The Art of the 10-Minute Talk

How to say something that matters — fast

Why 10 Minutes Is the Hardest Format

- **Long enough** to feel like you should go deep
- **Short enough** that every sentence counts
- **The audience decides in 90 seconds** if you're worth their attention

> "If you can't explain it in 10 minutes, you don't understand it well enough."

Principle 1: One Idea, Not Ten

- A 10-minute talk is **one idea** told well
- Not a compressed version of a longer talk
- Pick the single thing you want them to remember tomorrow

Anti-pattern Cramming a 45-minute talk into 10 minutes

Principle 2: The 3-Act Structure

2 min

Setup — Hook + Context

6 min

Core — Your One Idea

2 min

Close — Takeaway + CTA

Principle 3: Open With a Hook

- **A question** the audience wants answered
- **A story** that makes the problem visceral
- **A number** that reframes their assumptions

Never "Hi, I'm [name], and today I'll be talking about..."

Principle 4: Slides Are Scenery, Not Script

- Slides support the speaker — they don't replace them
- **One concept per slide** — if you need two ideas, use two slides
- The audience should glance at the slide and look back at you

5x5 Rule ~5 lines, ~5 words per line

Principle 5: Cut Ruthlessly

Keep

- The one idea
- Supporting evidence (2-3 points)
- The emotional hook
- The clear close

Cut

- Background the audience already knows
- Caveats and disclaimers
- "Nice to have" slides
- Your second-best example

Principle 6: Rehearse to Time

- **First rehearsal:** always runs 15-20 minutes
- **Cut, don't speed up** — talking faster doesn't help
- **Record yourself** — you'll find 30% of filler instantly
- **Target 9 minutes** — leave room to breathe

The Checklist

- Can you state your **one idea** in a single sentence?
- Does your **opening hook** earn attention in 10 seconds?
- Does every slide pass the **3-second glance test**?
- Have you **rehearsed to a timer** at least twice?
- Does your **close** give the audience a clear next step?

Say less. Mean more.

The best 10-minute talks feel like 5.