

# TEDx Content Guidelines

TED offers speakers a platform to provide information directly to millions of people around the world. It's a responsibility we take seriously. First and foremost, that information has to be accurate at the time of publication. Learn more about [TED's Content Guidelines](#).

As stewards of ideas worth spreading, TEDx organizers share in this responsibility of maintaining TED's reputation as a forum for sharing ideas that matter and upholding our audience's trust. Curation is at the heart of everything we do--and sometimes that means determining that an idea is not fit for the TEDx stage.

We put together these content guidelines and a [fact-checking guide](#) to help you plan your TEDx event. Our intention is not to be directive, but to provide the community with a practical set of standards and a [publishing policy](#) that ensure every audience member can trust the ideas they're hearing. It's inherently difficult to give hard and fast rules in this area. We're learning as we go so these guidelines will likely change over time as we run into new challenges. In this way, we can all preserve the integrity and value of the TED and TEDx stages throughout the world.

[Guideline 1: No commercial agendas](#)

[Guideline 2: No political agendas or inflammatory rhetoric](#)

[Guideline 3: No religious agendas](#)

[Guideline 4: No bad science](#)

## Guideline 1: No commercial agendas

If it's essential to a talk that the speaker mentions 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. While entrepreneurs and business leaders can speak at TEDx events, their talk should be driven by an idea and not sell from the stage. A TEDx event is not a platform for professional or circuit speakers, such as motivational speakers and professional life coaches--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 or inflammatory rhetoric

Politics, social issues, and policy are key parts of the global conversation. However, TEDx stages are not the place for partisan politics, nor for extremist or inflammatory positions. Speakers must not attack or advocate for parties, party platforms, and political leaders in their talk. They must not advocate for violence or oppression. Advise speakers to focus on discussing concrete problems and solutions.

Special care should also be taken with politically divisive subjects (eg. abortion, gun control) so as to avoid polarizing "us vs. them" language. Instead, speakers should focus on consensus-building and nuanced discussion. Consideration should also be given to any content that may carry negative connotations for other parts of our global audience.

## Guideline 3: No religious agendas

Don't book speakers who attempt to prove or persuade the correctness of a single religion, deity or other belief system (such as atheism or agnosticism), 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 or to denigrate those who don't share them.

## Guideline 4: No bad science

TED offers scientists and other experts a platform to provide scientific information directly to millions of people around the world. Learn more about [TED's Science Standards](#).

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 science and pseudoscience. And the more willing a speaker is to abandon scientific underpinning, the easier it is for them to make attention-grabbing claims. This is especially true for talks that call on science for support but do not come directly from the scientists themselves.

Claims made using scientific language should:

- Be testable experimentally.
- Have been published in a peer-reviewed, respected journal.
- 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 has the right scientific qualifications.
- 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 advocates.
- Use over-simplified interpretations of legitimate studies.
- Include imprecise 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.

# TEDx Publishing Policy

At TED our goal is to spread ideas and our shared mission with TEDx organizers is to curate ideas worth spreading. Together we can create high quality content for a positive impact on TEDx's global community. Although TEDx organizers curate talks independently for their live events, those talks become videos that constitute a large, growing digital archive online.

As curators and brand stewards, TEDx organizers are responsible for ensuring that every talk at their event complies with the terms of the TEDx license as described in the TEDx [TEDx Content Guidelines](#) and [TEDx Copyright Guidelines](#). Your level of compliance with these terms and cooperation with the TED team may influence the status of your license or your eligibility for future licenses.

If you suspect a speaker at your event overstepped a guideline, please reach out to [tedx@ted.com](mailto:tedx@ted.com) directly to let us know about it. Please do not submit the talk for review. We will review the content together and make a decision about how to proceed. If you think only a small part of the talk is non-compliant, we will advise you on whether or not it is possible to edit it in post-production before submitting to the uploader. When applying for a license renewal, please mention it in your application as an area of improvement for your next event.

TED reserves the right to remove, reject, annotate or limit the distribution of any TEDx talk.

While we put our best effort into reviewing all talks before publishing, the volume of submissions and diversity of language means we are unable to watch every single talk before publication. However, the team may reach out to you for the references and supporting documentation you or your speaker collected during the fact-check or clearing use of copyrighted material. If you are unable to provide adequate documentation to support the contents of the talk, and depending on the severity of the violation of TEDx guidelines, the talk may get published with a note from TED's editors, removed from search results and, in extreme cases, TED may remove or not publish the video altogether. In some instances TED may ask you to edit and re-submit for review.

If a talk **was credible** at publication, but new research has proven otherwise, TED will most likely add a note from the editor and limit its availability in search results. Only in select cases will the talk be removed from the TEDx YouTube channel.

If a **TEDx speaker** no longer wants their talk available online for any reason, please reach out to [tedx@ted.com](mailto:tedx@ted.com) directly to let us know about it and we will take the necessary steps to remove the talk from the TEDx YouTube channel. We take the privacy of TEDx speakers very seriously so even though all speakers have signed a speaker release agreeing to TED publishing their talk on the TEDx YouTube channel, TED understands that a speaker may prefer it not to be publicly accessible.

If a talk **contains copyrighted material** without the necessary license, the talk may be removed or not published altogether. In some instances, TED may ask you to edit and re-submit for review.

# TEDx Fact-Checking Guide

What is fact-checking? And, why does it matter?

Fact-checking means going through a script's empirical claims--basically, anything that can be verified in the real world--and making sure that they are as accurate as possible. There are real consequences to the talks you produce, since people will often change their behavior based on a talk that they watch. So, you want to be sure you are not accidentally sharing misinformation or disinformation on your TEDx stage. It protects the reputations of you, the speaker, the event, and TED at-large.

Getting started: What do you check?

Check any detail or claim that relies on external information. This can take the shape of something like a quote, anything with a number (dates, statistics, estimates, etc.), references to research, the findings of a study or a survey, and pretty much all general claims. Basically, if it can be checked, it should be checked.

The exception to this is a statement that falls within the realm of a speaker's own opinion (e.g. "I think this will happen") since this is their own personal speculation. However, a speaker's personal opinion doesn't preclude it from needing to be fact-checked. Maintain caution when the speaker uses their own opinion since the evidence supporting the assertion or argument must still be evaluated.

If there is a portion of a speaker's talk that refers to a personal experience or anecdote, you may want to ask for sourcing on that as well, to ensure accuracy. Some of the things that can be helpful to verify accuracy of anecdotes include:

- Full names, ages, and geographic locations of other individuals referred to in the talk (even if their full names do not appear in your talk)
- Contact info for individuals who can attest to that portion of the talk
- Documentation from that period of time such as emails, medical records or other records

A fact-checklist: How do you know if there are problems with a speaker's talk?

As a quick guide, here are some questions that will help you figure out if there are issues with a speaker's talk. If you answer **YES** to any of these questions, there's a good chance that the talk contains questionable and/or flaggable content.

- Are there generalizations (e.g. "most"), absolutes (e.g. "all"), and vague references (e.g. "research shows...")? These wordings can suggest that everyone agrees when they don't, and they can have a big impact on how people see a topic. Generalizations, absolutes, and vague references can be easily fixed with words like "many" or phrases like "scientists at Columbia found XYZ," either of which can greatly improve a talk's accuracy.
- Does the talk highlight a lot of numbers from multiple sources? Every reference varies in how it collects and analyzes data, so drawing comparisons between references can be challenging, even for experienced researchers.
- Is the talk promising a revolutionary solution or business product for a tangible problem which exists in society? It can be easy to accidentally overextend the implications of conclusions of your results to-date, especially if those results aren't yet public. Talks which feature "magical" solutions or products that claim to solve, rather than simply fight against, existing problems are a red flag. This

issue may require small phrasing changes to help protect the speaker and the audience/viewers from miscommunication of the idea.

- Is the speaker suggesting new ways to treat health problems? Science- and health-related scripts should be held to high scrutiny. If any talk highlights research with health implications, you need to make sure that the research is up-to-date, peer-reviewed, and consistent with the rigorous guidelines outlined by the [scientific method](#).
- Is a speaker taking credit for all of the work behind an idea (without acknowledging collaborators)? Published research or projects often rely on the contributions of others, and so the speaker should make an effort to acknowledge other collaborators or partners wherever possible.
- Did the speaker forget to acknowledge any counter-arguments to or limitations of the idea? A strong talk idea takes into account at least some of its own weaknesses. If counter-arguments or limitations aren't mentioned, the speaker may not be providing an honest representation of the idea. Remember, the talk is the best opportunity to address questions about the idea. And, if the speaker doesn't address the questions, others may do it in the comment section for them.
- Is it unclear what stage the research is in? A talk can highlight the potential of research or work underway. However, it shouldn't imply or make unclear that the work is already in its final stage if it's still early in testing. The speaker should responsibly distinguish between where exactly the idea is and where they hope it will go.

### Sources to avoid: What makes a reference [unreliable](#)?

There are A LOT of sources and websites available for you and speakers to review, but not all sources are created equally. To help with finding the right ones for a talk, here are some common warning signs that you can watch out for:

- Is the author unknown? Wikipedia can be helpful, but mainly as a portal to help you track down the original source of the information, not as a primary source in and of itself. Tertiary sources like encyclopedias can give background on a topic or point you towards other sources, but these sources shouldn't be the references you cite because you cannot know who wrote the entry. This also applies to articles published in news outlets, unless they attribute where they got their information and you're able to follow it to the source and verify its accuracy; or institutions that are not transparent about their funding (for example, a marketing wing of a for-profit company that releases research about the benefits of the product they produce).
- Do you know where the data really comes from? It's always good to know where your source got its information. One common problem is rooted in "data holes": information cited across multiple sources with no clear indication as to where it originated from. To help avoid falling into this hole, it's good for you to be skeptical of statistics that seem to be used everywhere, but never lead back to the place that generated them. A reputable source will share the methodology of how it arrived at the info, and could share things such as how many people were surveyed, where they were located, the time period over which the information was gathered, and whether there were any factors that could undermine the findings.
- Is there an identifiable bias? Beware of agendas from your sources and the institutions with which they are associated. A general rule of thumb to follow is that if it feels like a source is trying to sell you something, it probably is. Try to look for citations that acknowledge corrections and conflicts-of-interest, that make a reasonable effort to highlight other perspectives, and that state the sources behind their content's funding.

## Stick to the original source: What makes a citation reliable?

Strong sources can be pretty difficult to find. Indeed, there are a lot of variables that you need to consider when evaluating claims and research, far more than we have room to cover here. However, a good sample of the most important variable to consider in what makes a citation reliable include the following:

- Is the source primary or secondary? The best references are typically primary, meaning they are the original source that produced the information the speaker is talking about (e.g. first-hand accounts of events or original research). However, some secondary sources, such as an explainer article by an expert in the field, can also be reliable.
- How strong is the author's credibility? Does the source come from a credible author or institution? Are they well-regarded by independent, recognized figures from that source's field? Strong authors don't need to be scholars or have a PhD -- they just need to have a meaningful relationship to what they are talking about.
- How old is the source? Age isn't always a bad thing, but make sure references are actually up-to-date, especially when it comes to statistics and published research. And, the age of the research should make sense in the context of the talk. For example, it doesn't make sense for a speaker to talk about a so-called new technology, but then only have provided older sources.

## Topics to avoid: Why is it so difficult to fact-check certain ideas?

We've found that some topics seem to be particularly problematic because they are difficult or impossible to substantiate. We recommend approaching these with skepticism and more often than not, avoiding them altogether:

- *"Healing,"* including naturopathy, alternative medicine, self-healing, energy fields, and energy balance. This can consist of condoning alternative methods that are unproven, disproven, and/or potentially dangerous, or exaggerating their results.
- *Paranormal,* including mediumship, spiritual channeling, extrasensory perception, second sight, ghosts and spirits, and out-of-body experiences. No observable phenomena fall outside the realm of scientific scrutiny and asserting that they do is an abandonment of evidence-based thinking.
- *Quantum physics,* including, but not limited to, personal theories on "energy," "vibrations," "waves," "consciousness," etc. can sometimes be used without providing relevant context or explanations and instead rely on vagueness and mystery to establish a guise of scientific credibility.
- *Denial of anthropogenic climate change:* Denying the human causes of climate change (global warming) or misrepresenting valid climate models and predictions is irresponsible and wrongfully undermines the robust existing body of data and knowledge on the subject.

## Topics to approach with caution: How do you share ideas about health and medicine responsibly?

Our primary goal is to provide responsible information to the general public. We rely on TEDx organizers to prevent the distribution of any misleading information that can harm people suffering from ill health or disease. Talks should empower people by sharing facts and accurate information, and never be framed as health or medical advice. Whether the speaker is a qualified health professional or not, using an anecdote

from their personal or professional experiences is not a satisfactory data point in and of itself. While the following topics are not off-limits, be cautious and ask for peer-reviewed and published research papers that would support their claims. We discourage speakers from sharing prescriptions guaranteeing universal disease cures or preventions, especially in the following fields:

- *Nutrition*: Promoting or prescribing a single diet without consulting a medical professional can be dangerous— especially when framed around chronic disease. Nutrition science is notoriously complex and often misconstrued into a “one-size-fits-all” approach. It’s crucial that speakers be honest about the limitations of nutrition science research and avoid oversimplification of this topic.
- *Cancer treatments*: Claims about cancer treatment and prevention must be significantly supported by credible research. Be skeptical of speakers who make claims with too much certainty for the current state of research, as well as speakers who describe alternative treatments as curative or preventative methods.
- *Experimental therapies*: Look out for claims that oversell the current capabilities of new and experimental therapies, especially in the context of independent clinics. Prescriptive advice presents a safety issue for viewers when the list of potential side effects is misrepresented or intentionally left out. The problem comes when speakers discuss combining established areas of research (eg. stem cells, hormone replacement) with new, experimental techniques that are not so well-established, giving the audience the potential misunderstanding that the experimental research is as established as the other research.
- *Epigenetics*: It is important to accurately represent the nuance and limitations of this field of research and not rely on epigenetics to support unfounded claims. Do not oversimplify the complex interaction between genetic and environmental factors on gene expression, exaggerate the current understanding of epigenetics, or oversell the health effects of individual lifestyle choices, especially in the context of chronic illnesses and incurable diseases.
- *Mental health and suicide*: Talks should not oversimplify or undermine the complexity and severity of mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Talks should not share prescriptive advice and non-evidence-based methods on how to “cure” or treat mental illness. Personal mental health experiences should never be used as anecdotal evidence to support prescriptive claims. These topics are of special concern when talks make claims about overcoming mental illness through lifestyle choices that target and stigmatize youth.

## Tips for working with speakers

Working with speakers to improve the quality of their talks is crucial, but can certainly be a delicate situation. Here are some tips to help you and your speaker uphold the content guidelines:

**Focus on the HOW, not the WOW.** We want talks to be interesting, but they must be credible first and foremost. Determining credibility and steering clear of bad information can be difficult to achieve, especially when the speaker and their ideas are compelling. We strongly encourage TEDx organizers to curate speakers who can deliver talks that are more focused on HOW they’ve formulated their idea, rather than trying to WOW an audience with unfounded claims.

**Fact-checking is a non-negotiable.** From the beginning, make it clear that for the speaker to be a part of your event, they must be willing to modify their talk script, if necessary, to meet your fact-checking standards.

**Ask speakers to send you their sources.** Since speakers write their own talks, they should be able to provide you with valid sources to verify every claim. (If they don’t/won’t/can’t share sources with you, there is a good chance that the talk is not evidence-based.) Specifically, examples of valid sources include:

- Direct links to research literature



- Full texts of published articles in periodicals
- PDFs/scans of relevant pages in any books you cite.

**Resistance to fact-checking can signal problems later down the road.** Be thoughtful in your selection of speakers. In addition to the many ways to go about speaker selection, evaluate speakers, at least in part, on their ability to collaborate and handle constructive criticism.

**Never assume a speaker who is an expert (or a famous person) doesn't need to be fact-checked.** Experts are error-prone humans too! Even if a speaker tells you that they've already fact-checked their talk, it is your responsibility to fact-check every single empirical claim.

**After fact-checking the speaker's script, be specific in providing feedback.** For claims that could not be corroborated by sufficient or legitimate evidence, explain what you need from them for the claim to be up to muster. Do they need to rephrase a claim or remove a generalization? Do they need to provide a different source? Tell the speaker exactly what needs to be done and keep the process moving along.