

Assignments to use your voice: Create a TED-style climate talk

Assignment

Articulate an “idea worth spreading” about a relevant climate topic. Write a script and then bring it to life in a recorded video. (Suggested length: 800-1200 words, ~7-10 minutes)

Learning objective:

Develop knowledge of and skill in effective public communication through writing and delivering a TED-style talk — bringing your voice to life.

Tips for educators

- It can be helpful to introduce students to the form of TED-style talks over time. We’ve prepared a list of climate-focused talks that pair well with different sections of *All We Can Save* at the end of these materials.
- We suggest using two class sessions to support this assignment:
 - Class session 1: (A) help students understand the form of TED-style talks and (B) brainstorm talk topics.
 - Class session 2: workshop students’ talk topics.
- If you’re teaching the entirety of *All We Can Save*, this assignment works well following the “Rise” section or as a final.
- It also works well to have students submit their script on one date and their video a week later, to break up the component parts of the assignment.
- You may want to encourage students to apply to a local TEDx or similar event to share their talk publicly.

Gratitude and credit

This assignment is inspired and informed by the work of TED curators and speakers, which you’ll learn more about in these materials.

Understanding the form of TED-style talks

Materials to introduce the form generally

* to watch before class

TED's secret to great public speaking by Chris Anderson

Classroom content

- **Discuss:** What did you learn from Anderson?
- **Review:** Key tips for TED-style talks
- **Review:** Compelling ways to open a talk
- **Review:** Thinking through a throughline
- **Review:** Compelling ways to close a talk

Key tips for TED-style talks

- Limit your talk to just **one major idea** – a throughline for the whole talk.
- Give your listeners a **reason to care** – stir curiosity, e.g., with a provocative question.
- Build your idea **piece by piece** – with concepts/language/metaphors your audience already understands.
- Make your idea **worth sharing** – a generous idea, with wide benefit.

Compelling ways to open a talk

- **Question** to create curiosity...
Example: *Why do we think that stories by men are deemed to be of universal importance, and stories by women are thought to be merely about women?* – Jude Kelly

- **Quote** to draw listeners in...

Example: *Hello, everyone. Sawubona. In South Africa, where I come from, “sawubona” is the Zulu word for “hello.” There’s a beautiful and powerful intention behind the word because “sawubona” literally translated means, “I see you, and by seeing you, I bring you into being.”* — [Susan David](#)

- **Statistic** or **example** to pique interest...

Example: *Canada’s great northern forests, they’re the place of my heart. They hold 25 percent of the Earth’s wetlands. And they’re the nesting and breeding ground of the majority of North America’s songbirds. They’re the traditional territories of hundreds of Indigenous nations. And my climate journey started here as a forest activist a long time ago.* — [Tzeporah Berman](#)

- **Personal story** to create empathy...

Example: *When I was about eight years old, I first heard about something called climate change or global warming.... I remember thinking that it was very strange that humans, who are an animal species among others, could be capable of changing the Earth’s climate. Because if we were, and if it was really happening, we wouldn’t be talking about anything else....* — [Greta Thunberg](#)

- **Statement** that is intriguing/ startling...

Example: *Big boys don’t cry. Suck it up. Shut up and rub some dirt on it. Stop crying before I give you something to cry about. These are just a few of the phrases that contribute to a disease in our society, and more specifically, in our men. It’s a disease that has come to be known as “toxic masculinity.” It’s one I suffered a chronic case of, so much so that I spent 24 years of a life sentence in prison for kidnapping, robbery, and attempted murder.* — [Eldra Jackson](#)

- **Teaser** for what you’re going to share...

Example: *There are two powerful phenomena unfolding on earth: the rise of global warming and the rise of women and girls. The link between them is often overlooked, but gender equity is a key answer to our planetary challenge. Let me explain.* — [Katharine Wilkinson](#)

Thinking through a throughline

sub idea → *sub idea* → *sub idea* → *sub idea*

- What are the 3-5 sub ideas?
- For each idea: How does it connect to your objective? What evidence will you use?

Compelling ways to close a talk

- **Big picture** — pull back and show broader context/possibilities; paint an inspiring vision of what could be
Example: *Mental health needs to be an integral part of any climate change survival strategy, requiring funding, and ethics of equity and care, and widespread awareness. Because even if you're the most emotionally avoidant person on the planet, there's no rug in the world that's big enough to sweep this up under.* — [Britt Wray](#)
- **Active** — invite audience to take a specific action; make a personal commitment to meaningful action
Example: *I'm calling on all artists, women and men, to imagine a gender-equal world. Let's paint it. Let's draw it. Let's write about it. Let's film it. And if we could imagine it, then we would have the energy and the stamina to work towards it.* — [Jude Kelly](#)
- **Satisfying** — loop back to something from your opening; tidily summarize your case
Example: *But when our moment comes to face our fragility, in that ultimate time, it will ask us, "Are you agile?" "Are you agile?" Let the moment be an unreserved "yes." A "yes' born of a lifelong correspondence with your own heart. And in seeing yourself. Because in seeing yourself, you are also able to see others, too: the only sustainable way forward in a fragile, beautiful world. Sawubona.* — [Susan David](#)

Brainstorming talk topics

Reflection questions

* *For free writing and/or class discussion*

- Is there a core theme in *All We Can Save* that you want to expand on / be in conversation with?
- Is there a “why” question about climate that you want to answer?
- Is there a call to action on climate that you want to make?
- Whose work can support your idea?
- Who will your audience be? How will you enable your audience to have “ears to hear” / call them in?
- Boil it down: Why does your idea matter?

→ **Next steps: In 15-20 words, craft a summary of the core idea your talk will explore – to be workshopped in class.**

Workshopping talk topics

Classroom exercise

* *As a whole class and/or in small groups*

- One by one, share the 15-20 word summary of a talk topic. Ideally, put it on a screen or board so everyone can see it.
- Consider the following questions:
 - Is the topic clearly connected to the climate crisis?
 - Is there a single big idea here?
 - Does it spark curiosity?
 - Could this statement be clarified, simplified, or made more declarative? (Fewer words can be helpful!)
- Arrive at a refined topic summary, which will guide the script writing process.

→ **Next steps: Craft and submit your script, using your topic summary as a “north star.” Then, record and submit your video.**

Tips for recording your talk

- You can use a phone or computer to record. No fancy equipment needed.
- Frame yourself horizontally with your face centered. Be sure there’s sufficient light.
- Film in a quiet space. You may want to use headphones with a microphone for better sound quality.
- It’s fine to use notes. You don’t have to memorize your talk.

- There's no need to edit your video. Simply hit record, give your talk, and end the recording.

TED Talks that pair well with sections of *All We Can Save*

“Begin”

The disarming case to act right now on climate change by Greta Thunberg

“Root”

If you adults won't save the world, we will by Xiye Bastida
The forest is our teacher. It's time to respect it by Nemonte Nenquimo

“Advocate”

The bad math of the fossil fuel industry by Tzeporah Berman
It's impossible to have healthy people on a sick planet by Shweta Narayan

“Reframe”

The most important thing you can do to fight climate change: talk about it by Katharine Hayhoe
How to get everyone to care about a green economy by Angela Francis

“Reshape”

A healthy economy should be designed to thrive, not grow by Kate Raworth
The link between climate change, health and poverty by Cheryl Holder

“Persist”

The Standing Rock resistance and our fight for Indigenous rights by Tara Houska
Why you should be a climate activist by Luisa Neubauer

“Feel”

How climate change affects your mental health by Britt Wray
What to do when climate change feels unstoppable by Clover Hogan

“Nourish”

Why lakes and rivers should have the same rights as humans by Kelsey Leonard
Indigenous knowledge meets science to take on climate change by Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim

“Rise”

Climate change will displace millions. Here’s how we prepare by Colette Pichon Battle
Why community is our best chance for survival — a lesson post-Hurricane Maria by Christine Nieves Rodriguez

“Onward”

3 questions to build resilience — and change the world by Sister True Dedication

Additional talks to help students understand the form

Why women should tell the stories of humanity by Jude Kelly

The gift and power of emotional courage by Susan David

How I unlearned dangerous lessons about masculinity by Eldra Jackson