How to Deliver a TED Talk

Date: Tue, 2014-07-01
Issue: The Language Teacher - Issue 38.4; July 2014
Book Writer & Publisher: McGraw-Hill Education
Writer(s): Richard Miles, Nanzan University, Nagoya Chapter
Reviewed by Richard Miles, Nanzan University, Nagoya Chapter

TED talks are a useful way to stimulate critical thinking skills and help generate discussions in the classroom, but there is another very intriguing use for the videos at ted.com; learning about presentation skills. How to Deliver a TED Talk is based on an analysis of the best TED talks and has more than 100 tips for potential presenters. Although this book is specifically aimed at helping people deliver a Ted talk, it also serves as a very useful presentation guide or reference book for upper-intermediate to advanced level EFL or ESL students.

While history has clearly been shaped by important speeches (Abbott, 2012), being able to present effectively is also important for university students, those learning English (Zappa-Hollman, 2007), and educators (Pitenger, Miller & Mott, 2004) alike. Although this book is not specifically written for English language learners, it is still very suitable for high intermediate level Japanese university students. It is comprised of four parts: content, delivery, design, and the journey to the stage and beyond (how to get selected for TED talks—this part may not be applicable for your students). One interesting example is chapter 4 of the content section, detailing how to craft a catchphrase with just three words. The phrase “yes we can” is the most obvious example given, but others are provided as well, such as “start with why.” It then goes further, showing how good speakers make these phrases action centric and rhythmic, and how they often repeat the catchphrase at least three times during the presentation. Chapter 10 of the delivery part is also interesting as it deals with how to add humor to your presentation. Suggestions include using elements of surprise, an emotional release, or self-deprecation. He adds that effective speakers usually pause and stay in character after delivering the punch line, while warning against using any form of humor based on a sense of superiority. What is particularly good is that with each presentation tip, specific examples from TED talks and other famous speeches are given. In addition, Internet support is provided through links to speeches so you can view for yourself or show your students.

This book can be used as a reference book for oral presentation skills or it can be utilized in the classroom. One way to use it is by assigning certain relevant chapters to be read for homework. Students can focus on specific aspects of presenting, and then watch the related talks either at home or in the classroom. They can also refer back to the book at a later date to further examine certain key features of presentations.

The real strength of this book lies in the numerous authentic examples of TED talks that it provides for each tip. One such example is a list of different ways to end a presentation (p. 105), based on ten popular TED speakers. Chapter 3 focuses on how TED speakers use personal anecdotes in their presentation, and how this can be manipulated to achieve different outcomes. There are also many specific examples of what NOT to do, as in start with a clichéd opening (p. 93). By providing links to actual TED talks, the book brings a sense of realism to each point and shows readers how actual speakers deliver presentations effectively. It was also refreshing to use a presentation book which actively discourages the overuse of visuals and stresses the relative importance of language, delivery, and content instead. Developing a presence and the ability to communicate and interact with the audience without relying on visuals should form the basis of learning how to conduct a presentation.

There are a few caveats that need mentioning though. Firstly, this book is not written with a Japanese audience in mind. It is also not designed for classroom use specifically, so teachers need to adapt the contents accordingly. The book also does not come with any extra features or materials. While links to all the mentioned TED talks are listed in the back, teachers and students will need online access to view them.

Overall though, I have no hesitation in recommending this book. I found it unique and useful, both in terms of its focus, and in the detail of its content. It provides a sense of realism and depth of detail that most ESL or EFL textbooks and presentation how to textbooks are lacking.

References
This will help incorporate TED Talks into the class with a focus this time on professional and speaking personas. I also liked Donovan’s section in Chapter 1’s “Organizing Your Talk” on story, so I think another presentation my students can focus on in the reboot of the class is developing a compelling narrative that inspires and connects with the audience’s deepest rooted needs and desires. What was your favorite part of Donovan’s How To Deliver A TED Talk? Can you make any additional connections between Donovan’s book and Slim’s Body of Work? Advertisements.

Excerpted from How to Deliver a TED Talk: Secrets of the World’s Most Inspiring Presentations. Copyright 2014 by Jeremey Donovan. All rights reserved. Tip 1: Everybody has an idea worth spreading. After watching a TED Talk, most people feel at least two emotions. The first comes from the angel on your right shoulder whispering softly, “You can do anything. You can be anything.” The other three most viewed TED Talks cast a wider net by catalyzing interpersonal and societal change. They called us to action or altered our perspective on public health, public education, and diversity. The speakers who gave these talks were not the first to explore those subjects, and they will not be the last. Review several TED Talk videos to develop an understanding of the format. You’re not looking to copy the style of a particular speaker, but to get an overview of possible styles to find what feels right to you. Look at several TED Talk videos in areas similar to what you plan to talk about, as well as videos in areas that interest you that may be outside what you plan to talk about. 7. Determine the primary purpose of your TED talk. These let the event organizers provide feedback on how your talk is structured, how well you’ve paced it, and how clearly you deliver it. These online rehearsals usually are scheduled a month in advance of the event. Dress rehearsals on stage at the event site.