

# Speakers: Planning Your Talk

A collective guide on what works and how to craft a talk for a Speakers for Schools in-person event.

**This guide covers** - Talk formats, how to frame a talk, talk themes/aims, details of themes, how to open your talk and top tips for great talks!

## Talk Formats

There are two main formats to be considered for your talk. Think about the format that will best suit you, your topic and your audience. Whichever one you choose, please be sure to agree to it in advance of the talk with your school and follow the below guidance.

**All SFS events should be one hour long.**

### Fireside Chat/ Interview

*Ideal for a more informal conversation led by student questions, not requiring any slides or a set 'talk'.*

- Speaker and school have a phone call to agree the focus of the 'interview'; in some instances, questions need to be agreed in advance
- The interviewer could be a teacher or confident student; students can submit questions in advance
- Interview takes place for 30-45 minutes depending on speaker and school preference
- The session is then opened to any impromptu questions from the audience for the remainder of the hour

### Talk with Q&A

*Ideal for speakers with a key message, subject or story they want to use as the focus of the event (A/V optional)*

- Speaker and school have a call to agree the focus of the talk and the context for their students, so it strikes the right chord
- The talk itself is about 20-25 minutes followed by a 30 min Q&A with the audience
- Q&A should be actively moderated and driven by the teacher, with 5 pre-prepared questions to get the ball rolling
- Students should be ready to take part in a Q&A. Prep sheets are available on our website [here](https://speakersforschools.org/inspiration).

# Talks with an impact

Even for a seasoned speaker each Speakers for Schools talk is different depending on the school, student cohort and format. We are often asked how our speakers can be sure their talk leaves an impact, so we have brought together advice and insights from our 8,000+ talks to help you create the best talk for you and your audience.

We recommend that you begin by selecting a talk format you are most comfortable with, which best suits your speaking style. Then choose from the 5 themes in this guide remembering that different options suit different speakers, topics and students (so be sure to look at all options).

You can use the advice and insights in the rest of this guide to ensure that your talk is as engaging, informative and inspiring for students as possible.

## Framing a talk

It might seem like common sense to most but be sure to 'set the stage' at the start of your talk before jumping into your story or topic. Student preparation might vary too as teachers have different amounts of time to do this. The following sections are to help you create a successful event and help students get the most out of their talk:

### 1 Who are you?

Even if students know who you are, start every talk by introducing yourself to the audience and why you are giving your time to be there. Some students might not realise that this is not a careers talk or a normal assembly. Briefly explain your role and work if needed, explaining jargon like 'FTSE' or misconceptions like 'BAFTA is just an award'...

### 2 What message do you want to convey?

Speakers should state the purpose of their talk as this has been shown to help students take more away from the event. Below are some examples from previous talks:

*"Nobody starts out successful, and no one feels successful 100% of the time, which I wish someone would have told me at your age."*

*"I hope you will leave feeling more empowered to be involved in the political system and understanding the importance of your role in the community."*

*"I'm here because I want to convince you that creative industries are important and can use your talent; it's more than acting, drawing and music."*

*"I want you to know about the qualities and skills that are useful to anyone in a fast-changing world."*



## 3 What message do you want them to take away?

There will always be some students who are unsure of why your talk is applicable to them or their lives so it helps to take a moment to connect this to the wider world, how it might have an impact on them, or could change their perception of an issue or expectation. For example:

*“Being an 'academic' might seem stuffy or just teaching and reading books, but actually my work at the university is mostly about progressing research that is used in government social policy...”*

*"As a governor of a national bank the predictions and decisions we make can affect the entire economy, even how much you end up paying for a loaf of bread or milk..."*

## 4 How to have a lasting impact?

One of the ways to have a lasting impact is to use The Skills Builder Universal Framework as part of your talk. The framework is made up of eight key skills that are useful at any stage of life and very important for young people to develop – by mentioning these skills, how you have personally developed them over time and within your career can encourage the students to start reflecting on their own lives and skill development.



For example, if your talk reflects on your career journey within the Creative Industries, how have you developed your Creativity since you were in school? How did you find out that you were good at being creative? What was your journey to developing this skill and how did it help you get where you are today?

You could also mention in your talk how you are still developing these skills in your working life. For example, how staying positive when faced with a challenge has helped you overcome the barrier you were faced with.

You may find that your talk naturally covers these skills and taking an extra moment to focus on them may help with having a lasting impact. If your talk is on a specific subject and you are finding it difficult to include one of these skills, then you can think about how the students in the audience will develop some of these universal skills whilst listening and asking you questions.

# Talk Themes & Aims

The following section has 5 talk themes driven by their 'aim', each with example structures to help you focus on key points and messages so that your talk has the most impact. You can use this guide before you are in touch with a school to help you decide which theme and approach you might be open to or combine and tailor the themes as needed.

## Logistics to note:

- We will let you know once we have sourced a school that matches your basic requirements and is able to host you.
- Please make sure that you, or your office, have a phone call with the school to agree how you can tailor your talk to the specific cohort you will be speaking to. We recommend that you find out how old they are, what their interests are and so on. It is also a good idea to agree with the school the aims of the talk e.g. to demystify, inspire, and discuss a specific subject area etc.
- You will need to agree on the format, talk focus (see themes below) and any preferences directly with the school or college.
- We highly recommend reading all sections of this guide for more ways to add to your event and how to leave students with practical advice for their future.



## Theme 1 Industry Insights

**Aim: “I’d like to spark new interests or change how students see an industry, sector or role”**

With a key focus on demystifying and/or challenging misconceptions, speakers can help translate their work in a way that leaves students thinking differently about an industry, how it affects the world and future opportunities. Although it can link to future careers, all S4S talks are meant to be useful for a diverse student audience so a talk should focus on sparking new understanding and insights about the industry rather than a vocational talk on job roles.



# Recommended outline for an industry insights talk:

**1. Framing the talk: Introduce yourself, set the scene, and what you would like the students to gain/take away from your talk.**

**2. Explain what it is that your industry does and how it relates to young people or touches their lives. Ask the audience questions about the industry/sector to see what it is they know or if there are preconceptions – what do they associate with it?**

**3. Share insights into your journey and experience of your industry/sector.**

- What do you enjoy or find fascinating about your work?
- Why do you continue your work in this profession or industry?
- Did you have preconceptions about the industry before you joined?
- Has this changed?

**4. Share your view on the key transferable professional skills, experience and characteristics that could help young people be successful in a changing world.**

- What is it that you look for when hiring?
- Does it apply to other industries?
- How might the future of your industry/sector impact on young people?

**5. Towards the end, mention career pathways for those interested. What can different parts of an industry offer, or jobs that might be lesser known? Does your company offer apprenticeships or graduate schemes?**

## Increase the impact...

Most schools welcome you bringing an apprentice or graduate to your talk. They can speak about their experiences after the main talk and answer any practical questions for students interested in your industry. This can help to bridge the gap between where you are and where the students are. Students can see the link between what they are studying and possible progression routes.

## Top tip from feedback

Short videos (1-3 minutes) or strong visuals can be a great way to give students a behind-the-scenes look at your work or industry but be careful to avoid slides that are 'sales-y', long or company pitches.





# Theme 2 Life Lessons

**Aim: “I’d like to encourage students to rethink what's possible, and not to feel like they have to have it all figured out”**

This is a popular theme where speakers share their advice, experiences and 'life-lessons' to help students see their potential and opportunities differently. Often successful figures can do this through sharing candid reflections that might challenge what students think is required for success.

## Recommended outline for a life lessons talk:

- 1. Framing the talk: Introduce yourself, set the scene, and what you would like the students to gain/take away from your talk.**
- 2. Explain what it is that you do and your passion for your role. How does your role or sector impact on young people and what attracted you to it?**
- 3. Reflecting on your personal journey and how you got to where you are today. Consider discussing the below with students:**
  - Did you know what you wanted to do when you were at school?
  - Have you had several different careers or worked in different industries

**Discussing these and transferable skills could help students think about their futures and the paths they might take**

- 4. Share candid examples of failures and successes and what you learnt from these different scenarios**
- 5. What useful advice or mentorship have you received? Was there anyone you looked up to or continue to reference when feeling less confident?**
- 6. What is it that you look for when hiring? Are there any key characteristics, transferable skills and experiences that you believe are crucial?**

## Top tips from feedback

**Avoid reciting your CV from point to point. Instead share why you took certain chances, what you learnt and how it has shaped your outlook.**



# Theme 3 Inspiring Action

**Aim: “I’d like to share something I’m passionate about and encourage students to create change”**

This kind of talk will be driven by speakers' passions and an area where they hope to inspire action, such as democracy, the environment, public service, human rights etc. to encourage student interest and empowerment in global or local issues. Talks are designed to be a dialogue and should welcome other views, leaving students more confident in their role in the future and inspire them to think about wider society.

## Recommended outline for an inspiring action talk:

**1. Framing the talk: Introduce yourself, set the scene, and what you would like the students to gain/take away from your talk.**

**2. Why are you passionate about the subject you are speaking about e.g. democracy, activism, environmental issues and so on?**

- What sparked your own interest?
- Are you an expert or a more general supporter (not everyone is an absolute expert, but you can still be passionate about change)?

**3. Reflecting on your personal journey and how you got to where you are today. Consider discussing the below with students:**

- Did you know what you wanted to do when you were at school?
- Have you had several different careers or worked in different industries?

**Discussing these and transferable skills could help students think about their futures and the paths they might take**

**4. What is the broader context and why should young people care?**

**5. What does the future of this topic look like?**

**6. How can students get involved in the selected topic?**

## Top tips from feedback

These talks have worked well with an interactive element (either a part of or in addition to the talk) such as a quick group session about the policy issues students are most concerned about, or even workshopping their solutions to a major societal problem.

# Theme 4 Own your strengths

**Aim: “I’d like to encourage self-confidence and for students to embrace their individuality”**

Some speakers have a personal message for students who are often at an age where they can be navigating difficult social or identity issues and trying to figure out where they fit into the world. Whether it's about embracing their accent or ethnicity or challenging the status quo on gender expectations, this is a great talk for a speaker who wants to help students see past their identity, backgrounds or circumstances as a barrier to their potential or success.

## Recommended outline for an own your strengths talk:

- 1. Framing the talk: Introduce yourself, set the scene, and what you would like the students to gain/take away from your talk.**
- 2. Share your journey so far; how has your thinking changed over time about your own identity and confidence?**
- 3. Students can feel they are starting on the back foot if they don't fit into the imagined idea of success or the ones you see in magazines or on TV. How can they overcome this 'imposter syndrome'?**
- 4. Have there been moments that have triggered epiphanies or realisations on this subject in your career or personal life?**
- 5. What useful advice or mentorship have you received? Was there anyone you looked up to or whom you continue to reference when you're feeling less confident?**
- 6. What change do you want to see for the next generation when it comes to this issue?**

### Don't worry...

SFS talks aren't expected to be 'motivational' talks rather successful figures opening up personally about how they have grappled with difficult issues such as not fitting in, race and religion or even feeling less advantaged. Topics like these can really strike a chord with students.



# Theme 5 Expert Insights

**Aim: “I’d like to leave students well-informed on a specialty or expert subject that links to their studies”**

This talk is ideal for speakers expected to give students access to expert insights and knowledge that they wouldn’t get elsewhere, providing students with a crash course in a specific area. These talks are useful for smaller, focused student groups (e.g. A-level students) but there are also tips below to appeal to broader audiences too. N.B. The below can be covered within your slides or as an aside to help contextualise them.

## Recommended outline for an expert insights talk:

- 1. Framing the talk: Introduce yourself, set the scene, and what you would like the students to gain/take away from your talk.**
- 2. What is your area of expertise and what in your background might help students understand or contextualise the subject (links to what they have seen in the news, well-known companies etc.)?**
- 3. Why is it important now? How does it link to current affairs or issues?**
- 4. What would be essential basic concepts or knowledge of this subject that you believe students might not be hearing elsewhere such as important issues to keep in mind, if they are serious about understanding it?**
- 5. If students are interested in pursuing it as a career or subject further, depending on their age, what are some useful insider tips on developing their own understanding?**

## Helping the talk land...

These talks are not designed to be lectures or long speeches, so you should be sure to speak to the teacher about how you can pitch your talk at the right level depending on the students' age.

### Top tips from feedback

If you are an academic, schools and colleges will often hope you will also spend time demystifying higher education life to help students understand if it is right for them. You can suggest students speak to you after the talk for any advice or questions about your specific university or degree area.



# Increasing Your Impact

Speakers often ask us how they can increase their impact beyond the talk itself. There are a number of things you can do to expand the way you help students to feel more informed and confident about their future.

## Connect your talk with the practical next steps they can be thinking about:

If you bring an apprentice, graduate or junior executive along, they can provide an alternative perspective on the opportunities the industry has given them. They can chat to students about the practical steps they have taken and inspire them to see themselves doing something similar.

## 1/3 of students don't have access to work experience through their networks:

Share specific work experience opportunities, as well as tricks and tips for securing placements. Many students lack confidence or rely on parents to secure work experience. You can also work with SFS to offer placements through our [Experience Programme](#). Contact [experience@speakersforschools.org](mailto:experience@speakersforschools.org) to find out more!

## Tell schools about free programmes, local events, resources or materials from your organisation:

Many schools now have less time and money than ever, so anything like this that can help support them with their curriculum, or provide their statutorily required independent careers advice, will be very helpful. However, remember that teachers have many competing demands on their time, so there may be some offers that they cannot take you up on.



For help with any of these activities - or ideas for further ways to increase your impact with students please contact the SFS team on [inspiration@speakersforschools.org](mailto:inspiration@speakersforschools.org)



# FAQs

## How do I find out more about who I am speaking to?

Schools and speakers are introduced to finalise talk details and should have at least one phone call pre- event. Many things can come to light over the phone particularly about the students, what messages they'd benefit from hearing and how much they might know about your subject matter.

## Will students know who I am?

It depends, but the majority of our audiences are 14-17 years old, either a set year group or mixed ages and might not know you, your brand, or even popular cultural references (Elton who?). Frame the talk when you open it:

- Who are you?
- Why are you there to speak specifically?
- Why will this relate to them/help?

## The students won't be interested in what I have to say

Don't underestimate how inquisitive students will be, especially if you help them understand why you are excited by your topic or industry. Your world might be completely alien to them but that gives you an opportunity to ignite their interest. By trying to use engaging techniques and unconventional ways to get your message across you'll help your talk stand out.

## What would be your #1 tip for helping me land my talk?

A big part of a successful SFS talk is taking time to translate and contextualise. This is what sets apart those talks that really change the way students think about themselves, their surroundings and what's possible. It's great to know you had a major career change, but remember that the students have not experienced this before - how big of a deal is it really? You headed up a FSTE 100 company's marketing—err what's a FTSE?

## How can I avoid coming across as patronising but still be sure they understand what I am saying?

As above, students appreciate when speakers take a moment to translate their world, so it relates to what students might know. If you're unsure of the level of understanding, take a moment for a show of hands to ask how much they know on the subject. Analogies work well. Yes, they'll know what Facebook, Twitter etc. is, but they might not realise how revolutionary they were when they launched.

## What if the students have never heard of my job role?

These talks are not careers talks so this is ok. We want our speakers to encourage students' aspirations and inspire them to believe in their ability. You are demonstrating this to our students by showing that you can achieve success through hard work and perseverance.

### What Is Skills Builder?

The Skills Builder Universal Framework shows how to build essential skills at every stage of life. The ability to creatively solve problems, to self-manage, to communicate effectively, and to work well with others.

### Where can I find more information?

Please visit [www.skillsbuilder.org](http://www.skillsbuilder.org) for more information

### Do I have to use Skills Builder for my talk?

It's not mandatory to use Skills Builder for your next talk but we do recommend it as research has shown that 98% of students find essential skills important to for employment opportunities.

### What should I do if there's a change to my employment status?

Get in touch on [inspiration@speakersforschools.org](mailto:inspiration@speakersforschools.org) directly to tell us about any change to titles, biographies, etc. Given sensitivities of working with schools and children, if there are any personal/professional circumstances that arise that may raise unexpected safeguarding or reputational questions we ask you to notify us immediately so we can advise.

### What is the purpose of using Skills Builder?

With the help of Skills Builder young people can discover their strengths, areas for development and practical ideas to improve and build the essential skills that young people need to succeed.

## About Speakers for Schools

Speakers for Schools (SfS) are the UK's leading social mobility charity and since 2010 we have supported over 1.6 million students right across the country. Our vast network of the high-profile and influential professionals are committed to levelling the playing field for young people in state schools and colleges – by donating their time (and travel) to share their life stories, experiences, and insights. Our fully funded inspirational talks are uniquely positioned to broaden horizons and raise aspirations of young people, helping them to imagine what they could be in the future... And succeed!

We invite all employers, speakers and educators to register with our free service to offer and access our virtual talks and virtual work experience programmes to support young people across the UK.

## SfS Commitment to Safeguarding

Speakers for Schools acknowledges the duty of care to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people and is committed to ensuring safeguarding practice reflects statutory responsibilities, government guidance, and complies with best practice and Charity Commission requirements.

[Learn more](#)

Need extra help or advice? Get in touch with us at.

[inspiration@speakersforschools.org](mailto:inspiration@speakersforschools.org)