

# TED<sup>x</sup> Content Guidelines

TED and TEDx showcase “ideas worth spreading.” Curation is at the heart of everything we do--and sometimes that means determining that an idea won’t hit the mark.

To help you have a sense of whether an idea is worth spreading or not, we put together these guidelines to help you plan your TEDx event. Our intention is not to be overly directive, but to provide you with a practical set of standards that can ensure that every audience member can trust the ideas they’re hearing. In this way, we can all preserve the integrity and value of the TED and TEDx brands throughout the world.

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## **Guideline 1: No selling from the stage**

If it's essential to a talk that the speaker mention what they do and describe the businesses that they're in, they should. But speakers may never use the TED or TEDx stage to pitch their products or services, plug their books, or ask for funding. It's a fine line between shameless self-promotion and wholesome self-reporting so, as a rule of thumb, if it feels like an advertisement, it probably is.

## **Guideline 2: No political agendas**

Politics and policy are key parts of the global conversation. But the TED and TEDx stages are not the place for partisan politics, nor for extremist or inflammatory positions. Speakers should not advocate for parties, party platforms and political leaders in their talks -- nor should they insult or belittle political adversaries. Advise speakers to focus on discussing concrete problems and solutions.

## **Guideline 3: No religious proselytizing (including new age beliefs)**

Don't book speakers who attempt to prove or persuade of the correctness of a single religion, deity or belief system, whether through rhetoric or "scientific proof." Be wary of speakers promoting new age beliefs, including concepts such as quantum consciousness, Gaia theory, archaeoastronomy, and drug-induced spiritual epiphanies. Speakers can be honest about their beliefs, but should not use the stage to promote them.

## Guideline 4: Only good science

Science is a big part of the TED universe, and it's important that TEDx organizers sustain our reputation as a credible forum for sharing ideas that matter. It's not always easy to distinguish between real science and pseudoscience, and purveyors of false wisdom typically share their theories with as much sincerity and earnestness as legitimate researchers. Indeed, the more willing a speaker is to abandon scientific underpinning, the easier it is for them to make attention-grabbing claims. So beware being seduced by "wow." We want talks to be interesting. But before that, they must be credible. Here are some things to look for -- and to avoid.

### Claims made using scientific language should:

- Be testable experimentally.
- Have been published in a peer-reviewed journal (beware... there are some dodgy journals out there that seem credible, but aren't. For further reading, [here's an article on the topic.](#))
- Be based on theories that are also considered credible by experts in the field.
- Be backed up by experiments that have generated enough data to convince other experts of its legitimacy.
- Have proponents who are secure enough to acknowledge areas of doubt and need for further investigation.
- Not fly in the face of the broad existing body of scientific knowledge.
- Be presented by a speaker who works for a university and/or has a PhD or other bona fide high level scientific qualification.
- Show clear respect for the scientific method and scientific thinking generally.

### Claims made using scientific language should not:

- Be so obscure or mysterious as to be untestable
- Be considered ridiculous by credible scientists in the field
- Be based on experiments that can not be reproduced by others.
- Be based on data that do not convincingly corroborate the experimenter's theoretical claims.
- Come from overconfident fringe experts.
- Use over-simplified interpretations of legitimate studies

- Include imprecise new age vocabulary. (Phrases like “quantum consciousness”, personal “energy fields”, “crystal healing”, and the like, should be considered major red flags.) .
- Abandon evidence-based thinking or be dismissive of the scientific method.

## **Research Tips and Tricks**

We understand that it is sometimes still difficult to know whether an idea is worth spreading or not. You’re not expected to become an expert on all fields of intellectual thought overnight! Nonetheless, you need to be able to understand at least the big issues in every field you present onstage. Here are some tips on how to start researching a topic so you can figure out whether a speaker is legit or not. Please note, *every* speaker should be vetted!

- Consult university websites, reputable science and health blogs, and databases of papers published in respected journals to check up on a potential speaker and verify his/her credentials. If you have access to a local university library, a research librarian can help you source relevant journal articles.
- Ask your local university’s PR office to connect you to a professor in a relevant field. Make sure it is someone unconnected with the potential speaker and ask him/her a few questions about the topic and speaker. Ask a friendly journalist (or PR person if you’re working with one) to fact-check the speaker’s work to journalistic standards.
- If possible, have one team member dedicated to research and fact-checking.
- Know that you can always email the TEDx team at [tedx@ted.com](mailto:tedx@ted.com) and we can work with you to research the credibility of a speaker’s topic before your TEDx event.
- And if you produce a talk that you suspect doesn’t meet our guidelines, let us know about that too. We will help review the material and determine whether or not it should be uploaded to our YouTube channel.

## **Topics to avoid**

We’ve found that some topics are particularly problematic. We recommend approaching these with the utmost skepticism or avoiding them altogether:

- “Healing,” including reiki, energy fields, alternative health and placebos, crystals, pyramid power.
- “Free energy” and perpetual motion machines, alchemy, time travel.
- “The neuroscience of [fill in the blank].” We’re not saying all such talks will be non-legitimate, but for some reason this field attracts a lot of goofballs right now.

- The misuse of language about quantum physics. Quantum physics is certainly mysterious. Many other things are mysterious too. Some speakers can't resist using arguing that therefore somehow quantum physics has proven the truth of their particular mystery. It's bad logic, and a big red flag.

### **One of my speakers broke these rules. Now what?**

If you suspect that a speaker at your event veered outside these guidelines, let us know about it. We will review the content together and make a decision about how to proceed. We may place an overlay on the video in YouTube alerting viewers that the content is outside TED's standards. Alternatively, if the talk raises issues worthy of a broader debate we may move the talk off of YouTube and onto our own site, where we can provide more context and offer a broad array of conversation tools. And, in extreme cases, we reserve the right to remove the video altogether.

### **A work in progress**

To repeat: it is inherently hard to give hard and fast rules in this area. We're learning as we go. Like science itself, these guidelines will likely change over time as we run into new challenges and come across new issues. Let us know what works for you – and if you have other principles you think we should include in our list that might help future TEDx organizers.