

# Presentation and communication skills

## Lecture 4 - Talk foundation

Matej Lorko

[matej.lorko@euba.sk](mailto:matej.lorko@euba.sk)

[www.lorko.sk/lectures](http://www.lorko.sk/lectures)

Office hours (Room 5C.30)

Monday 15:15 – 16:00

Wednesday 12:30 – 13:15

### Literature:

- Gallo, C. (2014). Talk like TED: the 9 public-speaking secrets of the world's top minds. St. Martin's Press.
- Anderson, C. (2016). TED talks: The official TED guide to public speaking. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

# Presentation literacy

- Stepping out onto a public stage and having hundreds of pairs of eyes turned your way is terrifying. 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.
- 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.
- 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.

# Idea building

- Your number-one mission as a speaker is to take something that matters deeply to you and to rebuild it inside the minds of your listeners. We'll call that something an idea. A mental construct that they can hold on to, walk away with, value, and in some sense be changed by.
- Anyone who has an idea worth sharing is capable of giving a powerful talk. The only thing that truly matters in public speaking is not confidence, stage presence, or smooth talking. It's having something worth saying.
- The idea doesn't have to be a scientific breakthrough, a genius invention, or a complex legal theory. It can be a simple how-to. Or a human insight illustrated with the power of a story. Or a beautiful image that has meaning. Or an event you wish might happen in the future. Or perhaps just a reminder of what matters most in life.
- In any case, there's one thing you have that no one else in the world has: Your own first-person experience of life. Yesterday you saw a sequence of things and experienced a sequence of emotions that is, quite literally, unique. You are the only human among 7 billion who had that exact experience. So . . . can you make anything of that?
- Many of the best talks are simply based on a personal story and a simple lesson to be drawn from it. Did you observe anything that surprised you? Is there something in what you saw that might be interesting to other people?

# Idea building

- An idea is anything that can change how people see the world.
- Do you have ideas that deserve a wider audience? It's amazing how bad we are at judging an answer to that question.
- A lot of speakers (often male) appear to love the sound of their own voice and are happy to talk for hours without sharing anything much of value. But there are also many people (often female) who massively underestimate the value of their work, and their learning, and their insights.
- Think back over your work of the last three or four years; what really stands out? What was the last thing you were really excited by? Or angered by? What are the two or three things you've done that you're most proud of? When was the last time you were in conversation with someone who said, "That's really interesting"? If you could wave a magic wand, what is the one idea you'd most love to spread to other people's minds?

# Stop procrastinating

- You can use the opportunity of public speaking as motivation to dive more deeply into some topic. We all suffer, to a greater or lesser degree, from some form of procrastination or laziness.
- The chance to speak in public may be just the kick you need to commit to a serious research project. Anyone with a computer or a smartphone has access to pretty much all the world's information. It's just a matter of digging in and seeing what you can uncover.
- In fact, the same questions you ask as you do your research can help provide the blueprint for your talk. What are the issues that matter most? How are they related? How can they be easily explained? What are the riddles that people don't yet have good answers for? What are the key controversies? You can use your own journey of discovery to suggest your talk's key moments of revelation.
- So, if you think you might have something but aren't sure you really know enough yet, why not use your public-speaking opportunity as an incentive to truly find out?

# Using right language

- OK. You have something meaningful to say, and your goal is to re-create your core idea inside your audience's minds. How do you do that?
- Language works its magic only to the extent that it is shared by speaker and listener. And there's the key clue to how to achieve the miracle of re-creating your idea in someone else's brain. You can only use the tools that your audience has access to.
- If you start only with your language, your concepts, your assumptions, your values, you will fail. So instead, start with theirs. It's only from that common ground that they can begin to build your idea inside their minds.
- Focusing on what you will **give** to your audience is the perfect foundation for preparing your talk.

# Talk styles to avoid

- The sales pitch
  - The key principle is to remember that the speaker's job is to give to the audience, not take from them.
  - You want to build a reputation as a generous person, bringing something wonderful to your audiences, not as a tedious self-promoter.
- The ramble
  - 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.
- The org bore
  - 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, is going to leave your audience snoozing at the starting line.
  - 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.
- The inspiration performance
  - Avoid the ruthless pursuit of every trick in the book to intellectually and emotionally manipulate the audience.
  - 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.

# What's your point?

- The point of a talk is . . . to say something meaningful. But it's amazing how many talks never quite do that. There are lots of spoken sentences, to be sure. But somehow they leave the audience with nothing they can hold on to. Beautiful slides and a charismatic stage presence are all very well, but if there's no real takeaway, all the speaker has done—at best—is to entertain.
- The number-one reason for this tragedy is that the speaker never had a proper plan for the talk as a whole. The talk may have been planned bullet point by bullet point, or even sentence by sentence, but no time was actually spent on its overall arc.
- There's a helpful word used to analyze plays, movies, and novels; it applies to talks too. It is throughline, the connecting theme that ties together each narrative element. Every talk should have one.
- Since your goal is to construct something wondrous inside your listeners' minds, you can think of the throughline as a strong cord or rope, onto which you will attach all the elements that are part of the idea you're building.
- This doesn't mean every talk can only cover one topic, tell a single story, or just proceed in one direction without diversions. Not at all. It just means that all the pieces need to connect. A good exercise is to try to encapsulate your throughline in no more than fifteen words. What is it that you want your audience to have an unambiguous understanding of after you're done?

# Talk as a journey

- Think of a talk as a journey that the speaker and the audience take together, with the speaker as the guide. But if you, the speaker, want the audience to come with you, you probably need to give them a hint of where you're going. And then you need to be sure that each step of the journey helps get you there.
- In this journey metaphor, the throughline traces the path that the journey takes. It ensures that there are no impossible leaps, and that by the end of the talk, the speaker and audience have arrived together at a satisfying destination.
- But how to all do this in 15-20 minutes? You should definitely not condense your talk by including all the things that you think you need to say, and simply cut them all back to make them a lot shorter.
- Throughlines that connect large numbers of concepts don't work. It's a simple equation. Overstuffed equals underexplained.
- To say something interesting you have to take the time to do at least two things:
  - Show why it matters . . . what's the question you're trying to answer, the problem you're trying to solve, the experience you're trying to share?
  - Flesh out each point you make with real examples, stories, facts.

# Effective talk

- To provide an effective talk, you must slash back the range of topics you will cover to a single, connected thread—a throughline that can be properly developed. In a sense, you cover less, but the impact will actually be significantly greater.
- Author Richard Bach said, “Great writing is all about the power of the deleted word.” It’s true of speaking too. The secret of successful talks often lies in what is left out. Less can be more.
- It’s seductive to think about how much you can fit into 18 minutes. The better question is: What can you unpack in a meaningful way in 18 minutes? You will only cover as much ground as you can dive into in sufficient depth to be compelling.
- So a throughline requires you first to identify an idea that can be properly unpacked in the time you have available. You should then build a structure so that every element in your talk is somehow linked to this idea.

# Talk structure

- You can picture the structure of that talk as like a tree. There's a central throughline, rising vertically, with branches attached to it, each of which represents an expansion of the main narrative.
- The most viewed TED speaker at the time of writing this book is Sir Ken Robinson. He told me that most of his talks follow this simple structure:
  - A. Introduction—getting settled, what will be covered
  - B. Context—why this issue matters
  - C. Main Concepts
  - D. Practical Implications
  - E. Conclusion
- “He said, “There’s an old formula for writing essays that says a good essay answers three questions: What? So What? Now What? It’s a bit like that.”
- Of course, the appeal of Sir Ken’s talks goes way beyond their structural simplicity, and neither he nor I would recommend that everyone adopt that same structure. What matters is that you find the structure that most powerfully develops your throughline in the time available, and that it is clear how each talk element ties into it. (for example the rule of three, see previous lecture).

# The checklist

- As you work on developing your throughline, here's a simple checklist:
  - Is this a topic I'm passionate about?
  - Does it inspire curiosity?
  - Will it make a difference to the audience to have this knowledge?
  - Is my talk a gift or an ask?
  - Is the information fresh, or is it already out there?
  - Can I truly explain the topic in the time slot allocated, complete with necessary examples?
  - Do I know enough about this to make a talk worth the audience's time?
  - Do I have the credibility to take on this topic?
  - What are the fifteen words that encapsulate my talk?
  - Would those fifteen words persuade someone they'd be interested in hearing my talk?

# Cool stuff to watch

- Barry Schwartz - The paradox of choice: [https://www.ted.com/talks/barry\\_schwartz\\_the\\_paradox\\_of\\_choice](https://www.ted.com/talks/barry_schwartz_the_paradox_of_choice)
- Monica Lewinsky - The price of shame: [https://www.ted.com/talks/monica\\_lewinsky\\_the\\_price\\_of\\_shame](https://www.ted.com/talks/monica_lewinsky_the_price_of_shame)
- Richard Turere - My invention that made peace with lions: [https://www.ted.com/talks/richard\\_turere\\_my\\_invention\\_that\\_made\\_peace\\_with\\_lions](https://www.ted.com/talks/richard_turere_my_invention_that_made_peace_with_lions)

# Questions?

Matej Lorko

[matej.lorko@euba.sk](mailto:matej.lorko@euba.sk)

[www.lorko.sk/lectures](http://www.lorko.sk/lectures)

Office hours (Room 5C.30)

Monday 15:15 – 16:00

Wednesday 12:30 – 13:15

Literature:

- Gallo, C. (2014). Talk like TED: the 9 public-speaking secrets of the world's top minds. St. Martin's Press.
- Anderson, C. (2016). TED talks: The official TED guide to public speaking.