

How to Think about an Idea

What makes TEDx talk different?

Two things set TED and TEDx talks apart from any other kind of presentation. The first is the audience. A TED event audience pays to sit in a dark room and listen to more than a dozen people talk all day. Why?

Because they want their minds expanded.

Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.” The audience is looking for that kind of mind-expanding experience. They want to leave the auditorium feeling as if their ideas about the world have changed – been forever expanded.

How can you help the audience have that kind of experience? That’s the second quality that sets a TEDx event talk apart:

You need to offer the gift of an idea.

What is an idea?

Ideas often start with “What if” or “What happens when?” What if we used apple cells to grow a human ear? What happens when you plant fast-growing bamboo trees in a desert? What if we fundamentally misunderstand compassion?

Ideas refresh our perspective. They’re a little like poetry. You can write “the train sped through the cold countryside” or you can write “the train apple-cored the air”. The metaphor and imagery of a crisp apple being drilled out causes a shift in our perspective. It allows us to look at something in a new way. It’s the same with ideas.

Below are three simple tests to apply to your talk. If just one of them helps frame your concept, then you’re probably on your way to a solid idea.

Does your talk:

1. **Re-frame an existing paradigm?** – Sometimes the world agrees to look at a situation or idea from a similar perspective. What happens when we change that vantage point slightly? What new insights or understanding might we glean from a shift in perspective?
2. **Challenge an existing paradigm?** – Does tradition or mindset cause us to accept, unexamined, certain conditions or ideology? What happens when we refute the status quo? What happens if the existing paradigm were simply removed?
3. **Offer a completely new paradigm?** – Will your talk reveal a never-before-seen concept, technology, or methodology? Is it a true breakthrough?

The best test is to see if you can state your idea in just a sentence or two. Try running your idea by others to gauge their reactions. Do people understand it? Do they want to know more? Would they be willing to buy a ticket to hear about it?

Finally, have patience and give your idea time to develop. Writing is a great way to explore, refine, and distill your thinking. Don’t be afraid to noodle and play. Putting effort into discovering your core concept will help make your talk an idea worth spreading.

TED^x Seattle

x = independently organized TED event

Idea Statement Examples

Cell towers create imperfect and limited access to communication and the internet leaving some areas of the world information impoverished. We've created a new technology that will allow vast amounts of mobile data coverage over the entire planet.

[Nathan Kundtz](#), **Inventor**

What if we fundamentally misunderstand compassion? What if instead of thinking of it as trait like kindness, we reimagined it as a skill we can learn to become more powerful?

[Timothy Dawes](#), **Compassion Skills Trainer**

What if restorative justice principles are a more effective way to rehabilitate and heal juvenile offenders and their communities than a courtroom?

[Judge Wesley Saint Clair](#), **Superior Court Judge**

Research shows that our perception of space and form in the environment impacts our mental states. What happens when architecture is designed with people's emotions in mind?

[Scott Wyatt](#), **Architect**

What happens when a scientist who believes in the power of curiosity, but does not believe in Bigfoot, agrees to host a reality TV show about searching for Bigfoot?

[Ranae Holland](#), **Biologist**