



# Scribble Preach

*Faith for Thinkers.*

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## 12 Things TEDx Speakers do that Preachers Don't.

Posted on February 26, 2014 by [nick.youthwriter@gmail.com](mailto:nick.youthwriter@gmail.com)

Ever seen a TEDx talk? They're pretty great. [Here's one](#) I happen to enjoy, and have used in a couple of sermons. I've wondered for a long time, "How in the world do each of these talks end up consistently blowing me away?" So I did some research, and found the TEDx talk guidelines for speakers. Some of the advice was basic – but some of it was unexpected. Much of it, I think, is a welcome wake up call to preachers who are communicating in a 21st century postmodern, post-Christian context. Obviously, some of this doesn't fit with a preacher's ethos: but much of it does.

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That said, here are 12 things TEDx speakers do that preachers usually don't:

1. **Present one great idea.** “An idea isn't just a story or a list of facts. A good idea takes evidence or observations and draws a larger conclusion.” Of course TEDx talkers often have multiple points, but they always have direction: they're always moving forward to a set conclusion (and that's all big idea preaching is, for all the flack it gets). They also suggest to the speaker: “Get your idea out as quickly as possible”.
2. **Set a time limit.** “Shorter talks are not lesser talks. It may only take 5 minutes to make your point unforgettably”. Ouch – yes, I often speak too long. Like Pascal in his letter, most of us preach long sermons because we don't have time to prepare short ones – certainly not 20 minutes – but we could all stand to lose a few. Here's how they approach this: “Make a list of all the evidence you want to use: Think about items that your audience already knows about and the things you'll need to convince them of. Order all of the items in your list based on what a person needs to know before they can understand the next point, and from least to most exciting. Now cut out everything you can without losing the integrity of your argument. You will most likely need to cut things out you think are important.”
3. **Collaborate** – On the above suggestion: “Consider making this list with a trusted friend, someone who isn't an expert in your field.” During rehearsal stage, the guide recommends “listening to criticism”. Calvin made it a rule for pastors in his region to collaborate on their texts before preaching. Personally, I wish we didn't see the preparation of a sermon as a lone-ranger event: why not ask the perspectives of people who represent those who will be listening to this thing



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perspectives of people who represent those who will be listening to this thing, believers and non-believers alike?

4. **Put time into visuals.** “Note anything in your outline that is best expressed visually and plan accordingly in your script.” In the section regarding the question, “What goes in my slides?” the guide states: “Images and photos: to help the audience remember a person, place or thing you mention, you might use images or photos...Use as little text as possible – if your audience is reading, they are not listening. Avoid using bullet points. Consider putting different points on different slides.” We might not have time every week to come up with captivating visuals, but check out some websites like [prezi.com](https://prezi.com) – you’d be surprised how quickly you can put together an amazing presentation.
5. **Practice.** “Once you’re settled on your outline, start writing a script. Be concise, but write in a way that feels natural to you. Use present tense and strong, interesting verbs.” After the script is finished, the guide implores: “Rehearse, rehearse rehearse! We can’t stress this enough...If someone says you sound “over-rehearsed” this actually means you sound stilted and unnatural.”
6. **Stay away from notes.** “TED discourages long talks, podiums or readings”. This isn’t for everybody – but it’s certainly worth noting that according to the best speakers in the world, notes are considered to be a thing of the past.
7. **Avoid industry jargon.** Christianese, anyone? “Don’t use too much jargon, or explain new terminology...Spend more time on new information: If your audience needs to be reminded of old or common information, be brief.”
8. **Draw people into caring.** “Start by making your audience care, using a relatable example or an intriguing idea...Draw your audience in with something they care about. If it’s a field they never think about, start off by invoking something they do think about a lot and relate that concept to your idea.” How often do we assume that everyone sitting in the congregation is as interested in our text as we are?

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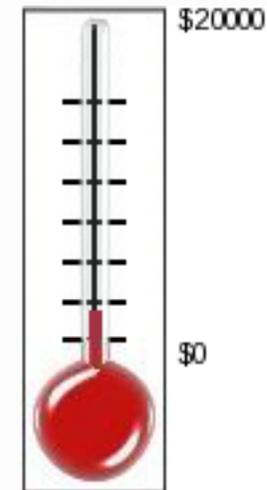
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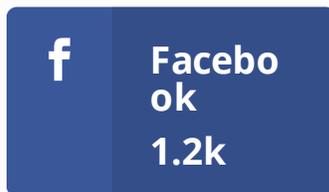
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9. **Snow now it makes a difference.** “Don’t use your conclusion to simply summarize what you’ve already said; tell your audience how your idea might affect their lives if it’s implemented.”
10. **Keep structure clear but invisible.** “Your structure should be invisible to the audience. In other words, don’t talk about how you’re going to talk about your topic – just talk about it!” I thought this was especially interesting – the TEDx guide states that structure should be present, but that it shouldn’t be announced. Presumably, it should be natural and strong enough that everyone listening can understand it without explanation.
11. **Stay planted.** “Practice standing still, planted firmly in one spot on stage.” So, yeah, about this. I have a VERY hard time with this. I should put two little shoe imprints near the pulpit.
12. **Respectfully address arguments.** “Respectfully address any controversies in your claims, including legitimate counter-arguments, reasons you might be wrong, or doubts your audience might have about your idea.” The Puritans spent much of their preaching time answering inner-objections – it’s what Keller calls “preaching to the heart”. In a post-Christian society, we ought to be putting more time into answering arguments, not less.

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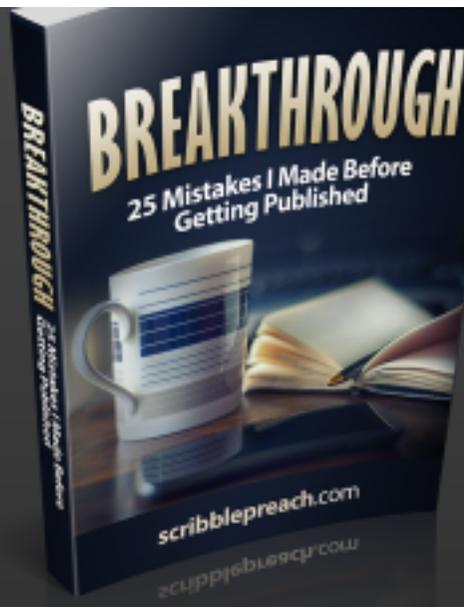
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Link to the TEDx speaker guidelines?

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Here, David:

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THANKS - good article, too.

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**Harlow Wilcox** · a year ago

If you think preachers don't do these things, you don't know the right preachers.

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**Jonny** · a year ago

On the one hand, yes and yes! But on the other hand, TED speakers are special occasions, whereas pastors are presenting your daily home cooked bit of gourmet influence in the home goes a long way to helping us enjoy (and appreciate) the world.

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**Kathleen** → Jonny · a year ago

This is not the stuff of gourmands. These principles can be applied even in a daily classroom setting. In fact, if one were to follow these principles, they would become lighter and more fluid.

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**Anna Joy Walker** · a year ago

Do you have any good examples of preachers that do this well?

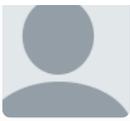
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**David Morse** → Anna Joy Walker · 7 months ago

Tim Keller frequently only preaches 20-25 minutes. Also, Simon M.

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On #4 and using visuals, I find the same thing with my blog posts: it takes has a few portraits of famous people, but you'd be surprised how long it to domain and then format them correctly in the right places in the post.

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