don't come to a talk to be sold to. As soon as they understand that might be your agenda, they will flee to the safety of their email inbox. It's as if you've agreed to have a coffee with a friend and discover to your horror that all she actually wanted to do was explain her must-invest time-share scheme to you. You're out of there at the first opportunity.

It's possible to disagree where the line is between sharing an idea and pitching, but the principle is crucial: Give, don't take.

And here's the thing. Generosity evokes a response. When human-rights lawyer Bryan Stevenson spoke at TED, his organization was in urgent need of \$1 million to continue fighting a key case in the US Supreme Court. But Bryan didn't mention this once in his talk. Instead he transformed the way we all thought about injustice in America, offering stories, insights, humor, and revelation. At the end the audience rose as one and applauded for several minutes. And guess what? He left the conference with contributions from attendees exceeding \$1.3 million.

THE RAMBLE

In the first TED I organized, one of the speakers began, "As I was driving down here wondering what to say to you . . ." There followed an unfocused list of observations about possible futures. Nothing obnoxious. Nothing that was particularly hard to understand. But also no arguments of power. No revelations. No aha moments. No takeaways. The audience clapped politely. But no one really learned anything.

I was fuming. It's one thing to underprepare. But to boast that you've underprepared? That's insulting. It tells the audience that their time doesn't matter. That the event doesn't matter.

So many talks are like this. Meandering, no clear direction. A speaker might kid himself that even an unfocused exploration of his brilliant thinking is bound to be fascinating to others. But if 800 people are planning to devote 15 minutes of their day to your words, you really can't just wing it.

As my colleague Bruno Giussani puts it, "When people sit in a room to listen to a speaker, they are offering her something extremely precious, something that isn't recoverable once given: a few minutes of their time and of their attention. Her task is to use that time as well as possible."

So if you're going to gift people with a wondrous idea, you first have to spend some preparation time. Rambling is not an option.

As it turned out, this particular rambling speaker did give TED a gift of sorts. From that talk on, we redoubled our efforts on speaker preparation.

THE ORG BORE

An organization is fascinating to those who work for it—and deeply boring to almost everyone else. Sorry, but it's true. Any talk framed around the exceptional history of your company or NGO or lab and the complex-but-oh-so-impressive way it is structured, and the fabulously photogenic quality of the astonishingly talented team working with you, and how much success your products are having, is going to leave your audience snoozing at the starting line. It may be interesting to you and your team. But, alas, we don't work there.

Everything changes, though, when you focus on the nature of

the work that you're doing, and the power of the ideas that infuse it, not on the org itself or its products.

This can be harder than it sounds. Ofttimes the heads of organizations are by default their spokespersons, always in selling mode, believing it's their obligation to honor the hard-working team that surrounds them. And because the work they want to talk about has taken place inside the organization, the most obvious way to describe it may be to anchor it to organizational acts. "Back in 2005, we set up a new department in Dallas in this office building [*slide of glass tower here*], and its goal was to investigate how we could slash our energy costs, so I allocated Vice President Hank Boreham to the task . . ." Yawn.

Compare that statement to this one: "Back in 2005 we discovered something surprising. It turns out that it's possible for an average office to slash its energy costs by 60 percent without any noticeable loss of productivity. Let me share with you how . . ."

One mode retains interest. One kills it. One mode is a gift. The other is lazily self-serving.

THE INSPIRATION PERFORMANCE

I hesitate to include this example, but I think I must.

Let's agree on this first: Absolutely one of the most powerful things you can experience when watching a talk is *inspiration*. The speaker's work and words move you and fill you with an expanded sense of possibility and excitement. You want to go out and be a better person. TED's growth and success have been fueled by the deeply inspirational nature of many of the talks. Indeed, it's the reason I was drawn to TED in the first place. I believe in inspiration's power.

But it's a power that must be handled with great care.

When a great speaker finishes her talk and the whole crowd

rises to its feet and applauds, it's a thrilling moment for everyone in the room. The audience is excited by what they've heard, and for the speaker, it's indescribably satisfying to receive such powerful recognition. (One of the more awkward moments we've ever had at TED was when a speaker left the stage to lukewarm applause and whispered to her friend backstage, "Nobody stood up!" An understandable comment. It was just unfortunate that her microphone was still on, and everyone could hear the pain in her voice.)

Whether they admit it or not, many public speakers dream of being cheered as they leave the stage, followed by screens full of tweets attesting to their inspirational prowess. And therein lies the trap. The intense appeal of the standing ovation can lead aspiring speakers to do bad things. They may look at talks given by inspirational speakers and seek to copy them . . . but in form only. The result can be awful: the ruthless pursuit of every trick in the book to intellectually and emotionally manipulate the audience.

There was an upsetting instance of this at TED a few years ago.* An American man in his forties had become a huge TED fan, and he sent us a compelling audition video, urging us to let him give his own talk. His talk premise exactly matched the theme we were focused on that year, and he came well recommended, so we decided to give him a shot.

The first moments of his talk were promising. He had a big personality. He beamed at the audience. He had some amusing opening remarks, a clever video, and a surprising visual prop. It was as if he'd studied every TED Talk in detail and was bringing the best of each to his own talk. Sitting and watching, I was hopeful we might have a giant hit on our hands.

But then . . . I started to feel a little queasy. There was some-

* To be kind, I've changed a couple of details.

thing not quite right. He was loving being on stage. Loving it just a little too much. He'd keep pausing, hoping for audience applause or laughter, and when he got it, he'd stop and say "thank you," subtly milking it for more. He started inserting ad-libbed comments intended to amuse. It was clear they amused him, but others, not so much. And the worst of it was the promised substance of the talk never really arrived. He claimed to have worked on demonstrating the truth of an important idea. But the case he brought was all whimsy and anecdote. There was one moment where he had even Photoshopped an image so that it appeared to support his case. And because of his getting carried away and soaking up the limelight, he was running way overtime.

Toward the end, he began telling people that yes, they had it in their power to adopt his wisdom, and he spoke of dreams and inspiration, ending with his arms outstretched to the audience. Because it was clear the talk meant so much to him, a portion of the audience did indeed stand to clap him. Me? I felt sick to my stomach. This was the cliché of TED that we'd tried so hard to eliminate. All style, very little substance.

The trouble with talks like this is not just that they flatter to deceive. It's that they give the entire genre a bad name. They make the audience less likely to open up when a genuinely inspiring speaker comes along. And yet, more and more speakers, attracted to the drug of audience adoration, are trying to walk this path.

Please don't be one of them.

Here's the thing about inspiration: It has to be earned. Someone is inspiring not because they look at you with big eyes and ask you to find it in your heart to believe in their dream. It's because they actually have a dream that's worth getting excited about. And those dreams don't come lightly. They come from blood, sweat, and tears.

Inspiration is like love. You don't get it by pursuing it directly. In fact, there's a name for people who pursue love too directly: *stalker*. In less extreme cases, the words we use are almost as bad: *cloying*, *inappropriate*, *desperate*. And sadly, this behavior prompts the opposite of what it desires. It prompts a pulling back.

It's the same with inspiration. If you try to take the shortcut and win people over purely with your charisma, you may succeed for a moment or two, but soon you'll be found out, and the audience will flee. In the example above, despite the partial standing ovation, that speaker received terrible audience feedback in our postconference survey, and we never posted the talk. People had felt manipulated. And they were.

If you have dreams of being a rock-star public speaker, pumping up an audience as you stride the stage and proclaim your brilliance, I beg you to reconsider. Don't dream of that. Dream of something much bigger than you are. Go and work on that dream as long as it takes to achieve something worthwhile. And then humbly come and share what you've learned.

Inspiration can't be performed. It's an audience response to authenticity, courage, selfless work, and genuine wisdom. Bring those qualities to your talk, and you may be amazed at what happens.

It's easy to talk about why talks fail. But how can they be built to succeed? It all starts with a moment of clarity.

Connecting with an Audience



Most of what I have learned about communication and connection did not come from my speech and communication classes in school. It came from my experience as a performer and from years of closely watching others perform. I worked my way through college playing drums in various jazz groups beginning when I was 17. No matter how technically “good” the music was, I have never seen a great performance that lacked a solid connection between the performer and the audience.

Playing music is a performance and also very much a presentation. Good presentations are about conversing, sharing, and connecting on an intellectual *and* emotional level in an honest and sincere way. It is even easier to connect when playing music since everything is right out there for everyone to see and hear. It doesn’t get much more honest than jazz, which has been called “the music of dialogue.” There are no politics and no walls. The music may touch the audience or it may not, but there is never even a hint of insincerity, questionable motives, or pretense of being anything other than what people see before them at that moment. The smiles, the heads nodding in agreement, and the feet tapping under the tables tell me that there is a connection, and that connection is no less than communication. It’s a fantastic feeling.

Tom Grant, based in Portland, Oregon, is a musical legend in America’s Pacific Northwest. You can buy his albums and hear his songs on jazz and soft jazz stations around the world, including in Japan. Tom is a great musician, but what I always like about his live performances is his warmth and friendly, engaging style that just make the connection with the audience so much better.

The lesson I’ve learned from watching great live musical performances is that the music plus the artist’s ability to convey the (musical) message and connect with the audience is what it’s all about. If done well, the end result is far more than just the notes played. A true performance transcends the simple act of artists playing music and people listening. It’s bigger than that.

The art of musical performance and the art of presentation share the same essence. That is, it's always about bridging the distance between the artist and audience to make a real connection. If there's no connection, there can be no conversation. This is true whether you're pitching a new technology, explaining a new medical treatment, or playing at Carnegie Hall.

To Tom Grant, performance is not an exhibition—I perform, you listen. Tom clearly feels it's a two-way encounter. Here's what Tom said in an interview in *Smooth Vibes* in 2005: "There is joy in music for the player and for the receiver. I play music because it is my calling in life. I hope it conveys a joy and benevolence that people can apply to their own lives and thus improve, if only in the tiniest way, the quality of life on earth."

Are not presentations about the player (presenter) and the receiver (audience)?
A good tip to always remember: It's not about us, it's about them. And about the message.



Photo of Tom Grant by Owen Carey.

Jazz, Zen, and the Art of Connection

There is a line of thinking that says if I tell you the meaning of Zen, then it wouldn't really be Zen. The same could be said concerning the meaning of jazz. Of course, we can talk about them and label them. With our verbalization, we get close to the meanings—and the discussion may be interesting, helpful, and even inspiring. Yet we never experience the thing itself by talking about it. Zen is concerned with the thing itself. Zen is about the now—right here, right now. The essence of jazz expression is like this, too. It's about this moment. No artificiality, no pretending to be anything you're not. No acting. No wishing at this moment to be anywhere or with anyone except where you are.

While there are many forms of jazz, if you want to at least get close to the essence of the art, then listen to the 1959 album *Kind of Blue* by Miles Davis. The liner notes for this classic album were written by the legendary Bill Evans, who plays piano on the recording. In these notes, Bill makes a direct reference to one of the Zen arts, *sumi-e*. Here are just a few lines from his notes:

“There is a Japanese visual art in which the artist is forced to be spontaneous. He must paint on a thin stretched parchment with a special brush and black water paint in such a way that an unnatural or interrupted stroke will destroy the line or break through the parchment. Erasures or changes are impossible. These artists must practice a particular discipline, that of allowing the idea to express itself in communication with their hands in such a direct way that deliberation cannot interfere.”

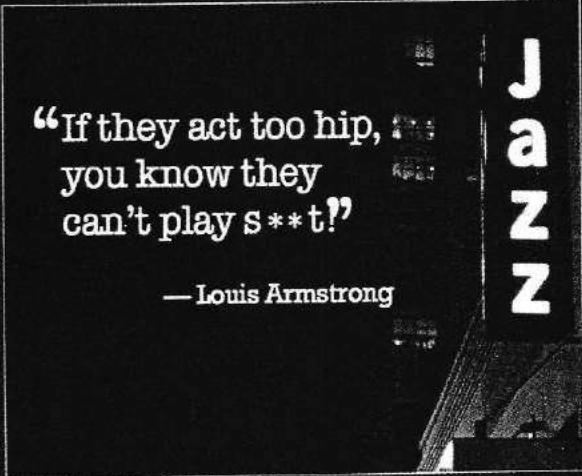
I always thought there was a sort of aesthetic to this album that expressed the tenets of restraint, simplicity, and naturalness—principles that are at the heart of the Presentation Zen approach as well. In the music you hear a free yet structured spontaneity, an idea that seems oxymoronic until you study one of the Zen arts—or jazz. A free yet structured spontaneity is exactly the kind of state we want to be in with an audience during a presentation.

You can establish better connections with an audience by bringing the spirit of jazz to your talk. By “spirit of jazz,” I mean the complete opposite of how people usually use the term *jazz*—as in “jazz it up,” that is, decorate it or add something on the surface. The spirit of jazz is about honest intention. If the intent is pure and the message clear, then that is all you can do. Jazz means removing the barriers and making it accessible, helping people to get your expression (your message, story, point). This does not necessarily mean you will always be direct, although this is often the clearest path. Hint and suggestion are powerful, too. The difference is that hint and suggestion with intent have a purpose and are done with the audience in mind. Hint and suggestion without intent or sincerity may result in simplistic, ineffective ramblings or even obfuscation.

Jazz makes the complex simple through profound expressions of clarity and sincerity. It has structure and rules but also great freedom. Above all, jazz is natural. It is not about putting on a façade of sophistication or seriousness. In fact, humor and playfulness are also at the core of jazz. You may be a dedicated, serious musician or you may be an appreciative fan, but either way you also understand that to be human is to laugh and to play—play is natural to us and natural to the creative process. It's only through our formal education that we begin to doubt the “seriousness” of play. When this happens, we begin to lose a bit of ourselves, including our confidence and a bit of our humanity. I've found through my parallel studies of jazz and the Zen arts that both have structure and practice at their core along with a strong component of playfulness and laughter—all elements we would like to bring to our presentations as well.

Quotes from Jazz

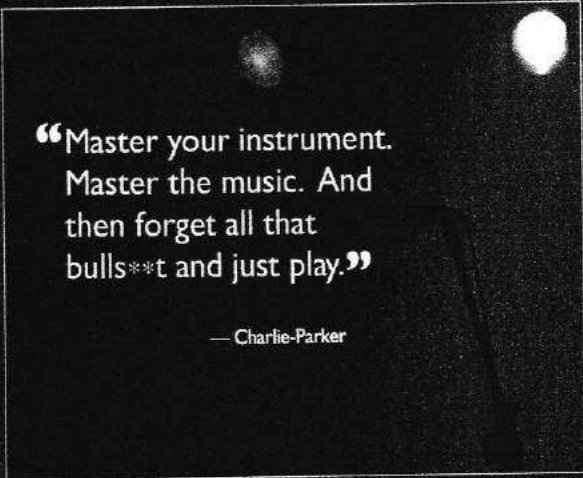
Jazz is about dialogue. It's about making connections and being fully in the moment. When discussing this point in live presentations, I often introduce quotes by famous musicians. The four quotes on the slides here speak to the art of presentation and making connections as well. (Embedded slide images from iStockphoto.com.)

A dark slide with a vertical title 'Jazz' on the right side. The quote is in white text on the left.

**“If they act too hip,
you know they
can’t play s**t!”**

— Louis Armstrong

With practice we can become more polished. But too much polish turns a presentation into a TV-like infomercial unworthy of an audience's trust. Presentation is a very human thing. Practice, rehearse, and make it great. But keep it real. Keep it human. And remember that it is about them (the audience), not us.

A dark slide with a vertical title 'Jazz' on the right side. The quote is in white text on the left.

**“Master your instrument.
Master the music. And
then forget all that
bulls**t and just play.”**

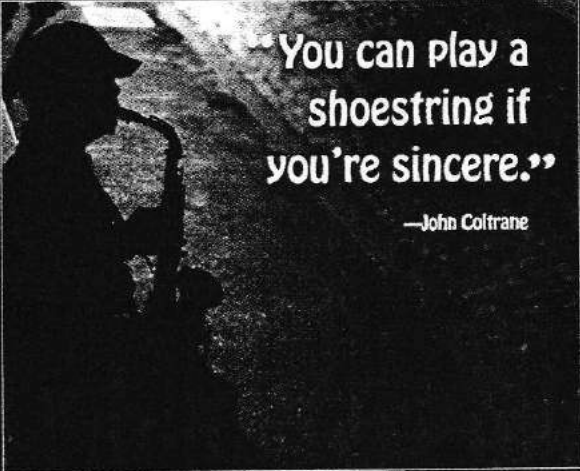
— Charlie Parker

Studying design, presentation, and communication is crucial. Obviously, you must know your subject well. But when we present, all that matters is that moment and that audience. Get to the point. Tell them something memorable. Quit worrying and inspire them or teach them—or better yet, both.

IT'S TAKEN ME ALL MY LIFE
TO LEARN WHAT NOT TO PLAY.

DIZZY GILLESPIE

Most presentations are too long or filled with unnecessary information that is included for the wrong reasons (such as fear). Knowing what to leave out takes work. Again, anyone can include everything and say everything. It is the master presenters (or writers, artists, and so on) who know what to exclude and have the courage to cut it.



“You can play a
shoestring if
you’re sincere.”

—John Coltrane

In most situations, you don't need the latest technology or the best equipment in the world. Showing that you are well prepared and ready to present naked, with or without technology, is far more important. A poor presentation is not any better simply because expensive equipment is used to project images. Sincerity, honesty, and respect for the audience matter far more than technology and technique.

Start Strong to Make a Connection

To establish a connection with an audience, we must grab their attention right from the start. Granville N. Toogood, author of *The Articulate Executive*, also emphasizes starting off quickly and beginning with punch. "To make sure you don't get off on the wrong foot, plunge right in," he says. "To galvanize the mind of the audience, you've got to strike quickly." I always urge people not to waste time at the beginning of a presentation with formalities such as long introductions or filler talk that is not related to the presentation's goal. The beginning is the most important part. You need an opening that grabs people and brings them in. If you fail to hook them at the start, the rest of your presentation may be for naught.

The primacy effect in the context of presentations suggests that we remember more strongly what happens at the beginning of a presentation. There are many ways to strike quickly and start with punch to make a strong initial connection. In my book *The Naked Presenter* (New Riders), I introduced the idea of making a strong connection by incorporating into your opening content that which is personal, unexpected, novel, challenging, or humorous. Not coincidentally, these elements comprise the acronym PUNCH to help you remember. Most of the best presentations contain at least one or more of these elements. Let's take a look at PUNCH in more detail.

PERSONAL

Make it personal. Personal in this case does not mean a long self-introduction about your background complete with organizational charts or why you are qualified to speak. A personal and relevant story, however, can be a very effective opening so long as it illustrates a key engaging point or sets the theme in a memorable way.

UNEXPECTED

Reveal something unexpected. Doing something or saying something that goes against what people expect gets their attention. Do or say something that taps into the emotion of surprise. This emotion increases alertness and gets people to focus. "There must be surprise...some key facts that are not commonly known or are counterintuitive," says management guru Tom Peters. "No reason to do the presentation in the first place if there are no surprises."

NOVEL

Show or tell something novel. Get people's attention by introducing something new. Start with a powerful image that's never been seen, reveal a relevant short story that's never been heard, or show a statistic from a brand-new study that gives new insights into a problem. Chances are your audience is filled with natural born explorers who crave discovery and are attracted to the new and the unknown. Novelty is threatening for some people, but assuming the environment is safe and there is not an over abundance of novelty in the environment, your audience will be seeking the novel and new.

CHALLENGING

Challenge conventional wisdom or challenge the audience's assumptions. Consider challenging people's imaginations, too: "How would you like to fly from New York to Tokyo in two hours? Impossible? Well, some experts think it's possible!" Challenge people intellectually by asking provocative questions that make them think. Many presentations and lectures fail because they simply attempt to transfer information from speaker to listener as if the listeners were not active participants.

HUMOROUS

Use humor to connect with the audience through a shared laugh. There are many benefits to laughter. Laughter is contagious. An audience that shares a laugh becomes more connected with each other and with you, creating a positive vibe in the room. Laughter releases endorphins, relaxes the whole body, and can even change one's perspective. The old adage is if they are laughing, they are listening. This is true, although it does not necessarily mean they are learning. It is critical, however, that the humor be directly relevant to the topic at hand or otherwise fit harmoniously into the flow of the narrative without distracting you from the objective of your talk.

The concept of recommending humor in a presentation gets a bad rap because of the common and tired practice of opening up a speech with a joke, almost always a lame one. However, I'm not talking about telling jokes. Forget about jokes. On the other hand, an observation of irony, an anecdote, or a short humorous story that makes a relevant point or introduces the topic and sets the theme are the kinds of openings that can work.

There are many ways to start a presentation, but no matter how you choose to start, do not waste those initial valuable two or three minutes “warming up” the audience with filler material or formalities. Start strong. The five elements comprising PUNCH are not the only options to consider, but if your opening contains at least one of these approaches, then you are on your way to opening with impact and making a strong connection.

The Honeymoon Period

Getting and keeping an audience's attention can be a tricky thing. Generally, audience's want you to succeed, but they will still only give you one or two minutes of a “honeymoon period” for you to make a good impression. Even famous, well-established presenters, including celebrities, will only get about a minute before audiences grow tired of a presenter's inability to make a good impression and grab their attention. There is no excuse for a weak start. If your technology lets you down just as your presentation starts, you cannot stop. As they say in show business: “The show must go on.” People form impressions of you and the presentation in the first few moments. You never want those first few moments to be a memory of you trying to get the technology to work.

Never Start with an Apology

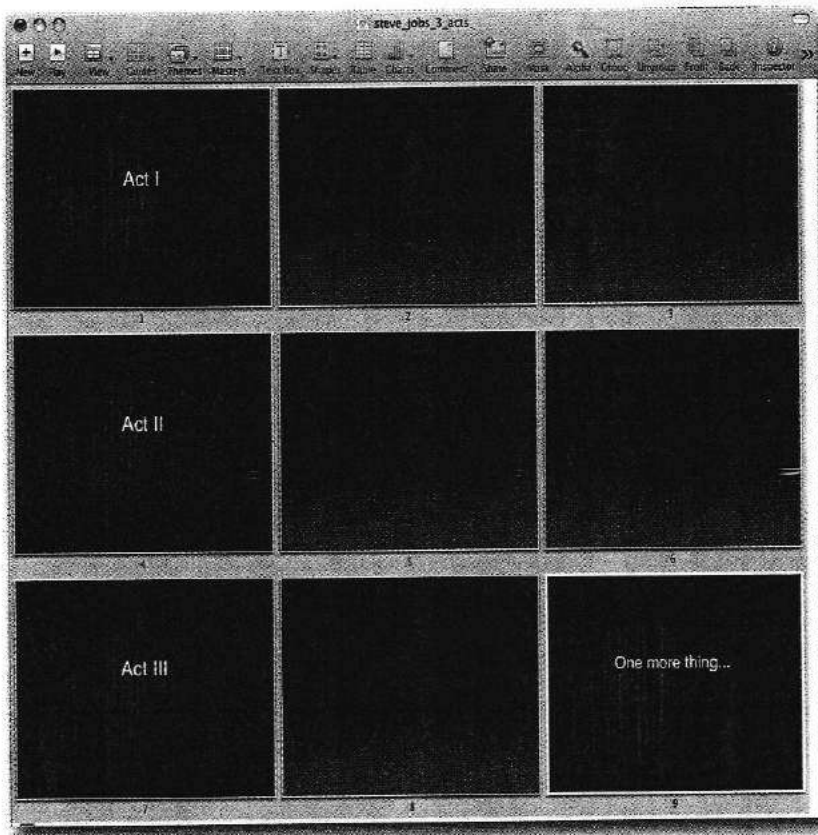
Do not apologize or imply that you have not prepared enough for a given audience. It may be true, and your apology may be sincere and honest (rather than just being an excuse), but it never comes across well to an audience. The audience does not need to know that we have not prepared as much as we would have liked, so why mention it and get it in their head? You actually may be prepared enough and doing well, but now the audience is saying to themselves “Man, he's right—he didn't prepare enough.” The same goes for telling people you're nervous. “You didn't look nervous, but now that you mention it....”

A confession that you are nervous may seem honest and transparent, but it is too self-focused at a time when you are supposed to be focused on the audience and their needs and their feelings. An admission about being nervous is not said to make the audience feel better, only to make yourself feel better. If you admit that you are nervous, you may actually feel better since labeling and acknowledging your emotion is better than suppressing it. This is why people

say it—because saying it out loud does make you feel a little better. However, the presentation is about the audience, and telling them how nervous you are does not serve their interest. Acknowledge to yourself that you are nervous. Being nervous is normal and saying it to yourself will help you feel better. But you do not need to share this information with the audience.

Do You Need to Show the Structure?

Do not start with an agenda slide. After you have made an initial connection with the audience, however, it's a good idea to give people an idea of where you are going during your time. Usually you can do this verbally in just a few seconds. But, if you have a lot of material, you may want to show the audience how your talk is structured and then remind them along the way where you are in the presentation. In a 2007 Macworld keynote presentation, Steve Jobs did this by breaking his presentation into three "Acts" and displaying the number of the act before each of his three sections.



Project Yourself

To make a connection you cannot be timid—you must project yourself. There are three things to consider when evaluating your ability to project yourself to an audience aside from the content of the talk: The way you look, the way you move, and the way you sound. The audience members, whether they know it or not, are judging you and your message based on these elements. All these factors influence your ability to make a strong connection.

Look the Part

How you dress matters. A rule of thumb is to dress at least a little more formally than your audience. It's important to dress appropriate to the organization and the occasion, of course, but it's better to be a bit overdressed than underdressed. You want to project an image of professionalism, but you do not want to seem out of touch with your audience either. In Silicon Valley, for example, the dress code can be quite casual and even a well-groomed person in jeans with a quality shirt and a good pair of shoes may look professional. (When we occasionally saw people in business suits on the Apple campus, we could tell they were from out of town.) In Tokyo, both men and women cannot go wrong with a dark business suit virtually anywhere. You can always bring your formality down a notch by removing your jacket, removing the tie, and rolling up the sleeves, but it's difficult to dress up a look that is too casual. To be safe, and to show respect for your audience, err on the side of dressing up.

Move with Purpose

If you can avoid it, do not stand in one place during the entire presentation. It's far better to walk to different parts of the stage or room, which allows you to engage with more people. You should not, however, pace back and forth or wander around the area near the screen without purpose. This kind of movement is distracting and projects a nervous energy rather than a confident, open energy. When you walk from one area to another, do so slowly and while standing tall. Stop to make your point or tell a story, then move slowly to another part of the stage before stopping again to elaborate on a different point. When someone asks a question from the opposite side of the room, walk slowly in their direction, acknowledging their presence while listening and approaching their side of the room. So long as people can still hear you, it is

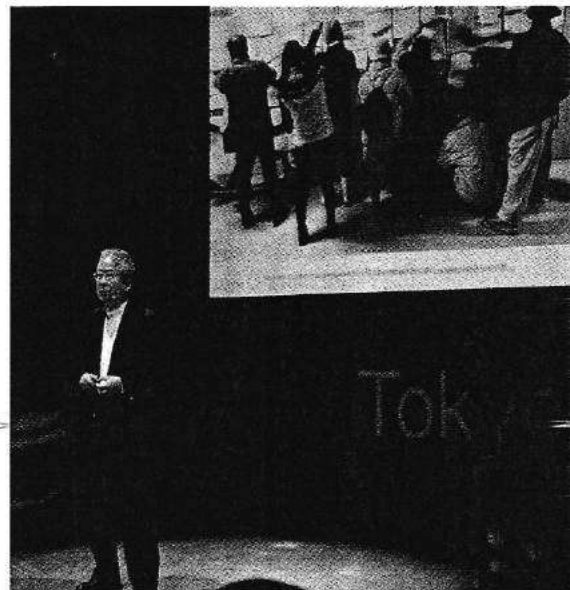
a good idea to walk into the audience from time to time—provided you have a purpose for doing so, such as answering a question during an activity that you assigned to the audience.

When you stand, do so with your feet comfortably but firmly planted about shoulder-width apart. You should not stand like a cowboy about ready to draw his guns, but neither should you stand with your legs together as if standing at attention. Standing at attention or with your legs crossed demonstrates a closed, defensive, or uncertain attitude. These positions, which are unnatural ways to stand when we are relaxed, make you a bit unstable and project weakness to others. About the only thing worse than standing on a stage with your legs crossed is doing so while leaning against the lectern. At best, it looks sloppy. At worst, it projects an image of weakness.

When we get nervous, most of us tend to speed up our movements, including hand gestures. If you want to project a more calm, relaxed, and natural image to the audience, remind yourself to slow everything down.

Face the Audience

Even if you are projecting visuals behind you, there is no need to turn your head to look back. Even if you gesture toward the screen, stand so that your shoulders are facing in the direction of the audience. If you keep your shoulders pointed toward the front, you will naturally turn your head back toward the audience without thinking about it after you glance at the screen. Turning slightly and briefly toward the screen to point out a detail is acceptable. However, continually looking at the screen as a reminder of where you are is very distracting and unnecessary. Except in rare incidents, if you use a computer to project visuals, you can place the computer down low in front of you so there is little reason to turn around.



*MIT's Hiroshi Ishii faces the audience at TEDxTokyo.
(Photo: TEDxTokyo/Andy McGovern.)*

Connect with Eye Contact

Related to the importance of facing the audience is establishing good eye contact. Maintaining natural eye contact with the audience is crucial, which is one of the reasons I advise against reading a script or relying on notes—it's hard to look into people's eyes when your eyes are looking down at notes. Your eye contact should appear natural, and you achieve this by looking at actual people in the room. If you instead gaze out at the back of the room or to a point on either side of the room, your audience will detect this at some level and the connection will be weakened.

If your audience is relatively small, say, under 50 or so, it may be possible to actually look everyone in the eye at some point during your talk as you move deliberately to different parts of the room. For larger audiences in a typical keynote-style presentation, it is still useful to pick out actual people to lock eyes with as you speak—even people who are sitting toward the back. By looking at one person, others near that person will feel as if you are looking at them as well. This is a technique that professional singers use when playing larger halls. It is important not to just glance at or scan general areas of a room but rather to briefly establish actual eye contact with people in different parts of the room.

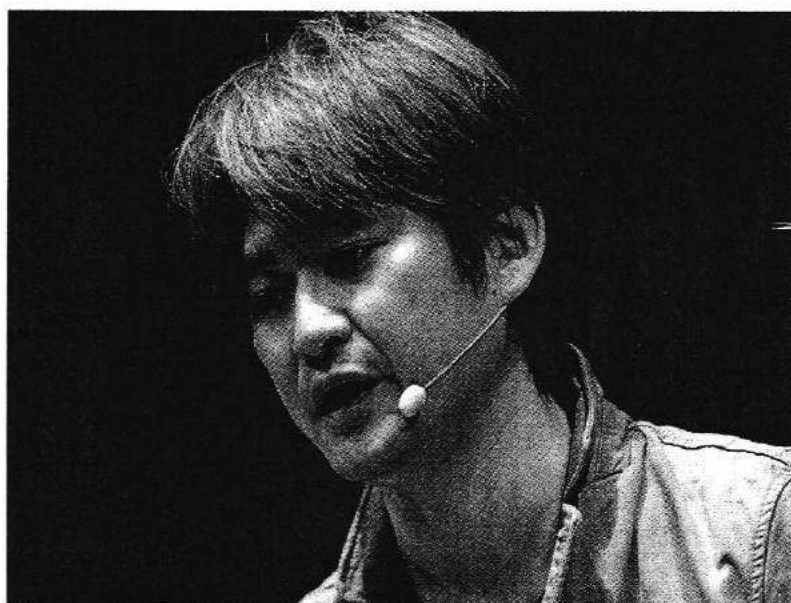
Put Energy in Your Voice

It's true that the best presentations seem more like good conversations, but there is a difference between speaking with two or three people over coffee and standing to present to an auditorium of 500 people after lunch. Your tone should be conversational, but your energy must be cranked up several notches. If you are enthusiastic, the energy will help project your voice. Mumbling is absolutely not permitted, and neither is shouting. Shouting is usually not sustainable and it's very unpleasant for the audience. When you shout, the volume may go up but the richness of your voice, the peaks and valleys of your unique intonation, are lost. So stand tall, speak up, and articulate clearly, but be careful not to let your speaking evolve into shouting as you speak with energy and project your voice.

Should you use a mic? If your room is a regular-size classroom or conference room with space for only 10 to 30 people, then a mic may not be necessary. But in almost every other case, a microphone is a good idea. Remember, it is not about you, it is about them. Giving the audience even just a slight bump

in volume through the use of a microphone will make it easier for them to hear you. Many presenters, especially men, eschew a mic and decide to shout instead. It's as if declining a microphone and choosing to shout is somehow more manly and assertive. But unless you are a head coach delivering an inspiring halftime speech for your football team, shouting is a very bad idea. You are not addressing your troops, remember, you are trying to present in a natural, conversational manner. The microphone, far from being a barrier to connection, can actually be a great enabler of intimacy as it allows you to project in your best and most engaging natural voice.

Only use a handheld mic, however, for very short speeches and announcements. A better option than a handheld mic is a wireless lavalier mic, also called a clip-on or lapel mic. The lavalier is good because it frees up a hand, which is especially important if your other hand is holding a remote control device. The downside of a lavalier is that if you turn your head to the side, some mics will not pick up your voice as well. Whenever possible, the best type of microphone to use is the headband or headset variety used for conferences such as TED. This type of wireless mic places the tiny tip of the mic just to the side of your mouth or your cheek and is virtually invisible to the audience. The advantage of this mic, besides eliminating the possibility of ruffling noises from your shirt, is that no matter how you move your head, the mic stays in the same position and always picks up your voice clearly.



Master game creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi speaking at TEDxTokyo 2011. The wireless headset mic picks up the voice best and allows for freedom of movement.

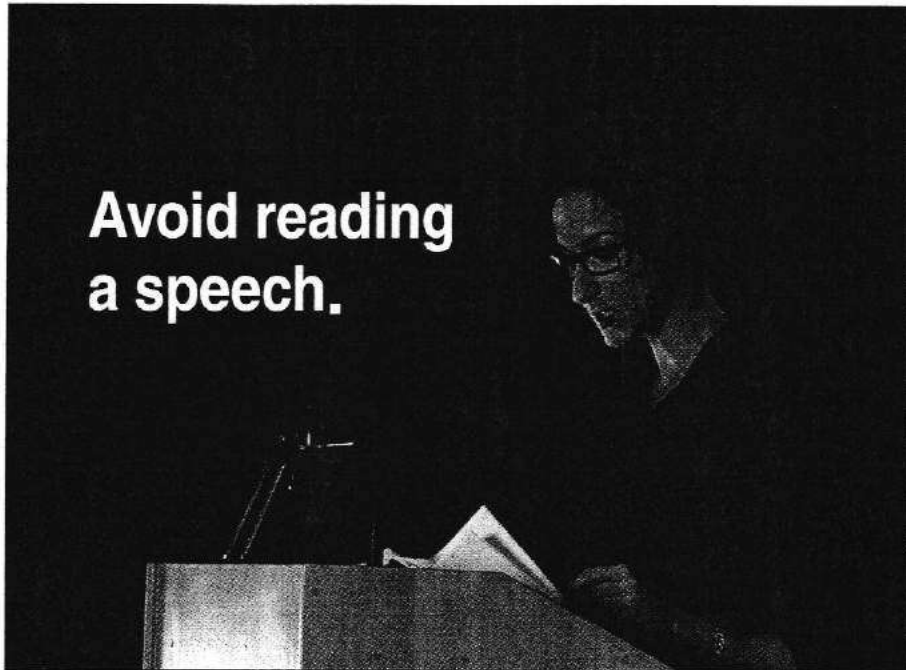
Don't Read a Speech

Communications guru Bert Decker urges speakers to avoid reading a speech whenever possible. In his book *You've Got to Be Believed to Be Heard*, Decker advises against reading speeches. "Reading is boring," he says. "Worse, reading a speech makes the speaker look inauthentic and unenthusiastic." This goes for reading slides as well. Many years ago the typical use of slideware involved people actually reading lines of text right from the slides behind them—and believe it or not, it still happens today. But don't do it. Putting lots of text on a slide and then reading that text is a great way to alienate your audience and ruin any hope you have of making a connection.

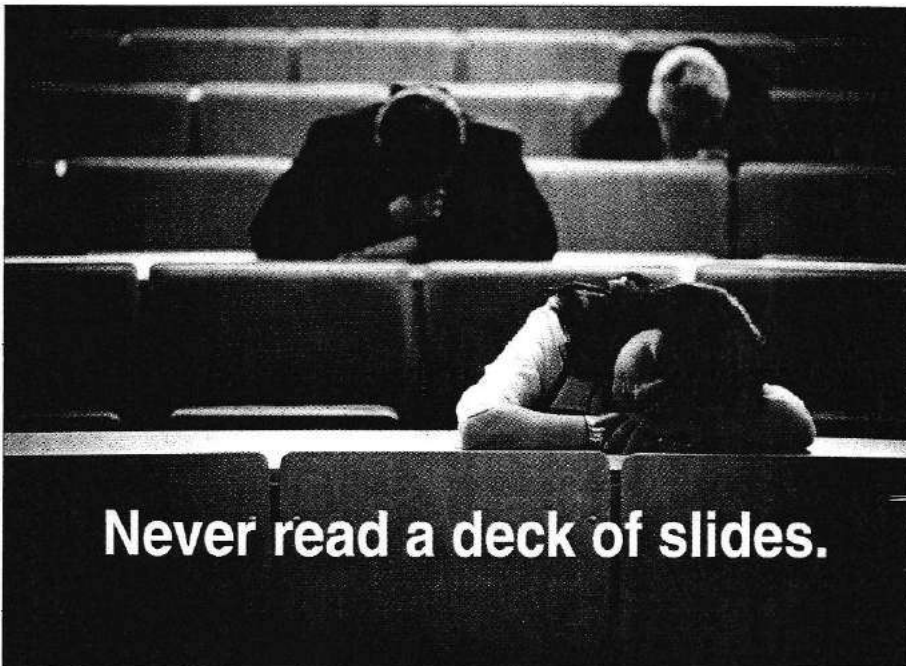
Guy Kawasaki, a venture capitalist and former chief evangelist at Apple, urges people to use large type on slides that people can actually see. "This forces you, he says, "to actually know your presentation and just put the core of the text on your slide." This is what the outspoken Kawasaki had to say about reading text off slides in a speech he gave to a room full of entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley in 2006:

"If you need to put eight-point or ten-point fonts up there, it's because you do not know your material. If you start reading your material because you do not know your material, the audience is very quickly going to think that you are a bozo. They are going to say to themselves 'This bozo is reading his slides. I can read faster than this bozo can speak. I will just read ahead.'"

Guy's comments got a lot of laughs, but he's right. If you plan on reading slides, you might as well call off the presentation now, because your ability to connect with, persuade, or teach the audience anything will approach zero. Reading slides is no way to show presence, make a connection, or even transfer information in a memorable way. In many cases, reading a deck of slides is indeed a good way to put the room to sleep.



**Avoid reading
a speech.**



Never read a deck of slides.

Images in the slides above from iStockphoto.com

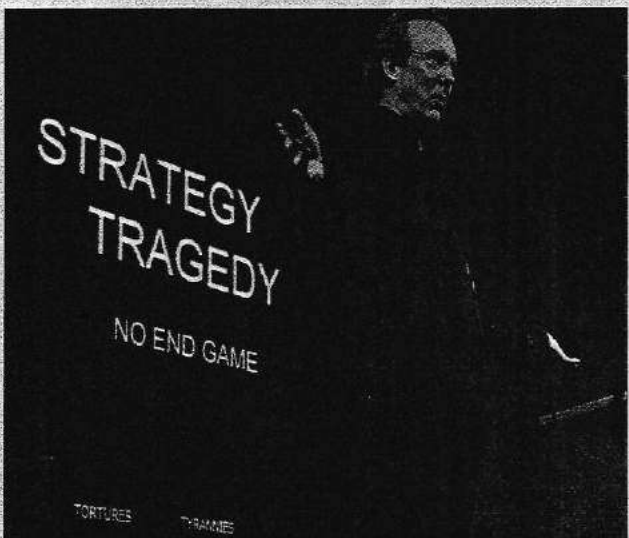
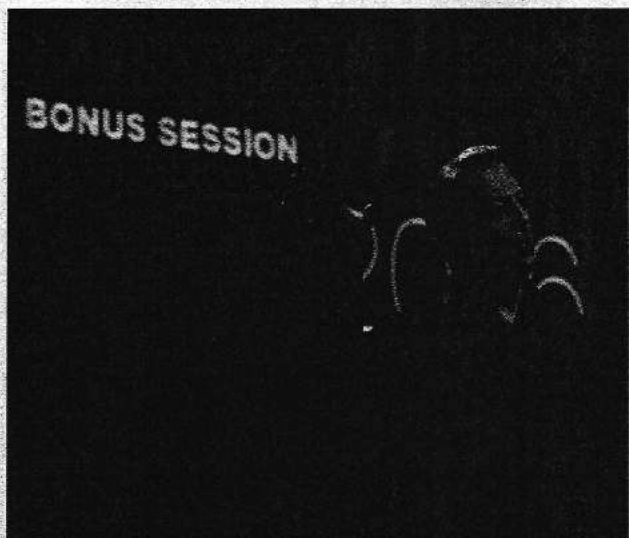


If Your Idea is Worth Spreading...

The annual TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) conference brings together the world's most fascinating thinkers and doers, who are invited to give insanely great talks on stage in 18 minutes or less. The time limit usually results in very concise, tight, and focused talks. If you have ideas worth talking about, then you've got to be able to stand, deliver, and make your case. As the presenters at TED demonstrate every year, presentation skill is critically important.

What's great about TED is that their amazing presentations are not limited to an elite few. Instead, they "give it away" by uploading tons of their best presentations to the Web and making the videos available in many different formats for online viewing and downloading. Hundreds of quality short-form presentations from the TED archives are available online, and more are added each week. The production quality is excellent and so is the content. TED truly exemplifies the spirit of the conceptual age—share, give it away, make it easy—because the more people who know your idea, the more powerful it becomes. Because of the high-quality free videos, the reach and impact of TED is huge. The TED website is a great resource for content and for those interested in watching good presentations, often with good use of multimedia.

www.ted.com/talks



Al Gore **TOP**
(TED/ leslieimage.com)

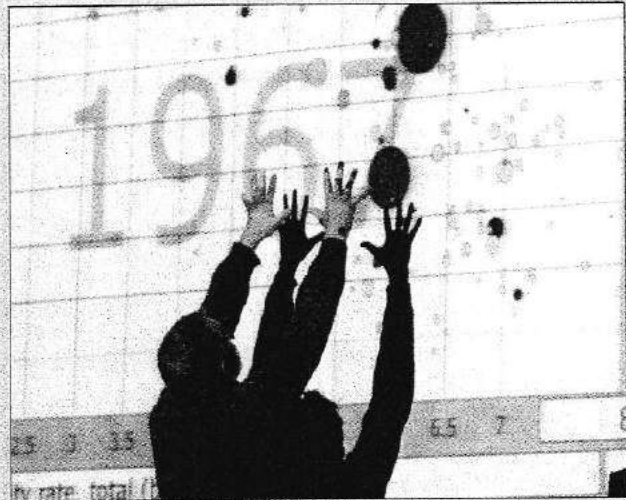
William McDonough **CENTER**
(TED/ Asa Mathat)

Sir Ken Robinson **BOTTOM**
(TED/ leslieimage.com)

Stand, Deliver, Connect

Hans Rosling (right), a professor of global health at Sweden's Karolinska Institute, is the Zen master of presenting statistics that have meaning and tell a story. Rosling co-developed the software behind his visualizations through his nonprofit Gapminder. Using U.N. statistics, Rosling shows that it is indeed a different world. Several presentations on the TED website showcase Rosling's talents. Conventional wisdom says to never stand between the screen and the projector, which is generally good advice. But as you can see from the photo here, Rosling at times defies conventional wisdom and gets involved with the data in an energetic way that engages his audience with the data and the story.

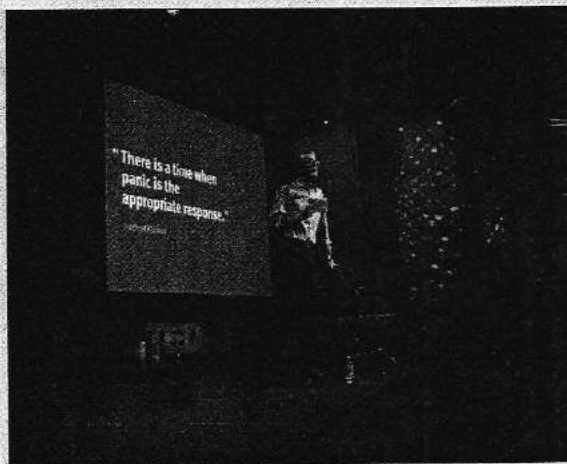
Other TED presenters on this page demonstrate the importance of standing front and center and connecting with the audience.



Hans Rosling (TED/leslieimage.com)



June Cohen
(TED/leslieimage.com)



John Doerr
(TED/leslieimage.com)



Lawrence Lessig
(TED/leslieimage.com)



Hara Hachi Bu: Why Length Matters

A consequence of Zen practice is increased attentiveness to the present, a calmness, and an ability to focus on the here and now. However, for your average audience member, it is a safe bet that he or she is not completely “calm” or present in the “here and now.” Instead, your audience member is processing many emotional opinions and juggling several issues at the moment—both professional and personal—while doing his or her best to listen to you. We all struggle with this. It is virtually impossible for our audience to concentrate completely on what we are saying, even for shorter presentations. Many studies show that concentration really takes a hit after 15 to 20 minutes. My experience tells me it's less than that. For example, CEOs have notoriously short attention spans while listening to a presentation. So the length of your presentation matters.

Every case is different, but generally, shorter is better. But why then do so many presenters go past their allotted time—or, worse, milk a presentation to stretch it out to the allotted time, even when it seems that the points have pretty much been made? This is probably a result of much of our formal education. I can still hear my college philosophy professor saying before the two-hour in-class written exam: “Remember, more is better.” As students, we grow up in an atmosphere that perpetuates the idea that a 20-page paper will likely get a higher grade than a 10-page paper, and a one-hour presentation with 25 presentation slides filled with 12-point lines of text shows more hard work than a 30-minute presentation with 50 highly visual slides. This old-school thinking does not take into account the creativity, intellect, and forethought that it takes to achieve a clarity of ideas. We take this “more is better” thinking with us into our professional lives.

One Secret to a Healthy Life (and a Great Presentation)

The Japanese have a great expression concerning healthy eating habits: *hara hachi bu*, which means “eat until 80 percent full.” This is excellent advice, and it's pretty easy to follow this principle in Japan since portions are generally much smaller than in places like the United States. Using chopsticks also makes it easier to avoid shoveling food in and encourages a bit slower pace.

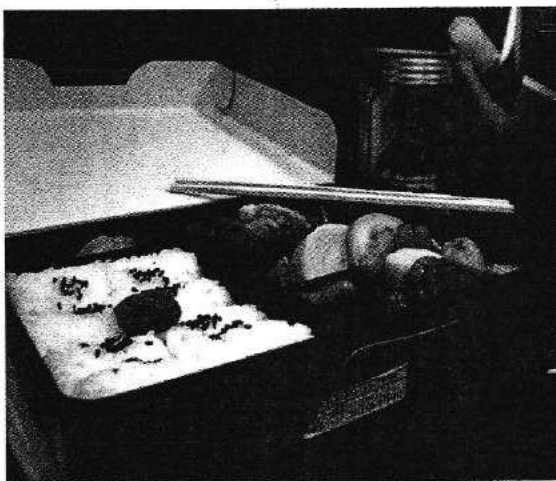
This principle does not encourage wastefulness; it does not mean to leave 20 percent of your meal on the plate. (In fact, it is bad form to leave food on your plate.) In Japan and Asia in general, we usually order as a group and then take only what we need from the shared bounty. I have found—ironically, perhaps—that if I stop eating before getting full, I am more satisfied with the meal. I'm not sleepy after lunch or dinner, and I generally feel much better.

The principle of *hara hachi bu* also applies to the length of speeches, presentations, and even meetings. My advice is this: No matter how much time you are given, never ever go over your allotted time; in fact, finish a bit before your time is up. How long you talk will depend on your unique situation at the time, but try to shoot for 90 to 95 percent of your allotted time. No one will complain if you finish with a few minutes to spare. The problem with most presentations is that they are too long, not that they are too short.

Leave Them Just a Little Hungry (for More)

Professional entertainers know that you want to end on a high note and leave the audience yearning for just a bit more from you. We want to leave our audiences satisfied—motivated, inspired, more knowledgeable—not feeling that they could have done with just a little less.

We can apply this spirit to the length and amount of material we put into presentations as well. Give them high quality—the highest you can—but do not give them so much quantity that you leave them with their heads spinning and guts aching.



This is a typical ekiben (a special boxed meal sold at train stations) from one of my trips to Tokyo. Simple. Appealing. Economic in scale. Nothing superfluous. Made with the "honorable passenger" in mind. After spending 20 or 30 minutes savoring the contents of the ekiben, complemented by Japanese beer, I'm left happy, nourished, and satisfied, but not full. I could eat more—another perhaps—but I do not need to. Indeed, I do not want to. I am satisfied with the experience. Eating to the point of becoming full would only destroy the quality of the experience I'm having.

Every word that is unnecessary only pours
over the side of a brimming mind.

— Cicero

In Sum

- You need solid content and logical structure, but you also have to make a connection with the audience. You must appeal to both the logical and the emotional sides of your audience members.
- If your content is worth talking about, then bring energy and passion to your delivery. Every situation is different, but there is never an excuse to be dull.
- Don't hold back. If you have a passion for your topic, then let people know it.
- Make a strong start with PUNCH. Include content that is personal, unexpected, novel, challenging, or humorous to make a connection from the beginning.
- Project yourself well by dressing the part, moving with confidence and purpose, maintaining good eye contact, and speaking in a conversational style but with elevated energy.
- Try not to read a presentation or rely on notes.
- Remember the concept of *hara hachi bu*. It is better to leave your audience satisfied yet yearning for a bit more, than to leave them stuffed and feeling that they have had more than enough.





CONNECTION

Get Personal

Knowledge can't be pushed into a brain. It has to be pulled in.

Before you can build an idea in someone else's mind, you need their permission. People are naturally cautious about opening up their minds — the most precious thing they own — to complete strangers. You need to find a way to overcome that caution. And the way you do that is to make visible the human being cowering inside you.

Hearing a talk is a completely different thing from reading an essay. It's not just the words. Not at all. It's the person delivering the words. To make an impact, there has to be a human connection. You can give the most brilliant talk, with crystal-clear explanations and laser-sharp logic, but if you don't first connect with the audience, it just won't land. Even if the content is, at some level, understood, it won't be activated but simply filed away in some soon-to-be-forgotten mental archive.

People aren't computers. They're social creatures with all manner of ingenious quirks. They have evolved weapons to protect against dangerous knowledge polluting the worldview they depend on. Those weapons have names: skepticism, mistrust, dislike, boredom, incomprehension.

And, by the way, those weapons are invaluable. If your mind were open to all incoming language, your life would quickly fall apart. "Coffee gives you cancer!" "Those foreigners are disgusting!" "Buy these beautiful kitchen knives!" "I know how to give

you a good time, baby . . ." Every single thing we see or hear is evaluated before we dare embed it into an actionable idea.

So your very first job as a speaker is to find a way to disarm those weapons and build a trusting human bond with the audience so that they're willing—delighted, even—to offer you full access to their minds for a few minutes.

If military metaphors aren't to your liking, let's go back to the idea of a talk as a journey. It is a journey you take your audience on. You may have figured out a brilliant route to a powerful destination. But before you can take people there, you have to make the journey seem enticing. Task one is to go to where the audience is and win them over. Yes, you're a guide who can be trusted. Without that, the whole endeavor may bog down before it has even started.

We tell our speakers that TED offers a warm, welcoming audience. But even so, there's a huge difference in impact between those speakers who connect and those who unconsciously trigger skepticism or boredom or dislike.

Happily, there are numerous ways to make that vital early connection. Here are five suggestions:

MAKE EYE CONTACT, RIGHT FROM THE START

Humans are good at forming instant judgments about other humans. Friend or foe. Likable or unlikable. Wise or dull. Confident or tentative. The clues we use to make these sweeping judgments are often shockingly light. The way someone dresses. How they walk, or stand. Their facial expression. Their body language. Their attentiveness.

Great speakers find a way of making an early connection with their audience. It can be as simple as walking confidently on stage, looking around, making eye contact with two or three peo-

ple, and smiling. Take a look at the first few moments of Kelly McGonigal's TED Talk on the upside of stress. "I have a confession to make." *[she pauses, turns, drops hands, gives a little smile]* "But first, I want YOU to make a little confession to me." *[walks forward]* "In the past year" *[looks around intently from face to face]* "I want you to just raise your hand if you've experienced relatively little stress. Anyone?" *[an enigmatic smile, which a few moments later turns into a million-dollar smile]*. There is instant audience connection there.

Now, not all of us are as naturally fluent, relaxed, or beautiful as Kelly. But one thing we can all do is make eye contact with audience members and smile a little. It makes a huge difference. The Indian artist Raghava KK maintains great eye contact, as does Argentine democracy advocate Pia Mancini. Within seconds of them starting, you just feel yourself being reeled in.

There's a reason for this. Humans have evolved a sophisticated ability to read other people by looking at their eyes. We can subconsciously detect the tiniest movement of eye muscles in someone's face and use it to judge not just how they are feeling, but whether we can trust them. (And while we're doing that, they're doing the same to us.)

Scientists have shown that just the act of two people staring at each other will trigger mirror neuron activity that literally adopts the emotional state of the other person. If I'm beaming, I will make you smile inside. Just a bit. But a meaningful bit. If I'm nervous, you'll feel a little anxious too. We look at each other, and our minds sync.

And the extent to which our minds sync is determined in part by how much we instinctively trust each other. The best tool to engender that trust? Yup, a smile. A natural human smile. (People can detect fake smiles and immediately feel manipulated. Ron Gutman gave a TED Talk on the hidden power of smiles. It's well worth 7½ minutes of your time.)

Eye contact, backed by an occasional warm smile, is an amazing technology that can transform how a talk is received. (It's a shame, though, that it's sometimes undermined by another technology: stage lighting. Some lighting setups mean a speaker is dazzled by bright spotlights and can't even see the audience. Talk to the event organizer about this ahead of time. If you're on stage and feeling disconnected, it's OK to ask for the house lights to be raised or the stage lights dimmed a little.)

At TED, our number-one advice to speakers on the day of their talk is to make regular eye contact with members of the audience. Be warm. Be real. Be you. It opens the door to them trusting you, liking you, and beginning to share your passion.

When you walk onto the stage, you should be thinking about one thing: your true excitement at the chance to share your passion with the people sitting right there a few feet from you. Don't rush in with your opening sentence. Walk into the light, pick out a couple of people, look them in the eye, nod a greeting, and smile. Then you're on your way.

SHOW VULNERABILITY

One of the best ways to disarm an audience is to first reveal your own vulnerability. It's the equivalent of the tough cowboy walking into a saloon and holding his coat wide open to reveal no weapons. Everyone relaxes.

Brené Brown gave a wonderful talk on vulnerability at TEDx-Houston, and she began it appropriately.

A couple years ago, an event planner called me because I was going to do a speaking event. And she said, "I'm really struggling with how to write about you on the little flyer." And I

thought, "Well, what's the struggle?" And she said, "Well, I saw you speak, and I'm going to call you a researcher, I think, but I'm afraid if I call you a researcher, no one will come, because they'll think you're boring and irrelevant."

You love her already.

By the same logic, if you're feeling nervous, it can actually work in your favor. Audiences sense it instantly and — far from despising you as you may fear, the opposite happens — they begin rooting for you. We often encourage speakers who look like they may struggle with nerves to simply be ready, if necessary, to acknowledge it. If you feel yourself choking up, then pause . . . pick up a bottle of water, take a sip, and just say what you're feeling. "Hang in there a moment . . . As you can see, I'm feeling a little nervous here. Normal service will be restored soon." Likely as not, you'll get a warm round of applause, and a crowd dying for you to succeed.

Vulnerability can be powerful at any stage of a talk. One of the most stunning moments witnessed on the TED stage came when neurosurgeon and best-selling author Sherwin Nuland had just completed a tour-de-force history of electroshock therapy, the treatment for severe mental illness that involves sending electric current directly through a patient's brain. He was knowledgeable and funny, and he made it all seem interesting, if a little terrifying. But then he stopped. "Why am I telling you this story at this meeting?" He said he wanted to share something he'd never spoken or written about before. You could have heard a pin drop.

"The reason . . . is that I am a man who, almost thirty years ago, had his life saved by two long courses of electroshock therapy." Nuland went on to unveil his own secret history of debilitating depression, an illness that got so bad doctors were planning to remove part of his brain. Instead, as a last resort, they tried

electroshock therapy. And eventually, after twenty treatments, it had worked.

By making himself so deeply vulnerable to the audience, he was able to end his talk with extraordinary power.

I've always felt that somehow I was an impostor because my readers don't know what I have just told you. So one of the reasons that I have come here to talk about this today is to — frankly, selfishly — unburden myself and let it be known that this is not an untroubled mind that has written all of these books. But more importantly, I think, is the fact that a very significant proportion of people in this audience are under thirty and it looks to me like almost all of you are on the cusp of a magnificent and exciting career. Anything can happen to you. Things change. Accidents happen. Something from childhood comes back to haunt you. You can be thrown off the track . . . If I can find my way back from this, believe me, anybody can find their way back from any adversity that exists in their lives. And for those who are older, who have lived through difficult times, perhaps where they lost everything, as I did, and started out all over again, some of these things will seem very familiar. There is recovery. There is redemption. And there is resurrection.

This is a talk everyone should see. Sherwin Nuland passed away in 2014, but his vulnerability, and consequent inspiration, live on.

Willing to be vulnerable is one of the most powerful tools a speaker can wield. But as with anything powerful, it should be handled with care. Brené Brown has seen a lot of speakers misinterpret her advice. She told me: "Formulaic or contrived personal sharing leaves audiences feeling manipulated and often hostile toward you and your message. Vulnerability is not oversharing. There's a simple equation: vulnerability minus boundaries is

not vulnerability. It can be anything from an attempt to hotwire connection to attention-seeking, but it's not vulnerability and it doesn't lead to connection. The best way I've found to get clear on this is to really examine our intentions. Is sharing done in service of the work on stage or is it a way to work through our own stuff? The former is powerful, the latter damages the confidence people have in us."

Brown strongly recommends that you *don't* share parts of yourself that you haven't yet worked through.

"We need to have owned our stories before sharing them is experienced as a gift. A story is only ready to share when the presenter's healing and growth is not dependent on the audience's response to it."

Authentic vulnerability is powerful. Oversharing is not. If in doubt, try your talk on an honest friend.

MAKE 'EM LAUGH — BUT NOT SQUIRM!

Concentrating on a talk can be hard work, and humor is a wonderful way to bring the audience with you. If Sophie Scott is right, part of the evolutionary purpose of laughter is to create social bonding. When you laugh with someone, you both feel you're on the same side. It's a fantastic tool for building a connection.

Indeed, for many great speakers, humor has become a super-weapon. Sir Ken Robinson's talk on schools' failure to nurture creativity, which as of 2015 had powered its way to 35 million views on TED, was given on the final day of the conference. He started like this. "It's been great, hasn't it? I've been blown away. In fact, I'm leaving." The audience giggled. And basically never stopped. From that moment, he owned us. Humor hacks away the main resistance to listening to a talk. By offering little gifts of

laughter from the start, you are subtly informing your audience . . . *Come along for the ride, dear friends. It's going to be a treat.*

Audiences who laugh with you quickly come to like you. And if people like you, they're much readier to take seriously what you have to say. Laughter blows open someone's defenses, and suddenly you have a chance to truly communicate with them.

There's another big benefit of laughter early in a talk. It's a powerful signal that you're connecting. Monica Lewinsky told me that the moment her nervousness went away during her TED Talk was when the audience erupted with laughter. And if it's a signal to the speaker, it's also a signal to everyone else in the room. Laughter says, *We as a group have bonded with this speaker.* Everyone then pays more attention.

It's striking that some of the very best speakers spend a significant portion of their talks building this connection. In Sir Ken's case above, almost all of the first 11 minutes is a series of hilarious education-related stories that do little to advance his main idea, but instead create an extraordinary bond with the audience. We're thinking: *This is SO much fun. I never thought education could be such an engaging topic. You are such an appealing person . . . I'd go with you anywhere.* And when he eventually gets serious and moves into his main point about the loss of creativity in schools, we're hanging on every word.

Likewise, in Bryan Stevenson's spellbinding talk about injustice, he spent the first quarter of his time on a single story about how his grandmother had persuaded him never to drink. The story ended hilariously, and suddenly we all felt deeply connected to this man.

Caution: Successfully spending that much time on humorous stories is a special gift, not recommended for most of us. But if you can find just one short story that makes people smile, it may unlock the rest of your talk.

Comic sci-fi author Rob Reid offered a very different type of

humor: satire. His tone throughout was serious. He claimed to be offering a sober analysis of "copyright math." But after a minute or so, people began realizing that actually he was mocking the absurdity of copyright laws that regarded every illegally downloaded song as the equivalent of stealing \$150,000. The giggles started and quickly flared into guffaws.

Of course, it doesn't always work. One speaker at TED a few years ago clearly thought he was being hilarious in telling a series of ever more awkward stories about his ex-wife. Maybe a couple of friends in the audience were chuckling. The rest of us were cringing. On another occasion, a speaker tried to perform every quotation in his talk in the accent he imagined the author of the quote might have had. Perhaps his family found this to be endearing. On a public stage, it was just embarrassing. (Unless you're extremely talented, I strongly recommend avoiding accents, other than your own!)

Thirty years ago, speakers packed their talks with jokes based on gender, race, and disability. Don't go there! The world has changed.

Humor is a skilled art, and not everyone can do it. Ineffective humor is worse than no humor at all. Telling a joke that you downloaded off the Internet will probably backfire. Indeed jokes per se seem hackneyed, clumsy, and unsophisticated. What you're looking for instead are hilarious-but-true stories that are directly relevant to your topic or are an endearing, humorous use of language.

The funniest person on our team is Tom Rielly, who runs our fellows program and for years gave a final wrap-up of the conference that skewered every speaker with wicked hilarity. Here's his advice:

1. Tell anecdotes relevant to your subject matter, where humor is natural. The best humor is based on observation

of things occurring around you and then exaggerating or remixing them.

2. Have a funny remark ready if you flub your words, the A/V goes awry, or if the clicker doesn't work. The audience has been there and you instantly win their sympathy.
3. Build humor into your visuals. You can also have the humor be the contrast between what you're saying and what you're showing. There are lots of great possibilities for laughter.
4. Use satire, saying the opposite of what you mean, then revealing your intent, though this is really hard to get right.
5. Timing is critical. If there's a laughter moment, you have to give it a chance to land. That may take the courage to pause just for a moment. And to do so without it looking like you're fishing for applause.
6. Very important: If you're not funny, don't try to be funny. Test the humor on family or friends, or even a colleague. Are they laughing? If not, change it or spike it.

Dangers (even in the hands of people blessed with the gift of humor):

1. Off-color remarks and offensive language: Don't. You're not speaking at a late-night comedy club.
2. Limericks or other seemingly funny poetry
3. Puns
4. Sarcasm
5. Going on too long
6. Any attempted humor based on religion, ethnicity, gender identity, politics. Members of those communities maybe can; outsiders definitely can't.

All of these can work in the right circumstances but are fraught with the possibility of bombing or causing offense. If the audience experiences either, it's hard to get them back.

If you plan to do a lot of public speaking, it's really worth trying to find your own brand of humor that works. And if not, don't panic. It's not for everyone. There are plenty of other ways to connect.

PARK YOUR EGO

Would you want to trust your mind to someone who was completely full of himself? Nothing damages the prospects of a talk more than the sense that the speaker is a blowhard. And if that happens early on . . . look out.

I vividly remember a TED Talk from many years ago that began: "Before I became a living brand . . ." And there, right there, you knew it wasn't going to end well. The speaker was on a high after some recent major commercial success, and we were going to hear about every last bit of it. That's the only time at TED I remember a talk being interrupted by hisses. *Hisses!* Even if you truly are a genius, a drop-dead-gorgeous athlete, and a fearless leader, it's best to let your audience figure that out for themselves.

TED speaker Salman Khan put it beautifully:

Be yourself. The worst talks are the ones where someone is trying to be someone they aren't. If you are generally goofy, then be goofy. If you are emotional, then be emotional. The one exception to that is if you are arrogant and self-centered. Then you should definitely pretend to be someone else.

Some speakers use humor to land a deliberate blow to their egos.

Dan Pink, an accomplished speaker whose talk on motivation

has 10 million views and counting, walked onto the stage looking just a bit overconfident and began speaking in a voice that was just a tad too loud. But after his first few sentences, we were all in his pocket. This is what he said:

I need to make a confession at the outset here. A little over twenty years ago I did something that I regret, something that I'm not particularly proud of, something that, in many ways, I wish no one would ever know, but here I feel kind of obliged to reveal. In the late 1980s, in a moment of youthful indiscretion, I went to law school.

Brilliant. Now we liked him after all.

Self-deprecation, in the right hands, is a beautiful thing. Tony Blair is a master at it, often using self-deprecation to win over potentially hostile audiences. Once, before he was elected British prime minister, he began to tell a story which, he said apologetically, might make people worry whether he was qualified to govern. He told of a visit to the Netherlands, where, at a meal with dignitaries, he encountered a well-dressed woman in her fifties. She asked him who he was. "Tony Blair." "And what do you do?" "I lead the British Labour Party." He asked her who she was. "Beatrix." "And what do you do?" *[awkward pause]* "I'm the queen." Another speaker would have just name-dropped that he'd had dinner with the Queen of the Netherlands and lost the audience before he started. By deliberately talking himself down, Blair won laughter, affection, and trust.

Ego emerges in lots of ways that may be truly invisible to a speaker who's used to being the center of attention:

- Name-dropping
- Stories that seem designed only to show off
- Boasting about your or your company's achievements

- Making the talk all about you rather than an idea others can use.

I could tell you to go back to basics and to remember that the purpose of your talk is to gift an idea, not to self-promote. But even then you might miss it. It can be hard to see from the inside. Every leader needs someone she can count on for raw, honest feedback. Someone who's not afraid to upset or offend if need be. If you're feeling proud of what you've recently accomplished, it's important to try out your talk on that trusted person, and then give them the chance to say, "That was great in parts. But honestly? You come over a little full of yourself?"

TELL A STORY

Storytelling is so important that the entire next chapter is dedicated to it, but one of its most important functions is to build connection with the audience.

We're born to love stories. They are instant generators of interest, empathy, emotion, and intrigue. They can brilliantly establish the context of a talk and make people care about a topic.

Powerful stories can appear at any stage of a talk. A great way to open. A great way to illustrate in the middle. And sometimes, though less often, a great way to end.

Ernesto Sirolli wanted to give a talk about a better approach to development aid in Africa. If you're going to take on a tough subject like that, it's a very good idea to connect with the audience first. Here's how he did it.

Our first project ... was where we Italians decided to teach Zambian people how to grow food. So we arrived there with

Italian seeds in southern Zambia in this absolutely magnificent valley going down to the Zambezi River, and we taught the local people how to grow Italian tomatoes and zucchini and . . . And of course the local people had absolutely no interest in doing that . . . And we were amazed that the local people, in such a fertile valley, would not have any agriculture. But instead of asking them how come they were not growing anything, we simply said, "Thank God we're here. Just in the nick of time to save the Zambian people from starvation." And of course, everything in Africa grew beautifully. We had these magnificent tomatoes . . . And we could not believe, and we were telling the Zambians, "Look how easy agriculture is." When the tomatoes were nice and ripe and red, overnight, some two hundred hippos came out from the river and they ate everything. And we said to the Zambians, "My God, the hippos!" And the Zambians said, "Yes, that's why we have no agriculture here."

When you can pull together humor, self-deprecation, and insight into a single story, you have yourself a winning start.

The stories that can generate the best connection are stories about you personally or about people close to you. Tales of failure, awkwardness, misfortune, danger, or disaster, told authentically, are often the moment when listeners shift from plain vanilla interest to deep engagement. They have started to share some of your emotions. They have started to care about you. They have started to like you.

But be careful. Some stories can come over as boastful or emotionally manipulative. When you explain the amazing way you turned a problem into a thrilling success, far from connecting, you may actually turn people off. When you pull the photograph of your eldest son from your jacket pocket right at the end of your talk, declare that he's been diagnosed with a terminal illness, and say that your talk is devoted to him, you may make your audience more uncomfortable than sympathetic.

The guideline here is just to be authentic. Is that the real you telling this story? A good test is to imagine whether you would tell this story to a group of old friends. And if so, how. Friends are good detectors of the inauthentic. And so are audiences. Be real, and you won't go too far wrong.

And that advice applies to this entire chapter on connection. I've sometimes described these suggestions as tools or techniques. It's important they don't come over that way. They need to be part of an authentic desire to connect. You're a human. Your listeners are humans. Think of them as friends. And just reach out.

AH, POLITICS

I can't end this chapter without lamenting the biggest killer of connection: tribal thinking. Whether in politics, religion, or race, people who are part of a community that has rejected wholesale the ideas you want to articulate, are, to say the least, a challenging audience.

Did my reference above to Tony Blair make you angry at me? After years in power, and especially because of his support for the war in Iraq, he became hated by some to the point where just mentioning his name raised their stress levels. For them, the example above will have seemed poorly chosen. Its explanatory purpose will have been ignored.

Politics can do this. And so can religion. Some views are held so deeply that if a speaker seems to be threatening them, people go into a different mode. Instead of listening, they shut down and smolder.

This is a very big problem. One of the most consequential pieces of public speaking in recent times has been the presentation Al Gore began making in 2005 that was turned into the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, proclaiming a global cli-

mate crisis. He made powerful use of every talk technique you can imagine: compelling slides, careful logic, eloquence, humor, passionate advocacy, devastating mockery of opposing views, and even a touching personal story about his daughter. When he gave the presentation at a special off-the-record session of TED, it profoundly impacted the lives of many participants, persuading some to chuck in their jobs and work full-time on climate issues.

There was one problem, though. Al Gore was a politician in a country sharply divided on partisan lines. Our partisan instincts build near-impregnable barriers against propaganda from the other side. Half of the country connected more deeply with Gore than ever, embraced *An Inconvenient Truth*, and had their world-views permanently altered. The other half never connected at all. They simply shut it out. The very fact that it was Gore the politician making the case meant that it couldn't be true. A decade later, the climate issue was as politicized as ever. What should be a matter of science had tragically become a test of political alignment. (It's possible the same thing would have happened on the left if Dick Cheney or Karl Rove had led the charge on a major global issue.)

The toxicity of our political (and religious) nonconversations is a true tragedy of the modern world. When people aren't prepared or ready to listen, communication can't happen.

If you want to reach people who radically disagree with you, your only chance is to put yourself in their shoes as best you can. Don't use language that may trigger tribal responses. Start with a vision of the world as seen through *their* eyes. And use every one of the tools described here to build a connection based on your shared humanity.

Happily, most speaking opportunities are with fundamentally welcoming audiences. You should readily be able to make a connection with them. And then your talk can truly shine.

Talk Tools

EXPLANATION*How to Explain Tough Concepts*

Harvard psychologist Dan Gilbert came to TED with a daunting task. In just a single short talk, he planned to explain a sophisticated concept called “synthesized happiness” and why it led us to make wildly inaccurate predictions about our own futures.

Let’s see how he set about it. Here’s how he begins:

When you have 21 minutes to speak, two million years seems like a really long time.

An opening line anchored in the here and now, but immediately creating intrigue.

But evolutionarily, two million years is nothing. And yet in two million years, the human brain has nearly tripled in mass, going from the one-and-a-quarter-pound brain of our ancestor here, [*Homo*] *habilis*, to the almost three-pound meatloaf that everybody here has between their ears. What is it about a big brain that nature was so eager for every one of us to have one?

Do you feel a little spark of curiosity? That’s the first step to a successful explanation. Once a mind is intrigued, it opens up. It *wants* new ideas.

Gilbert continues to tease:

Well, it turns out when brains triple in size, they don’t just get three times bigger; they gain new structures. And one of the main reasons our brain got so big is because it got a new part,

called . . . the prefrontal cortex. What does a prefrontal cortex do for you that should justify the entire architectural overhaul of the human skull in the blink of evolutionary time?

While continuing to stoke our curiosity, Gilbert just slotted in the first concept he’ll be building on: *prefrontal cortex*.

One of the most important things it does: it’s an experience simulator. Pilots practice in flight simulators so that they don’t make real mistakes in planes. Human beings have this marvelous adaptation that they can actually have experiences in their heads before they try them out in real life. This is a trick that none of our ancestors could do, and that no other animal can do quite like we can. It’s a marvelous adaptation. It’s up there with opposable thumbs and standing upright and language as one of the things that got our species out of the trees and into the shopping mall.

Slipped in along with the humor, we get another cool new concept. *Experience simulator*. That’s a key building block. It was dropped into place courtesy of a simple metaphor, the flight simulator. We already know what that is, so it’s possible to imagine what an experience simulator might be. But could it be made clearer with an example? Yes, it could:

Ben and Jerry’s doesn’t have liver-and-onion ice cream, and it’s not because they whipped some up, tried it, and went, yuck. It’s because, without leaving your armchair, you can simulate that flavor and say yuck before you make it.

A single vivid example of the simulator in action, and you totally get it. But now the talk takes an intriguing twist.

Let’s see how your experience simulators are working. Let’s just run a quick diagnostic before I proceed with the rest of the talk.

Here are two different futures that I invite you to contemplate. You can try to simulate them and tell me which one you think you might prefer. One of them is winning the lottery. And the other is becoming paraplegic.

The audience is laughing, but a little nervously, wondering what's to come. And what's to come is a truly astonishing slide. Gilbert shows us data suggesting that, one year after winning the lottery or becoming a paraplegic, both groups are actually *equally happy*. What?! That can't be right. This cool new concept of the experience simulator has suddenly taken you to a place you didn't expect. A baffling place. The facts you're presented with make no sense. You're experiencing a *knowledge gap* and your mind is craving that it be filled.

So Gilbert proceeds to fill it, by offering another new concept.

The research that my laboratory has been doing . . . has revealed something really quite startling to us, something we call the *impact bias*, which is the tendency for the simulator to work badly . . . to make you believe that different outcomes are more different than in fact they really are.

By putting a name on it—*impact bias*—the mystery somehow becomes more believable. But our curiosity is burning more brightly than ever in its attempt to bridge this gap. Can it really be the case that we could mispredict our future happiness levels to this degree? Gilbert taps into that vein of curiosity to unveil his key concept.

From field studies to laboratory studies, we see that winning or losing an election, gaining or losing a romantic partner, getting or not getting a promotion, passing or not passing a college test, on and on, have far less impact, less intensity, and much less duration than people expect them to have. This al-

most floors me—a recent study showing how major life traumas affect people suggests that, if it happened over three months ago, with only a few exceptions, it has no impact whatsoever on your happiness.

Why? Because happiness can be synthesized! . . . Human beings have something that we might think of as a psychological immune system. A system of cognitive processes, largely nonconscious cognitive processes, that help them change their views of the world so that they can feel better about the worlds in which they find themselves.

There it is, *synthetic happiness* explained. It's been built on the concepts of *prefrontal cortex*, *experience simulator*, and *impact bias*. And to make it clear, Gilbert uses another metaphor, that of the *immune system*. You already know what an immune system is, so to think of this as a *psychological immune system* is easy. The concept is not delivered in a single leap but piece by piece, and with metaphors to guide and show how the pieces fit together.

But perhaps we're still not fully believing it. So Gilbert encourages us that he really does mean what he seems to be saying by giving a series of examples of people's psychological immune systems at work:

- A disgraced politician who is grateful for his fall,
- A falsely convicted inmate who describes his thirty-seven years in jail as “a glorious experience,”
- And Pete Best, the Fab Four's rejected drummer, who famously said, “I'm happier than I would have been with the Beatles.”

The examples really drive his point home. Gilbert goes on to show how this phenomenon can be observed everywhere, and

how you can live a wiser, happier life if you take it into account. After all, why do we chase happiness when we have the capacity within ourselves to manufacture the very commodity we crave?

But already we've seen enough to reveal the core elements of a masterful explanation. Let's recap:

Step 1. He started right where we were. Both literally, "When you have 21 minutes to speak . . .," and conceptually, without daunting assumptions about our knowledge of psychology or neuroscience.

Step 2. He lit a fire called *curiosity*. Curiosity is what makes people ask *why?* and *how?* It's the feeling that something doesn't quite make sense. That there's a knowledge gap that has to be closed. This happened right at the start and then was dialed up dramatically with his unexpected data about paraplegics and lottery winners.

Step 3. He brought in concepts one by one. You can't understand the main concept without first being introduced to the pieces on which it depends, in this case prefrontal cortex, experience simulator, and impact bias.

Step 4. He used metaphors. It took metaphors like the flight simulator and the psychological immune system to make clear what he was talking about. For an explanation to be satisfying it has to take puzzling facts and build a connection from them to someone's *existing* mental model of the world. Metaphors and analogies are the key tools needed to do this. They help shape the explanation until finally it snaps into place with a satisfying *aha!*

Step 5. He used examples. Little stories, like that of Pete Best, 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 this figured out.*

At the end of his explanation, our mental model of the world has been upgraded. It's richer, deeper, truer. A better reflection of reality.

Explanation is the act that consciously adds a new element to someone's mental model or reorders existing elements in a more satisfying way. If, as I have suggested, the goal of a great talk is to build an idea inside someone's mind, then explanation is the essential tool for achieving that goal.

Many of the best TED Talks achieve their greatness through masterful explanation. And there's a beautiful word for the gift they give: *Understanding*. We can define it as the upgrading of a worldview to better reflect reality.

There is evidence from numerous diverse sources, from neuroscience to psychology to educational theory, that this is how understanding must happen. It's built as a hierarchy, with each layer supplying the elements that construct the next layer. We start with what we know, and we add bits piece by piece, with each part positioned by using already understood language, backed by metaphors and examples. The metaphors, perhaps literally, reveal the "shape" of the new concept so that the mind knows how to slot it in effectively. Without this shaping, the concepts can't be put in place, so a key part of planning a talk is to have the balance right between the concepts you are introducing and the examples and metaphors needed to make them understandable.

Lexicographer Erin McKean offers this as a nice example of the power of metaphor.

If you were giving a talk about JavaScript to a general audience, you could explain that people often have a mental model of a computer program as being a set of instructions, executed one after another. But in JavaScript, instructions can be *asynchronous*, which means that you can't be confident that line five will always happen after line four. Imagine if you were getting dressed in the morning and it was possible to put your shoes on before your jeans (or your jeans on before your underpants)! That can happen in JavaScript.

A single-sentence metaphor and: *click!* the light comes on.

If the core of your talk is explaining a powerful new idea, it is helpful to ask: What do you assume your audience already knows? What will be your connecting theme? What are the concepts necessary to build your explanation? And what metaphors and examples will you use to reveal those concepts?

THE CURSE OF KNOWLEDGE

Unfortunately, this isn't that easy. We all suffer from a cognitive bias for which economist Robin Hogarth coined the term "the curse of knowledge." In a nutshell, we find it hard to remember what it feels like *not* to know something that we ourselves know well. A physicist lives and breathes subatomic particles and may assume that everyone else of course knows what a charm quark is. I was shocked in a recent cocktail-party discussion to hear a talented young novelist ask: "You keep using the term 'natural selection.' What exactly do you mean by that?" I thought everyone with half an education understood the basic ideas of evolution. I was wrong.

In *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century*, Steven Pinker suggests that overcoming the

curse of knowledge may be the single most important requirement in becoming a clear writer. If it's true about writing, when readers have a chance to pause and reread a sentence several times before continuing, then it's even more true about speaking. Pinker suggests that simply being conscious of this bias is not enough. You have to expose your drafts to friends or colleagues and beg for ruthless feedback on anything they don't understand. The same is true for talks, and especially those talks that seek to explain something complex. First share a draft script with colleagues and friends. Then try it out in front of a private audience. And specifically ask the questions, *Did that make sense? Was anything confusing?*

I've long admired Pinker's ability to explain our minds' machinations, so I asked him for some more guidance here. He told me that, for true understanding to take place, the full *hierarchical structure* of an idea must be communicated.

A major finding of cognitive psychology is that long-term memory depends on coherent hierarchical organization of content—chunks within chunks within chunks. A speaker's challenge is to use the fundamentally one-dimensional medium of speech (one word after another) to convey a multidimensional (hierarchical and cross-linking) structure. A speaker begins with a web of ideas in his head, and by the very nature of language he has to convert it into a string of words.

This takes great care, right down to individual sentences and how they link. A speaker has to be sure that listeners know how each sentence relates logically to the preceding one, whether the relationship is similarity, contrast, elaboration, exemplification, generalization, before-and-after, cause, effect, or violated expectation. And they must know whether the point they are now pondering is a digression, a part of the main argument, an exception to the main argument, and so on.

If you imagine the structure of an explanatory talk as a central throughline with other parts connected to it— anecdotes, examples, amplifications, digressions, clarifications, etc.— then overall that structure may look like a tree. The throughline is the trunk, and the branches are the various pieces attached to it. But for understanding to take place, it's crucial the listener knows where she is on that tree.

This is often where the curse of knowledge strikes hardest. Every sentence is understandable, but the speaker forgets to show how they link together. To him, it's obvious.

Here's a simple example. A speaker says:

Chimpanzees have vastly greater strength than humans. Humans learned how to use tools to amplify their natural strength. Of course, chimpanzees also use tools.

And an audience is left confused. What is the point being made here? Maybe the speaker was trying to argue that tools matter more than strength but didn't want to imply that chimpanzees never use tools. Or that chimpanzees are now capable of learning how to amplify their already greater strength. The three sentences don't connect, and the result is a muddle. The above should have been replaced with one of these:

Although chimpanzees have vastly greater strength than humans, humans are much better tool users. And those tools have amplified human's natural strength far beyond that of chimpanzees.

Or (and with a very different meaning),

Chimpanzees have vastly greater strength than humans. And now we've discovered that they also use tools. They could use those tools to learn how to amplify their natural strength.

What this means is that some of the most important elements

in a talk are the little phrases that give clues to the talk's overall structure: "Although . . ." "One recent example . . ." "On the other hand . . ." "Let's build on that . . ." "Playing devil's advocate for a moment . . ." "I must just tell you two stories that amplify this finding." "As an aside . . ." "At this point you may object that . . ." "So, in summary . . ."

Equally important is the precise sequencing of sentences and concepts so that understanding can build naturally. In sharing early drafts of this book there were countless occasions when people pointed out, "I think I get it. But it would be much clearer if you switched these two paragraphs and explained the link between them a little better." It's important to achieve clarity in a book, and it's even more important to have clarity in a talk. Ultimately, your best bet is to recruit help from people new to the topic, because they will be best at spotting the gaps.

TED speaker Deborah Gordon, who explained how ant colonies can teach us crucial networking ideas, told me that the quest for explanation gaps was a crucial part of talk preparation:

A talk isn't a container or a bin that you put content in, it's a process, a trajectory. The goal is to take the listener from where he is to someplace new. That means trying to make the sequence so stepwise that no one gets lost along the way. Not to be grandiose, but if you could fly and you wanted someone to fly with you, you would take their hand and take off and not let go, because once the person drops, that's it! I rehearsed in front of friends and acquaintances who knew nothing about the topic, asking them where they were puzzled or what they wondered about, hoping that by filling those gaps for them I'd be filling the same gaps for other people.

It's especially important to do a jargon check. Any technical terms or acronyms that may be unfamiliar to your listeners should be eliminated or explained. Nothing frustrates an audi-

ence more than to hear a 3-minute discussion of TLAs when they have no idea what TLAs are.* Maybe one such transgression can be handled, but when jargon terms pile up, people simply switch off.

I am *not* advocating that everything be explained on a level appropriate for sixth-graders. At TED we have a guideline based on Einstein's dictum, "Make everything as simple as it can be. But no simpler."† You don't want to insult your audience's intelligence. Sometimes specialist terms are essential. For most audiences, you don't have to spell out that DNA is a special molecule that carries unique genetic information. And you don't have to *over*-explain. Indeed, the best explainers say just enough to let people feel like they're coming up with the idea for themselves. Their strategy is to bring in the new concept and describe its shape just enough so that the prepared minds of the audience can snap it into place for themselves. That's time-efficient for you and deeply satisfying for them. By the end of the talk they're basking in the glow of their own smarts.

FROM EXPLANATION TO EXCITEMENT

There's one other key explanation tool. Before you try to build your idea, consider making clear what it *isn't*. You'll notice I've used that technique in this book already, for example, by discussing talk styles that don't work before going on to those that do. If an explanation is building a small mental model in a large space of possibilities, it's helpful first to reduce the size of that space. By ruling out plausible possibilities you make it a lot easier for your audience to close in on what it is you have in mind.

* TLA = Three Letter Acronym

† It's not clear he said it in exactly those words, but the idea is credited to him.

When, for instance, neuroscientist Sandra Aamodt wanted to explain why mindfulness was helpful for dieting, she said: "I'm not saying you need to learn to meditate or take up yoga. I'm talking about mindful *eating*: learning to understand your body's signals so that you eat when you're hungry and stop when you're full."

Superb TED Talk explainers include Hans Rosling (revelatory animated charts), David Deutsch (outside-the-box scientific thinking), Nancy Kanwisher (accessible neuroscience), Steven Johnson (where ideas come from), and David Christian (history on a grand canvas). I thoroughly recommend them all. They each build inside you something new and powerful that you will value forever.

If you can explain something well, you can use that ability to create real excitement in your audience. Bonnie Bassler is a scientist working on how bacteria communicate with each other. She gave a talk that dove into some pretty complex but mind-blowing research her lab had been undertaking. By helping us understand it, she opened up a world of intriguing possibilities. Here's how.

She started by making the talk relevant to us. After all, it's not a given that anyone in the audience actually cared that much about bacteria. So she began like this:

I know you guys think of yourself as humans, and this is sort of how I think of you. There's about a trillion human cells that make each one of us who we are and able to do all the things that we do, but you have ten trillion bacterial cells in you or on you at any moment in your life. So, ten times more bacterial cells than human cells on a human being . . . These bacteria are not passive riders, they are incredibly important; they keep us alive. They cover us in an invisible body armor that keeps environmental insults out so that we stay healthy. They digest our

food, they make our vitamins, they actually educate your immune system to keep bad microbes out. So they do all these amazing things that help us and are vital for keeping us alive, and they never get any press for that.

OK. Now it's personal. These bugs matter to us. Next, an unexpected question stirs our curiosity:

The question we had is how could they do anything at all? I mean, they're incredibly small; you have to have a microscope to see one. They live this sort of boring life where they grow and divide, and they've always been considered to be these asocial, reclusive organisms. And so it seemed to us that they are just too small to have an impact on the environment if they simply act as individuals.

This is getting intriguing. She's going to tell us that somehow bacteria hunt in packs? I'm eager to know more! Bonnie then takes us on a detective's investigation through various clues that point to how bacteria must act in concert. There's an amazing story about a bioluminescent squid that uses the synced-up behavior of bacteria to make itself invisible. And finally we get to her discovery of how invasive bacteria might launch an attack on a human. They can't do it individually. Instead, they emit a communication molecule. As more bacteria multiply in your body, the concentration of this molecule increases until suddenly they all "know" collectively that there are enough of them to attack, and they all begin emitting toxins at the same time. It's called *quorum sensing*. Wow!

She said this discovery opened up new strategies for fighting bacteria. Don't kill them, just cut their communication channels. With antibiotic immunity spreading, that is a truly exciting concept.

Then she ended her talk by teasing up an even broader implication:

I would argue . . . that this is the invention of multicellularity. Bacteria have been on the earth for billions of years; humans, [a] couple hundred thousand. We think bacteria made the rules for how multicellular organization works . . . if we can figure them out in these primitive organisms, the hope is that they will be applied to other human diseases and human behaviors as well.

At every stage of Bonnie's talk, each piece was carefully built only on what came before. There was not a single piece of jargon that wasn't explained. And that gave her the ability to open new doors of possibility for us. It was complex science, but it got our nonexpert audience wildly excited, and at the end, much to her astonishment, we all stood and applauded her.

You can't give a powerful new idea to an audience unless you can learn how to explain. That can only be done step by step, fueled by curiosity. Each step builds on what the listener already knows. Metaphors and examples are essential to revealing how an idea is pieced together. Beware the curse of knowledge! You must be sure you're not making assumptions that will lose your audience. And when you've explained something special, excitement and inspiration will follow close behind.



Preparation Process

VISUALS

Those Slides Hurt!



In the twenty-first century we have the ability to supplement the spoken word with a dazzling array of technologies that, done right, may take a talk to a whole new level. Photographs, illustrations, elegant typography, graphs, infographics, animation, video, audio, big data simulations — all can dial up both the explanatory power of a talk and its aesthetic appeal.

Despite this, the first question to ask yourself is whether you actually need any of it. It's a striking fact that at least a third of TED's most viewed talks make no use of slides whatsoever.

How can that be? Surely a talk plus images is always going to be more interesting than just a talk? Well no, actually. Slides move at least a little bit of attention away from the speaker and onto the screen. If the whole power of a talk is in the personal connection between speaker and audience, slides may actually get in the way of that.

Now, it is certainly not the case that there is a zero-sum attention tradeoff between screen and speaker. What is being shown onscreen often occupies a different mental category than what is being said. Aesthetic versus analytical, for example. Nonetheless, if the core of your talk is intensely personal, or if you have other devices for livening up your talk — like humor or vivid stories — then you may do better to forget the visuals and just focus on speaking personally to the audience.

And for every speaker, the following is true: Having no slides at all is better than bad slides.

Having said that, the majority of talks do benefit from great slides, and for some talks, the visuals are the absolute difference between success and failure.

TED was originally a conference devoted purely to technology, entertainment, and design, and the presence of designers quickly fostered the expectation that slides would be elegant and impactful. Arguably, that tradition is a core reason why TED Talks took off.

So what are the key elements to strong visuals?

They fall into three categories:

- Revelation
- Explanatory power
- Aesthetic appeal

Let's handle those in turn.

REVEAL!

The most obvious case for visuals is simply to show something that's hard to describe. Presenting the work of most artists and photographers of course depends on doing this. An explorer revealing a voyage or a scientist unveiling a discovery can also use visuals in this way.

Edith Widder was part of the team that first captured the giant squid on video. When she came to TED, her entire talk was built around that moment of revelation. When the incredible creature eventually appeared onscreen, the audience nearly jumped out of its skin. But use of images for revelation doesn't have to be as dramatic. The key is to set the context, prime the audience, and then

... *BAM!* Let the visuals work their magic. Run them full-screen, with minimal adornment.

EXPLAIN!

A picture is worth a thousand words (even though it takes words to express that concept). Often the best explanations happen when words and images work together. Your mind is an integrated system. Much of our world is imagined visually. If you want to really explain something new, often the simplest, most powerful way is to show and tell.

But for that to work, there needs to be a compelling fit between what you tell and what you show. Sometimes a speaker will hit the audience with a slide of immense complexity. Perhaps he is unconsciously trying to impress with the sheer scope and nuance of his work. As he continues churning out the words, the audience is desperately scanning the slide, trying to figure out how to match what is being said with what they are looking at.

The key to avoiding this is to limit each slide to a single core idea. Some speakers, and especially scientists, seem to have the unconscious operating assumption that they should minimize the number of slides, therefore cramming a ton of data onto each one. This may have been true in days when slides were physical things that you had to load into a slide projector. Today, though, the cost of ten slides is the same as the cost of one. The only thing that's limited is the time you have to deliver your talk. So an overly complex slide that might take 2 minutes to explain could be replaced with three or four simpler slides that you can click through in the same amount of time.

TED's Tom RIELLY speaks about the need to manage cognitive load:

With a talk and slides you have two streams of cognitive output running in parallel. The speaker needs to blend both streams into a master mix. Talking about theoretical physics has a high cognitive load. So does a slide with dozens of elements. In these circumstances, the audience member's brain has to decide whether to focus on your words, your slides, or both, and it's mostly involuntary. So you must design where attention is going and make sure a high cognitive load on a slide doesn't fight with what you're saying.

Similarly, it doesn't make sense to leave a slide onscreen once you've finished talking about it. Here's Tom again.

Just go to a blank, black slide and then the audience will get a vacation from images and pay more attention to your words. Then, when you go back to slides, they will be ready to go back to work.

If your goal is one key idea per slide, then it makes sense to consider whether anything more can be done with a slide to highlight the point it is trying to make. This is especially true with graphs and charts. If you're talking about how rainfall in February is always greater than in October, and you show a graph of annual rainfall, why not give the audience the gift of highlighting February and October in different colors?

And if you then go on to make a comparison between March and November, do that with a separate build or on a separate slide with those months differentiated. Don't leave it all crammed on one slide.

David McCandless is a master at turning data into understanding by the use of elegant slides. At TEDGlobal in 2010, for example, he showed two slides. The first was titled **WHO HAS THE BIGGEST MILITARY BUDGET?** It showed ten squares of

different sizes, each square representing a country, in proportion to the size of their budgets. The US, of course, was the largest by far.

The second slide, however, showed squares representing military budget as a percentage of GDP. And suddenly the US is in eighth place, behind Myanmar, Jordan, Georgia, and Saudi Arabia. In just two slides, your worldview is sharpened dramatically.

Other speakers still seem to believe that you enhance the explanatory power of your slides by filling them with words, often the same words that they plan to utter. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Those classic PowerPoint slide decks with a headline followed by multiple bullet points of long phrases are the surest single way to lose an audience's attention altogether. The reason is that the audience reads ahead of the speaker, and by the time the speaker covers a specific point, it feels old hat. When we see speakers come to TED with slide decks like this, we pour them a drink, go and sit with them at a computer monitor, and gently ask their permission to delete, delete, delete. Maybe each bullet point becomes its own slide; many phrases are reduced to a single phrase; they're replaced by an image; or they are deleted altogether.

The point is there is no value in simply repeating in text what you are saying on stage. Conceivably, if you are developing a point over a couple of minutes, it may be worth having a word or a phrase onscreen to remind people of the topic at hand. But otherwise, words on the screen are fighting your presentation, not enhancing it.

Even when a text slide is simple, it may be indirectly stealing your thunder. Instead of a slide that reads: *A black hole is an object so massive that no light can escape from it*, you'd do better with one that reads: *How black is a black hole?* Then you'd give the information from that original slide in spoken form. That way, the

slide teases the audience's curiosity and makes your words *more* interesting, not less.

When you think about it, it's fairly simple. 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.

Used this way, the screen can explain in an instant what might take hours otherwise. At TED, our favorite proponent of explanatory visuals is Hans Rosling. Back in 2006, he unveiled an animated graphic sequence that lasted just 48 seconds. But in those 48 seconds he transformed everyone's mental model of the developing world. And here's the thing: If you haven't seen it, I can't actually explain it to you. To try would take several paragraphs, and even then I wouldn't be close. That's the whole point. It *had* to be shown on a screen. So next time you're near a computer, Google "Hans Rosling: The best stats you've ever seen." Watch and marvel. (The 48-second clip starts at 4:05.)

Not everyone can be a Hans Rosling. But everyone can at least ask themselves the question, *Are visuals key to explaining what I want to say? And, if so, how do I best combine them with my words so that they're working powerfully together?*

DELIGHT!

An often overlooked contribution of visuals is their ability to give a talk immense aesthetic appeal.

It amazes me that visual artists will often restrict what they show to just a tiny fraction of their work. Yes, *concepts* in a talk need to be limited. But images? Not so much. The mistake is to assume that you have to *explain* every image. You don't. If you had invited a prized audience into your own vast exhibition hall to see your work, but you only had time to focus on a single gal-

lery, you would nonetheless first lead them quickly through the rest of the hall, if only to take their breath away and expand their understanding of your broader body of work. With images, a 5-second viewing, even without any accompanying words, can have impact. If it's so easy to offer such a gift to the audience, why withhold it?

There are numerous ways to structure a talk that can allow moments of visual indulgence that will significantly increase the audience's sense of delight, even when the topic itself isn't necessarily beautiful.

The designer and TED Fellow Lucy McRae packed dozens of intriguing, gorgeous images and videos into her talk, all of which generated their own sense of wonder—even when she was talking about body odor.

Likewise, the graphic style of a presentation, with elegant font choices, illustrations, and/or custom animations, can make it irresistible.

These are some core principles. But with visuals, the devil is in the details. To take us a little deeper, let me invite back to the page Tom Rielly, a man for whom bad visuals are a source of physical pain. Tom, over to you!

Tom Rielly writes:

Great! Let's start with the tools you'll use.

PRESENTATION SOFTWARE TIPS

As of 2016, there are three main presentation tools: PowerPoint, Keynote (for Mac), and Prezi. PowerPoint is ubiquitous, though I find Keynote easier to use, and with better typography and graphics. Prezi (in which TED was an early investor) offers an al-

ternative mode in which, instead of a linear succession of slides, you move around a two-dimensional landscape, zooming in and out to focus on what matters to you.

Most projectors and screens these days are the dimensions of a modern widescreen television: 16:9, as opposed to the 4:3 of old TVs. Yet presentation software opens up in 4:3 mode. You want to immediately change the settings to 16:9 (unless you're speaking at a venue where they might still have only 4:3 projectors).

Don't use the software's built-in templates of bullets, letters, and dashes. Your presentation will look the same as everyone else's, and the templates end up being limiting. I recommend you start with a totally blank slide. If you're showing a lot of photos, use black as the background — it will disappear and your photos will pop.

Most photographs should be shown "full bleed." That's not a horror-movie term but an old printing term meaning that the image covers the entire screen. Better to have three full-bleed photos in a row than three on one slide. Photos are often still shot at 4:3, so if you wish to show a picture without cropping its top and bottom, put it on a black slide, which will leave unobtrusive black borders on the left and right.

Photo resolution: Use pictures with the highest resolution possible to avoid annoying pixelation of the images when projected on large screens. There is no such thing as too high a resolution, unless it slows the software down.

FONTSTYPEFACES

It's usually best to use one typeface per presentation. Some typefaces are better suited than others. We usually recommend medium-weight sans-serif fonts like Helvetica or Arial. But don't use

excessively thin fonts as they are hard to read, especially on a dark background. If in doubt, keep it simple.

Font size

Tiny type causes the audience to struggle. Use 24 points or larger in most cases. Use *at most* three sizes of your chosen typeface per presentation, and there should be a reason for each size. Large size is for titles/headlines; medium size is for your main ideas; small size is for supporting ideas.

Font background

If you're going to place type over a photo, make sure you place it where your audience can read it. If a photo is too busy to put type on directly, add a small black bar at the bottom and put the type on it.

Font color

Here the operative words are *simple* and *contrast*. Black on white, a dark color on white, and white or yellow on black all look good because they have great contrast and are easy to read. Use only one color of font per presentation unless you want to show emphasis or surprise. Never use a light-color type on a light-color background or dark-color type on a dark-color background — for example, light blue on yellow or red on black just won't be easy to read.

LEGIBILITY

After you make your font and color choices, look at your presentation on your computer or — way better — on your TV or a projector, and stand back 6 to 12 feet. Can you read everything? Do the photos look clear without pixelation? If not, readjust.

WHAT NOT TO DO

- Bullets belong in *The Godfather*. Avoid them at all costs.
- Dashes belong at the Olympics, not at the beginning of text.
- Resist underlining and italics—they're too hard to read. Bold typefaces are OK.
- Drop shadows can occasionally be useful to improve legibility, especially for type on top of photos, but use the effect sparingly.
- Don't use multiple type effects in the same line. It just looks terrible.

EXPLANATIONS AND DIAGRAMS

Use builds—add words and images to a slide through a series of clicks—to focus people's attention on one idea at a time. Give your audience enough time to absorb each step. Don't feed too much of the slide at a time or people will get overwhelmed.

PHOTO CREDITS

In the scientific community it's especially important to credit each photo on every slide. But it's better to avoid large type, because those citations will draw the audience's eye away from your slide. If all the images are from one source, you can say thanks to *National Geographic* out loud, or you can add one photo credit that says: "Photos courtesy of *National Geographic*," and then you don't have to repeat it on every slide.

If you do need to include credits, they should be positioned and styled consistently, in the same place, same font, same size

(no more than 10 point) on every slide. And cut them down from "Photo Credit: Augustin Alvarez, Ames Research Center, NASA, Mountain View, CA" to "Augustin Alvarez, NASA." Note that some rights holders, such as museums, may resist abbreviating their credits. But it's worth asking. I usually set credits in white, reversed out of the image and rotated 90 degrees so they sit vertically, up the right side of the slide. Ask your friends: are the credits pulling focus away from the images? If so, they are too prominent.

PICTURES OF YOU AND YOUR TEAM

It's great to include a photo of you in your working environment: lab, bush, Large Hadron Collider. But resist including more than one unless there is a reason. Ben Saunders told us how he journeyed to the North and South Poles. His image is necessary in most photos to tell that story. There was also a whole team of people who worked tirelessly to make Ben's expedition possible, but to show photos of them would have taken the audience's focus away from the main story. While we understand that you want to share the credit, pictures of your team, especially in a yearbook-style compilation of individuals, matter to you but not to your audience. Resist, and if you must have one photo, make it an organic grouping. It's much better to depict your team in context during a presentation.

VIDEOS

Videos can be amazing tools to demonstrate your work and ideas. However, you should rarely show clips longer than 30 seconds. And in an 18-minute talk, show no more than two to four

clips unless your work absolutely depends on it. It's best if video clips are of your work and you have rights to them (versus a clip from *Star Wars*); explain something that can't be explained by still images; and have great production value (shot in high-definition, with good lighting and especially good sound). A badly produced video will have your audience thinking more about its poor quality than about its content. Make sure it's organic and authentic, not produced by your PR department or with bombastic canned music. *Hint:* When you are working, capture video of everything, because you may decide to use it later, even if you don't know when. TED invests in high-quality video and photographs, and they just get more valuable as the years pass.

You can embed a video in your presentation, but remember to check with the A/V team to be sure it's definitely working before you go on stage.

TRANSITIONS

This is the dreaded quicksand of many a presenter. Rule of thumb: Avoid nearly all of them. Shimmer, sparkle, confetti, twirl, clothesline, swirl, cube, scale, swap, swoosh, fire explosions, and dropping and bouncing are all real Keynote transitions. And I never use any of them, except for humor and irony. They are gimmicky and serve to drop you out of your ideas and into the mechanics of your software. There are two transitions I do like: none (an instant cut, like in film editing) and dissolve. None (or cut) 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. Cut and dissolve even have two subconscious meanings: With cut you're shifting to a new idea, and with dissolve the two slides are related in some way. That's not a hard and fast rule, but it's valid. You can use cuts and dissolves in the same presentation.

If there is no reason for a transition, don't use one. In summary, your transition should never call attention to itself.

TRANSPORTING FILES

Send your presentation to your hosts, and bring a USB stick with your complete presentation *and* your video, separate from your presentation. Also include the fonts used in the presentation. Even if I have sent a presentation in advance to the venue where I'll be speaking, I always bring it with me too. Important: 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 that Keynote or PowerPoint will gather all the pieces of your presentation in one place. Do label each video clearly, including its location. For example, SIOBHAN STEPHENS SLIDE 12: VIDEO: MOTH EMERGES FROM COCOON.

RIGHTS

Make sure you have a legal license to use the photos, videos, music, and any special fonts, or that they are in the Creative Commons or outright free to use. It's always easiest and best to use your own work. If you use a Whitney Houston song, for example, it could cost thousands of dollars to clear it for use in your live talk and especially online.

TESTING

There are two kinds of testing: human and technical. First, for human testing, I recommend that you test your presentation — es-

pecially your slides — on family or friends who are not in your field. Ask them afterwards what they understood, what they didn't, and what further questions they have. Testing is extremely important, especially on very technical or abstruse subjects.

Equally important is technical testing. I bought a Kensington remote for \$35 that plugs into my computer's USB so I can click through the talk as I would on stage. Are the slides crisp and bright? Are the transitions quick enough? Are the fonts correct? Do the videos play OK? Are there any technical glitches of any kind? Running through your talk a lot will help you know if it is reliable.

Always ask what kind of computer will be used to show your presentation, if it can be shown in the same program and with the same fonts you used to create it, and, if your host is using the same software, ask what version they are using.

Make sure you use the very latest version of the software because that's generally what organizers will have, and onsite conversions from one version to another are stressful and sometimes require lots of finessing. Once, I created a presentation in Keynote on a Mac and it was imported into PowerPoint on a PC. It looked like a disaster in rehearsal. I convinced them to get a Mac and Keynote and it worked great.

Never give a presentation unless you have walked through your slides — and especially videos — on the equipment that will actually be used to show them. It's particularly important to get the sound person to check the sound levels of any audio in your presentation, especially if you plan to speak over it. Inaudibility or a startling burst of sound will throw you off.

WORKING WITH DESIGNERS

Most people can learn to make good slides, but if the stakes are high and budget permits, by all means enlist the help of a pre-

sentation graphics designer. Notice how I didn't say just any designer. Someone who focuses on websites or printed materials may not be as fluid with the art and grammar of conveying ideas through slides. Ask for previous work. You can find them on Behance and other websites.

Four more important points:

1. Even if you have a corporate graphics department to do the work, you should be involved from the beginning. Be proactive. Don't just review the finished video; make sure you are present and participating. Most designers are great at what they do, but they're helping you express yourself, so it just makes sense to be involved.
2. If you are uncomfortable with someone else's slide recommendations, trust your instincts. It's you up there on stage, after all.
3. We work with a lot of designers remotely, using Skype, email, and Dropbox, and it works well. There is no reason your designers have to be nearby.
4. Help doesn't need to be expensive. For presentation graphics, I like to work with small design shops of just one to about fifteen people because I get to work more with the principals. There is also a steady supply of recent art and design school graduates from places like RISD, Art Center College of Design, Pratt, Art Institutes, Cooper Union, and many more colleges around the world.

VERSION CONTROL

Use version control religiously, and a tool like Dropbox to store all your drafts as well as your fonts, photos, videos, and sound. It's always a good idea to name files with the version number, your name, the venue, and later the TED session, if you

know it. For example, like this: v4trjwTomRiellyPrezTED2016 Session11. The initials (“trjw”) tell who worked on it last. *Hint:* Put the version number and last person’s initials at the beginning of the file name, otherwise you might not be able to tell easily which is which. Every time you pass it to or fro, save a new version with a new number, and before you share the Dropbox link with the production team at an event, make a folder inside Dropbox for the old versions and keep the latest version separate. Mark the final version “FINAL” at the beginning or end of the filename.

Your designer will love you if you or a team member assemble as many of the assets (photos, videos, sounds) as possible in a folder before he starts designing. Also, to help the designer, sometimes I’ll open a new Keynote file and make dummy slides with instructions, for example: *This slide will show one of the species we’re trying to conserve. This slide will show the dry lakebed;* etc.

Do that for as many slides as you can, arrange them, and send the file to the designer. This is the equivalent of a filmmaker’s Post-it Notes on the wall — they help her organize her ideas.

Finally, as in all things with graphics, less is more.

And back to Chris:

A round of applause for Tom, please!

And finally, if you want to see state of the art in action, here are three more speakers whose visuals we adore.

The glorious images shown by conservation photographer Mac Stone at TEDxUC fully justify the title of his talk, “Photos that make you want to save the Everglades.”

At TEDxVancouver, Jer Thorp spoke of the impact of clear infographics and proved his point with countless examples.

And at TEDxSydney, biomedical animator Drew Barry used astounding 3D animations to reveal hidden processes in our cells.

Once you have a plan for your visuals, it’s time to go back to the words, and then figure out how you will turn them into an actual talk. There are two quite different approaches here, and, as we’ll see, the world’s best speakers disagree strongly on this topic. Happily, there’s a way to bridge the divide.

Preparation Process

RUN-THROUGHS

Wait, I Need to Rehearse?

Whichever mode of speaking you decide on, 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.*

Musicians rehearse before playing. Actors rehearse before opening the theater doors to the paying public. For public talks, the stakes may well be as high or higher than any concert or play, yet many speakers seem to think they can just walk on the stage and get it right the first time. Thus it is that, time and again, hundreds of people in the audience have to suffer countless minutes of needless pain simply because one person didn't prepare adequately. 'Tis a crying shame.

The greatest corporate communicator of recent times, Steve Jobs, didn't get there by talent alone. He put in hours of meticulous rehearsal for every major product launch Apple did. He obsessed over every detail.

Most of the big TED hits happened only because of the hours of prep the speakers put in. Jill Bolte Taylor, whose talk about her stroke exploded across the Internet in 2008, told me:

I practiced literally hundreds of hours. Over and over again, even in my sleep as I would awake and find myself reciting the talk. Because the piece was so emotional for me, I would relive the morning of the stroke every time I shared the story. Because my emotion was authentic, the story was perceived as authentic, and we took the journey together.

Stem cell scientist Susan Solomon is equally passionate about the power of rehearsal:

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, and in front of any audience. Rehearse in front of friends. Rehearse by yourself. Rehearse with your eyes closed. Rehearse walking in the garden. Rehearse sitting at your desk, but without using your notes. And be sure that, in your rehearsals, you include your visuals, since timing with them is critical.

Rachel Botsman says you should take care with whom you practice:

Practice your speech in front of someone who knows nothing about your work. I made the mistake of running through mine with people who are very familiar with me and what I am doing. The best feedback will be from people who can tell you where there are gaps in your narrative or where you are making assumptions that people will know x, y, z.

Self-professed introvert Susan Cain credits her rehearsal audience for significant improvements to her talk:

I took TED's advice to heart: If you're going to memorize your talk, make sure you know it so well that the words come from the heart. It's not enough to practice it in front of the mirror or while you're walking the dog. Use a real stage, and speak to at least one audience member. The Friday night just before my talk, the amazing Wharton professor Adam Grant gathered an audience of his thirty top students and alums, and I gave my talk to them. Their feedback was so insightful that I stayed up all night to rewrite the final third of the talk. Then I had to spend the rest of the weekend re-memorizing. I don't advise waiting until the last minute like this! But I do recommend working with a real audience and a sage friend like Adam.

But here's a surprise. Even speakers who *don't* believe in scripting and memorizing their talks have still made a big point of rehearsing. Here's education reformer Salman Khan:

Deliver the speech at least five times in your bedroom, paraphrasing the core ideas. Even if you mess up or forget something, force yourself to finish with each go (and always keep time). In my mind, the value of practice is less about memorization than about making you comfortable and less stressed. If you are confident and at ease, everyone will have a better time.

Science writer Mary Roach concurs:

My talk was not written out word for word or memorized. But it was rehearsed — at least twenty-five times, using ten note cards and a timer. There's a kind of unintentional memorization that develops naturally from repetition. I think that's what you're after. Memorization feels safer, but a little risk is good. Fear is energy, and you want some of that running through your wires.

That phrase *unintentional memorization* is an important one. If you rehearse enough, you may find yourself simply knowing the talk in its best form. When Clay Shirky came to the TED offices to give a talk about a ballooning controversy regarding copyright legislation, I marveled at his ability to smoothly deliver the whole complicated thing without a script, without notes even. I asked him how he did it. Answer: Repeated rehearsals. But rehearsals that actually *created* the talk. Here's what he said:

I once heard Ron Vawter, the greatest actor I've ever known, answer a question about his rehearsal technique. He replied, "I just say the words enough times that they sound like they're coming from me." That's what I do — I prepare for a talk by talking. I start with a basic idea, figure out an introductory sentence or two, and then just imagine myself explaining it to people who care about the idea.

In the beginning, the talking is to get a sense of what fits and doesn't fit — it's more editing than rehearsing. In that TED Talk I had a whole bit about scarcity in industries other than TV, but it kept feeling awkward to cram it in, so I dropped it. After a while, the talking becomes for pacing and timing. And by the end, I'm mostly just talking out the transitions. Slides help, of course, but rehearsing the transitions is especially important. The audience needs to hear in your voice when you're doubling down on an idea, versus when you're changing subjects.

I always make written notes, but I never write out the talk — talks shouldn't feel like writing read aloud. Instead, I write down a list of what theater people call beats: here's a thought about the DMCA, then one about SOPA, then one about the DNS, and so on. I make the last list of these beats just before I go on stage, as a last head-clearing reminder.

If you pull together the advice from Cain, Khan, Roach, and Shirky, you will see that the gap between memorized and in-the-moment talks starts to fade. The best memorized talks are known so well that speakers can concentrate on their *passion* for the ideas they contain. The best in-the-moment talks have been practiced enough times that their speakers know exactly what trajectory they should take, and they find many of the most powerful phrases already there in mind.

What we're really talking about here is not two different ways of *delivering* a talk, but rather, it's two different ways of *constructing* a talk. Some people start with a script, others with a set of bullet points, but the process of rehearsal moves these much closer together. In both cases, the goal is a carefully structured talk, delivered with in-the-moment focus.

Maybe, at this point, you'll push back and say that you hate talks that are rehearsed. You can always tell, however effortless someone thinks they're making it seem. *Talks should be fresh, unique, live!*

I know maybe a tiny handful of speakers who can do that. They're building on a lifetime of experience and/or an unusual ability to construct and focus an idea in real time. But for most of us, giving a talk "fresh" brings with it terrible tradeoffs: lack of focus, missed key points, lack of clarity, and time overrun, just to name a few. I really don't recommend this approach. When people think a talk sounds rehearsed, the problem is not *too much* rehearsal, it's *too little* rehearsal. The speaker is stuck in the Uncanny Valley.

But let's acknowledge this: Rehearsals are hard. They're inherently stressful. Even committing to a run-through out loud in your bedroom is hard. There may be some speaking occasions where you simply can't justify taking the time to do this (in which case, speaking from a hand-held set of bullet points, or from a script that you look up from as much as you can, are your best options). But if a talk is important, you really, really owe it to yourself and the audience to work through that stress by rehearsing. In doing that the stress starts to become replaced by confidence, and then by excitement.

Author Tracy Chevalier overcame her reluctance to rehearse and discovered how it can actually shape the talk.

TED organizers place a lot of emphasis on rehearsing. They told me to practice so often I got annoyed. I have given many public talks and never practiced the way TED expected me to. In the end, however, I did rehearse, and was very glad of it. Most talks are not timed so tightly, and my style is often conversational and tangential. Practicing makes you realize just how much waffle there is in most talks. Practice, time yourself, and start cutting out all the asides and unnecessary stuff. I also found that in saying it aloud, I came up with phrases that worked well. I memorized those, then used them as anchors, or landing pads to touch down on. I didn't memorize the whole

talk—that can sound pretty fake unless you're an actor—but I did memorize the structure and those few landing pad phrases, and that made the talk tighter and better.

Even Bill Gates, one of the world's busiest men, puts a huge effort into learning and rehearsing his TED Talks. Once upon a time he was considered a poor public speaker. By taking preparation seriously, he's turned that around and has produced powerful talks on public health, energy, and education.

If it's worth Bill Gates's time and Susan Cain's time and Tracy Chevalier's time and Salman Khan's time to rehearse for a major talk, it's probably worth your time too.

Some things to ask your audience during or after these rehearsals:

- Did I get your attention from the get-go?
- Was I making eye contact?
- Did the talk succeed in building a new idea for you?
- Was each step of the journey satisfying?
- Were there enough examples to make everything clear?
- How was my tone of voice? Did it sound conversational (usually good) or as if I was preaching (usually bad)?
- Was there enough variety of tone and pacing?
- Did I sound as if I was reciting the talk?
- Were the attempts at humor natural or a little awkward? Was there enough humor?
- How were the visuals? Did they help or get in the way?
- Did you notice any annoying traits? Was I clicking my tongue? Swallowing too often? Shifting from side to side? Repeatedly using a phrase like "you know" or (worse) "like"?
- Were my body gestures natural?

- Did I finish on time?
- Were there moments you got a little bored? Was there something I could cut?

I recommend you have someone record these rehearsals on a smartphone so that you can take a look at yourself in action. You may immediately notice some physical trait that you're completely unconscious of that you'd prefer wasn't there.

Finally, let's talk about time limits. It's really important that you take the clock seriously. This is certainly true when you're part of a packed program. Overrunning the clock is stealing time from the speakers who follow you. But it's not just about avoiding upsetting them and the event organizer. It's also about landing your best talk. In our crazy modern attention economy, people respond to crisp, powerful content. They have no patience for flab. And it's not just a modern phenomenon. In history, many of the most powerful talks were short and to the point. Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address clocked in at just over 2 minutes. The speaker before him droned on for 2 hours; what he said is long forgotten.

When it comes to the actual day, the last thing you want is to be worried about time. To avoid this, use your rehearsals to fine-tune your talk. You should plan to cut your material until you're sure you can finish well under the limit. This will allow time for audience laughter and a wee glitch or two. On the day itself, if you know you're going to be OK on time, it will allow you to focus 100 percent on the topic you should be focused on: explaining with passion the idea you care so much about.

Spoken word artist Rives has a nice guideline here.

Your finish line is your time times 0.9. Write and rehearse a talk that is nine-tenths the time you were given: 1 hour = 54 minutes, 10 minutes = 9, 18 minutes = 16:12 (yes, it is). Then get on

stage and ignore the clock. You'll have breathing room to pace yourself, to pause, to screw up a little, to milk the audience's response. Plus your writing will be tighter and you'll stand out from the other speakers who are dancing to the rhythms of the same time limit.

Let's sum it up.

- For a high-stakes talk, it's very important to rehearse multiple times, preferably in front of people you trust.
- Work on it until it's comfortably under your allocated time limit and insist on honest feedback from your rehearsal audience.
- Your goal is to end up with a talk whose structure is second nature to you so that you can concentrate on meaning what you say.

On Stage**VOICE AND PRESENCE***Give Your Words the Life
They Deserve*

Here's a radical question: Why bother to give a talk?

Why not instead simply email the text to every potential member of the audience?

An 18-minute talk contains maybe 2,500 words. Many people can read 2,500 words in less than 9 minutes and retain good comprehension. So why not do that instead? Save the auditorium cost. Save everyone's travel. Save the chance that you might flub your lines and look foolish. And get your talk across in less than half the time it takes to speak it.

In my twenties, I couldn't have made the case for public speaking. While studying philosophy at university, I was devastated to find that the wonderful P. F. Strawson, a beautiful writer and brilliant thinker, was, at least on the day I heard him, a truly terrible speaker. He mumbled his way through 60 minutes, reading every sentence in the same monotone voice, barely looking up. I learned that I was utterly wasting my time going to his lectures when I could double down on just reading his books. So I stopped going to his lectures. In fact I stopped going to lectures, period. I just read.

One of the reasons I was so captivated by TED was the discovery that talks really can offer something more than the printed word. But it's not a given, and it's not even true in every case. That something extra has to be thought about, invested in, developed. It has to be earned.

What is that something extra? It's the human overlay that turns *information* into *inspiration*.

Think of a talk as two streams of input running parallel. Words are processed by your brain's language engine, which operates in much the same way when you're listening as when you're reading. But layered on top is a stream of metadata that allows you to (largely unconsciously) evaluate every piece of language you're hearing, determines what you should do with it, and how you should prioritize it. There's no analog to this in reading. It can only happen when you're watching a speaker and hearing her voice. Here are some of the impacts that the added layer can bring:

- Connection: *I trust this person.*
- Engagement: *Every sentence sounds so interesting!*
- Curiosity: *I hear it in your voice and see it in your face.*
- Understanding: *The emphasis on that word with that hand gesture — now I get it.*
- Empathy: *I can tell how much that hurt you.*
- Excitement: *Wow — that passion is infectious.*
- Conviction: *Such determination in those eyes!*
- Action: *I want to be on your team. Sign me up.*

In the aggregate, this is inspiration. Inspiration in its broadest sense. I think of it as the force that tells the brain what to do with a new idea. Many ideas just get filed away and probably soon forgotten. Inspiration, by contrast, grabs an idea and rushes it into our minds' attention spotlight: *General alert! Important new worldview incoming! Prepare to activate!*

There are many mysteries in how and why we respond so powerfully to certain speakers. These capabilities have evolved over hundreds of thousands of years and are deeply wired into us. Somewhere inside you there is an algorithm for trust. An algo-

rithm for credibility. An algorithm for how emotions are spread from one brain to another. We don't know the details of those algorithms, but we can agree on important clues. And they break down into two big categories, what you do with your *voice* and what you do with your *body*.

SPEAK WITH MEANING

If you get a chance, listen to the opening minute of the TED Talk by George Monbiot. The text is charming, but not particularly sensational.

When I was a young man, I spent six years of wild adventure in the tropics, working as an investigative journalist in some of the most bewitching parts of the world. I was as reckless and foolish as only young men can be. This is why wars get fought. But I also felt more alive than I've ever done since. And when I came home, I found the scope of my existence gradually diminishing until loading the dishwasher seemed like an interesting challenge. And I found myself sort of scratching at the walls of life, as if I was trying to find a way out into a wider space beyond. I was, I believe, ecologically bored.

But when he speaks, you hear something quite different. If I had to depict it just using typography, it would be something like this:

When I was a young man, I spent *six years of wild adventure* in the tropics working as an **investigative** journalist in some of the most **bewitching** parts of the world. I was as **reck**less and **fool**ish as only young men can be. *This-is-why-wars-get-fought*. But I *also* felt more *a l i v e* than I've ever done since. And when

I came **H O M E**, I found the scope of my existence gradually diminishing until **loading the dishwasher seemed like an interesting challenge**. And I found myself sort of *scratching* at the *walls* of life, as if I was trying to find a way **OUT** into a *w i d e r* space beyond. I was, I believe, **ecologically bored**.

In print, that looks awful. But when you hear Monbiot speak, you find yourself pulled instantly into his world. Almost every word he utters is crafted with a different layer of tone or meaning embedded in it, and the net effect is to add incredible nuance to his opening, nuance that print simply can't impart. That talent continues throughout the talk. The words he was uttering evoked intrigue and curiosity to be sure, but his *voice* practically forced you to feel curiosity and astonishment.

How did he do this? 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. If you want to dig into these a little more, I thoroughly recommend a TED Talk by Julian Treasure called, "How to speak so that people want to listen." He not only explains what's needed, he offers exercises that help you get your own voice ready.

For me, the key takeaway is simply to inject variety into the way you speak, variety based on the *meaning* you're trying to convey. So many speakers forget this. They give a talk in which every sentence has the same vocal pattern. A slight rise at the start, and a drop at the end. There are no pauses or changes of pace. What this communicates is that no single part of your talk matters more than any other part. It's just plodding its way along until it gets to the end. The biological effect of this is hypnotic. That is, 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 one word in each paragraph that *really* matters and underline it twice more. Find the sentence that is lightest in tone in the whole script and run a light wavy pencil line under it. Look for every question mark and highlight them with a yellow highlighter. Find the biggest single aha moment of the talk and inject a great big black blob right before it is revealed. If there's a funny anecdote somewhere, put little pink dots above it.

Now try reading your script, applying a change in tone for each mark. For example, let yourself smile while looking at the pink dots, pause for the big black blob, and speed up a little for the wavy pencil line, while speaking more softly. How does that sound? Really contrived? Then try again with a little more nuance.

Now try one more thing. Try to remember all the emotions associated with each passage of your talk. Which are the bits you're most passionate about? Which issues could make you a little angry? What are you laughing at? What are you baffled by? Now let *those* emotions out a little as you speak. How's it sounding? Try doing this with a friend present, and see what she responds to and what she rolls her eyes at. Record yourself reading it and then play it back with your eyes closed.

The point is to start thinking of your tone of voice as giving you a whole new set of tools to get inside your listeners' heads. You want them to understand you, yes, but you also want them to feel your passion. And the way you do that is not by *telling* them to be passionate about this topic, it's by showing your own passion. It spreads automatically, as will every other emotion you authentically feel.

You were worried about the short time limit? No worries. In a sense, you just doubled it. You can use every second not just to

convey information but to communicate *how* that information might be received. And all without adding a single extra word.

For more great examples of the right use of voice, check out talks by Kelly McGonigal, Jon Ronson, Amy Cuddy, Hans Rosling, and the incomparable Sir Ken Robinson.

Some speaking coaches may push vocal variety beyond what feels right to you. Don't let them. Let it come naturally from the passion you feel for the topic. Mostly you want to speak conversationally, interjecting curiosity and excitement when it's appropriate. I ask people to imagine they've met up with friends they went to school with and are updating them on what they've been up to. It's that kind of voice you're looking for. Real, natural, but unafraid to let it rip if what you're saying demands it.

One other important aspect to pay attention to: how fast you're speaking. First of all, it's great to vary your pacing according to what you're speaking about. When you're introducing key ideas or explaining something that's complex, slow down, and don't be afraid to insert pauses. During anecdotes and lighter moments, speed up. But overall, you should plan to speak at your natural, conversational pace. For most speakers that's somewhere in the range 130–170 words per minute.

Some guides to public speaking urge people to deliberately slow down. In most circumstances, I think that's ill-advised. In general, understanding outpaces articulation. In other words, it usually takes the speaker's brain circuits more time to compose than the listener's to comprehend (*except* for the complex explanation moments, where yes, you should slow down). If you speak at your normal conversational pace, it's fine, the listener won't mind, but if you go much slower than that, you're inviting impatience into the room. Impatience is not your friend. While you're enjoying the biggest moment of your life, the audience is slowly dying of word starvation.

Rory Sutherland, who somehow maintained 17 minutes of hilarious, insightful speech at a rate of 180 words per minute, believes many speakers could benefit from speeding up a bit:

There are two ways of losing an audience: going too fast is by far the rarer of the two. Going too slowly is actually the bigger problem, since it allows time for people's minds to wander off. I feel a bit guilty saying this, but if you speak quickly enough, you can get away with the odd leaping segue. I don't recommend blatant non sequiturs, obviously. Speaking fast also papers over a lot of cracks — no one minds or even notices the odd *um* or *er* provided they come quick and fast.

Neither he, nor I, is recommending that you rush or gabble. Just that you talk conversationally . . . and be ready to accelerate in passages where it's natural to do so. This works well, both in the room and online.

Does that surprise you? Do you think of public speaking as the opposite of conversational speaking?

At one TED conference, a first-time speaker from South Asia started his rehearsal bellowing at the top of his voice. I'm all for variety in speaking styles, but this was really exhausting to listen to. I asked him why he was speaking that way, and he thought for a moment and said, "In my culture, public speaking means speaking to a crowd of people. For the people at the back to hear, you have to shout. But," he paused, "but here, I suppose I do not need to do this, because here we have an automatic shouting device." He tapped his microphone and we burst into laughter.

It's actually a really important point. Public speaking evolved long before the age of amplification. To address a crowd of any size, speakers would have to slow down, breathe deep, and let rip, with dramatic pauses after each sentence. It's a style of speaking we recognize today as *oration*. It's a speaking style that can sync

up crowd emotions and responses in a powerful way. We associate it with some of the most influential speeches in literature and history, from Marc Antony's "Friends, Romans, Countrymen" to Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty, or give me death!"

But in most modern settings, oration is best used sparingly. It's capable of conveying passion and urgency and outrage, but it struggles with the many more subtle emotions. And from an audience perspective, it can be really powerful for 15 minutes, but exhausting for an hour. If you were speaking to a single person, you would not orate. You could not build a day-long conference program around oration.

And oration is much slower. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech was delivered at around 100 words per minute. It was perfectly crafted and delivered for its purpose. But it's unlikely that your task today is to address a crowd of 200,000 people at the heart of a major social movement.

Amplification has given us the ability to speak intimately to a crowd. It's an ability worth using. It builds connection and curiosity much more easily than oration. That conversational tone is even more important when you watch a talk online. There you're a single person looking at a screen, and you want the speaker to address you as such. Talks that are orated to a large crowd rarely go viral.

Some speakers fall into a trap here. In the thrill of being on stage, they get caught up in a slightly too grandiose sense of the occasion and begin unconsciously embracing a form of oration. They slow down their pace. They speak a little too loudly. And they insert dramatic pauses between sentences. This is an absolute talk killer. Oration is a subtle art that only a few are truly great at. It can be appropriate in church or at a mass political rally. But for other public-speaking occasions, I recommend leaving it alone.

RECRUIT YOUR BODY

Sir Ken Robinson jokes that some professors seem to view their bodies simply as devices to carry their heads into the next meeting. Sometimes a speaker will give the same impression. Once his body has moved his head onto the stage, it no longer knows what to do with itself. The problem is amplified in a setting where there's no lectern to hide behind. People stand awkwardly, hands glued to their sides, or lurch from leg to leg.

The last thing I want to do is prescribe a single approach to body language. Talks would quickly get boring if every speaker did the same thing. But there are a few things you can think about that may make you feel more comfortable, and that will better project your authority to your audience.

The simplest way to give a talk powerfully is just to stand tall, putting equal weight on both feet, which are positioned comfortably a few inches apart, and use your hands and arms to naturally amplify whatever you're saying. If the audience seating is curved around the stage a little, you can turn from the waist to address different parts of it. You don't have to walk around at all.

This mode can project calm authority; it is the method used by a majority of TED speakers, including Sir Ken. The key is to feel relaxed, and to let your upper body move as it will. Good posture helps; avoid slouching your shoulders forward. An open stance may feel vulnerable . . . but that vulnerability works in your favor.

Some speakers, though, 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. Take a look at Juan Enriquez in action. Or Elizabeth Gilbert. In both cases, they look extremely comfortable. And (this is important) they fre-

quently stop to dwell on a point. It's that rhythm that lets this method work. Constant pacing can be tiring to watch. Pacing punctuated by stillness can be powerful.

Something to avoid is nervously shifting from leg to leg or walking forward and back a couple of steps in a kind of rocking motion. Many speakers do this without realizing it. They may be feeling a little anxious, and shifting from one leg to the other eases their discomfort. But from the audience's viewpoint, it actually highlights that discomfort. There have been so many times in TED rehearsals where we've encouraged these speakers to relax and to simply stand still. The difference in impact is immediate.

So, move if you want to. But if you do move, move intentionally. And then, when you want to emphasize a point, stop and address your audience from a stance of quiet power.

There are plenty of other ways you can speak with power. Dame Stephanie Shirley chose to sit for her talk, using a metal stool with one foot tucked back on a rung, and notes in her lap. It looked relaxed and natural. The late, great neurologist Oliver Sacks also sat for his talk. At the other end of the spectrum, Clifford Stoll leapt and darted around the stage with such energy that it added an entirely new and unique dimension to his talk.

So there are no rules here, other than for you to find a mode of being on stage in which you're comfortable and confident, and which doesn't detract from what you're saying. The simple test is to rehearse in front of a small audience and ask them if your body language is getting in the way, and/or video-record yourself to see if you're doing something you're unaware of.

The world can accommodate—and welcome—many different presentation styles. Just make sure your body knows it's not there solely to transport your head. It's allowed to enjoy its own time on stage.

DO IT YOUR WAY

And now, the most important lesson. It's an easy trap to get so caught up with the *how* of giving a talk that you forget what's more important, and that is—giving *your* talk in *your own* authentic way.

As with your wardrobe choice, once you've found a presentation style that works for you, don't overthink it. Don't try to be someone else. Focus on your content and your passion for it . . . and don't be afraid to let your own personality shine through.

The success of Jill Bolte Taylor's talk back in 2008 tempted a whole generation of TED speakers to try to imitate her emotional tone. That's a mistake. And it's one that Mary Roach almost fell for:

The first thing I did upon being invited to give a talk was to click on the most popular TED Talk at that time, the one by Jill Bolte Taylor. I stopped it after 2 minutes, because I knew I could not be Jill Bolte Taylor. As insecure as I am, I knew it would be better to be Mary Roach than to be Mary Roach trying to be Jill Bolte Taylor.

Dan Pink agrees:

Say it like yourself. Don't mimic someone else's style or conform to what you think is a particular "TED way" of presenting. That's boring, banal, and backward. Don't try to be the next Ken Robinson or the next Jill Bolte Taylor. Be the first you.

On Stage



18

FORMAT INNOVATION

*The Promise (and Peril) of
Full-Spectrum Talks*

In November 2011, science writer John Bohannon took to the stage at TEDxBussels, accompanied by an unusual speaking aid. Instead of PowerPoint, he brought with him a dance troupe. Actually, they brought him. They carried him onto the stage. And while he spoke about lasers and superfluids, they physically embodied the points he was making.

It was a riveting performance. Bohannon went on to argue that dance can be a great accompaniment for science talks, and he's even started a movement called Dance Your PhD.

If you want your talk to truly stand out from the crowd, there are many options open to you to be innovative.

If we look at the fundamentals, the only real constraint in a talk is the time available. In 18 minutes, you can utter about 2,500 words. But what else could you do? Your audience has five senses and is capable of absorbing multiple inputs.

At TED, we use the term *full spectrum* to describe those attempts to build more into a talk than just words and slides. Here are sixteen suggestions you could consider. We suspect we're going to see enormous innovation over the coming years.

Now, all of these need handling with extreme care. Done wrong, they can seem gimmicky. But done right, they can kick a talk up to a whole new level.

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