

TED Talk Guidelines

Required length: 7 - 10 minutes

Due Dates:

F 12/7 **All students should be ready to present their talks**

12/7 - 12/12 **Presentations of talks in class (GRADED)**

M 12/17 **TEDx Conference (6 - 8 PM)**

In-class presentations: Starting on Friday, December 7, you will give a “dress rehearsal” of your talk to the class. This is the talk that I will grade. If you do not score well on the in-class presentation, you have two options for a redo:

Option 1: Have a friend or parent film your evening talk on 12/17 and share it with me.

Option 2: Complete an in-class redo between 12/13 and 12/17.

Presenting your complete talk at the evening conference is mandatory. If you do not show up, your score for the talk will be dropped to a 0. If you “phone it in,” you will lose points.

Requirements:

- **TED talks are *memorized*.** TED speakers practice their talks a lot. I’ve only seen one talk in which the speaker read from a script, but even then she looked at the audience most of the time. The best TED talks feel spontaneous even though they’ve been carefully crafted. To pull this off, you need to know your talk--and your topic--so well that you feel comfortable going “off script” for a bit. **DO NOT RELY ON YOUR SLIDES** to help you keep track of where you are.

NOTE: A script for a talk is different from an essay. Unlike an essay, a talk is more conversational. The style is lower (but not so low that your audience doesn’t take you seriously): you can use “I,” tell stories, be funny, and you should use shorter sentences.

It is okay to have a few notecards with you during the talk, but only to prompt your memory. Do not put your script on notecards and read from them.

- **Slides should contain mostly images and very little text, if any.** You can use slides as “signposts” of your key points along the way, but you should **NEVER EVER READ FROM**

YOUR SLIDES. The best way to avoid doing this is to have nothing on your slides to read.

- **Use your slides purposefully.** Do not put random images on your slides just to be cute or funny. They should enhance your audience's understanding of your points, and they should never distract from the content of your talk.
- **NO title slide or Works Cited slide.** For other class presentations you may be required to show your sources, but TED talks are different. (*EXAMPLE: Next year, in Senior Sem, you will be required to have a Works Cited slide and possibly a title slide.*)
- **Images & video must be cited** unless 1) they are in the "public domain" or 2) they are your original compositions. Provide a brief citation at the bottom of the slide. I will show you examples of this.
- **Connect with your audience:**
 - ***Tell a story.*** Many talks open with a story. Some work a story into the middle somewhere. Others organize their talks as a story (a story of how the speaker came to realize something, develop something, overcome something, etc.). It doesn't have to be a personal story, but these are the best ones to use because they personalize you and help your audience connect with you.
 - ***Take an informal poll.*** Some speakers ask their audiences for a show of hands. Some even open with this kind of poll. If you do, make sure your questions are non-threatening and relevant to your topic.
 - When speaking, ***change the tone of your voice as well as the pace of your talk*** to help keep your audience's attention and emphasize important information or turning points in your talk. Remember: your main goal is to make your audience as passionate and inspired by this topic as you are.
 - ***Move around the stage a little.*** You probably won't have a lot of room to wander, but don't just stand still in one place and never move. If you do stand in one place, make sure you rotate during your talk: turn your body from one side of the audience to the other. You're a human being; don't act like a robot.
 - ***Look at your audience.*** If it makes you too nervous to look them in the eye, then just focus on the tops of their heads. **DON'T BE A "NAVEL GAZER"** (staring at your navel or feet the whole time).
- **Don't introduce yourself or start your presentation with "Hello."** Your name will be on the schedule which the audience will have. Keynote speakers will be introduced by the

emcee.

- **Leave the audience with something they can “take away.”** What’s the “big idea” at the heart of your project? (This is typically a brief but compelling answer to your main inquiry question.) Some of the best TED talks offer a simple but insightful idea. For example:
 - We should embrace being wrong, because it is part of what makes us human. (Kathryn Schulz, “On Being Wrong”)
 - We can use video games to solve real-world problems. (Jane McGonigal, “Gaming Can Make a Better World”)
 - Parasites are more common than we might think, or Nature is really freaky. (Ed Yong, “Suicidal Wasps, Zombie Roaches, and Other Parasite Tales”)
- The talk/script must be well organized with **a clear beginning, middle, and end.**
 - The **beginning** should “hook” your audience while introducing the problem/topic/question.
 - The **middle** should deliver the main substance of your research. What have you learned? What is the most interesting, important, or meaningful information/ideas your audience needs to know?
 - The **end** should tie everything together and make the information relevant to your audience. (This is the “take away” I mentioned above.)
- The talk must reflect a substantial amount of **academic inquiry**. How does your investigation/project relate to other research in the field?

Tips for success:

- **Start with the end in mind.** Where do you want the talk to end up? Most talks work their way to the main point or “claim”--the “so *what?*” of the whole thing. What is your *so what?* Figure that out first and then structure your talk to get there in seven to ten minutes.
- **Keep the talk “simple.”** Try to have no more than three main points or three parts to your talk. Any more and your audience will have trouble following you.
- **Film yourself practicing and watch it.** You will see and hear things that “bug” you that you would never have noticed otherwise.
- **Put yourself in your audience’s shoes** when writing your script. What would you, as an audience member, need to be “hooked?” What would you need to know first? Second?

Third?

- **Let your passion guide you.** Keep in mind what fascinates you most about this topic. Some of the best talks sound a little like this: *Look what I discovered? Isn't that so cool?? Now let me tell you why it matters.*

GRADING CRITERIA

Even though I am not grading your evening presentation, you must complete it. If you do not, your in-class presentation grade will change to 0.

I will grade your in-class “rehearsal” talk on the following criteria: ([click here](#) for a digital rubric)

- Research
 - **Quantity:** you’ve been investigating your topic since September, so you should have a substantial amount of information to synthesize and present. Use your research--both secondary AND primary to answer your main question.
 - **Quality:** This can mean a lot of different things. You could, for instance, refer to several scholarly articles (not from popular magazines or websites), quote from reputable books, discuss an extensive survey you conducted, incorporate several interviews, and so forth. Basically, you need to show that you tried to find the best, most accurate, and up-to-date information possible.
- Creativity
 - **Ideas:** It isn’t enough to just summarize what other people have said or written about your topic. The point of these talks is to communicate why this stuff matters to you and to your audience. To do that you will need to do something interesting and meaningful with that knowledge you’ve gained. You might, for instance, apply it to a real-world situation that affects your audience, come up with a new way to think about the topic, use your research to solve a problem, etc. Also, complex information should be presented in a way that helps audiences understand and engage with it: use concrete examples, stories, diagrams or charts, etc.
 - **Presentation:** A talk should have substance but it should also present it in an engaging way. Don’t just stand up there and summarize what you’ve learned. Tell a story, ask your audience a question or two, give fun or unexpected analogies or examples, and so forth.
- Organization
 - **Vocal “markers”:** You need to be very explicit about your key points and about transitioning between them. Don’t be afraid to repeat your key points--your

audience will appreciate it. Say things like “What I want to do is...” or “There are three key ideas that I want to show you....”

- **The “point”:** Your talk should lead toward one main point--one thing you want your audience to understand about your topic, one main reason why all of this matters, etc. It should NOT be a haphazard or random list of facts or insights.
 - **Clear and logical structure:** Your talk must have a beginning, middle, and end. The middle should be longest--it's where you discuss the essential ideas from your research.
- **Media**
 - **Slides:** As stated above, your slides should contain very little (if any) text. Images should be purposeful and relevant to what you are saying at the moment.
 - **Video:** If you include video clips, they should be as short as possible (try not to go over 60 seconds for any single clip)
 - **Timing:** Your speech should not go under 7 minutes or over 10. (Memorizing a script and practicing the surest way to stay within that range.)
 - **Delivery:**
 - **Voice:** You should vary the tone and pitch of your voice, as well as the speed at which you talk. For instance, you might slow down when you want to emphasize a serious point, or pause deliberately before and after making an important point. Don't talk too fast or too slowly. Share your passion and curiosity (but don't lay it on too thick).
 - **Pacing/rhythm:** Think of a talk as a roller coaster or mountain range--with dips and rises, ups and downs. A good talk moves back and forth between research and examples, story and analysis, ideas and audience engagement. A well-paced talk spends an equal amount of time on each point and doesn't get bogged down in too many details.
 - **Eye contact:** Look at your audience the whole time. Scan the crowd. If looking people in the eye makes you nervous, look at the tops of their heads instead. DON'T LOOK AT YOUR SLIDES OR NOTES THE WHOLE TIME.
 - **Movement/gestures:** Try not to stand in the same place the whole time. Move across the "stage" a little. Also, don't be afraid to make relevant hand gestures to enhance your listeners' understanding.