

Schools: Planning Your Talk

What does a Speakers for Schools talk look like?

Speakers for Schools talks are inspirational events that allow speakers to share their unique insights and advice with students as someone leading in their industry or discipline, to help broaden horizons and encourage students in their potential. They are also a chance for a real conversation with figures who are shaping the world today – ranging from real stories of how a speaker got to where they are, to how their industry is changing society as we know it.

This Guide Covers

- Logistics and planning checklist
- Talk formats
- Talk themes
- FAQs
- About Speakers for Schools



Logistics & Planning Brief

SFS talks should be **one hour long** with a large student audience (assembly style), followed by a Q&A session. Themes and formats should be agreed with speakers before the talk during a phone call. Sfs talks are bespoke and depend on the individual speaker but fall into broader themes which can be seen on pages 4 and 5 of this guide. Most speakers provide unique insights as successful figures in their field to help inform and encourage students, while others can be more specialised.

Below are Key Steps to Follow When Planning for Your Talk:

1. Once introduced to your speaker/their office, you must agree the date and time of the talk. Please be sure to let SFS know when this is confirmed.

2. It is a requirement to have a phone call with your speaker/their office. Talks where speakers and schools have had a call often result in a stronger impact on students and a more successful session. During the phone call you should agree:

- The format of the talk
- Themes and key messages of the talk
- Please be sure to advise your speaker on the audience for the talk (size, age, prior subject knowledge etc) and how you hope they will benefit from the session - this will help speakers prepare for their visit
- Does your speaker have any further expectations? For example, a meet and greet with students, a tour of the school, a meeting with the headteacher/SLT

3. We do ask that students are prepared ahead of the talk, so they know why the speaker is attending and who they are, it is also a great opportunity to have students thinking about the talk and potential questions. Our Q&A Prep Sheets can be found [here](#).



Please see our [on the day hosting guide](#) for top tips on how best to host your speaker, including the final event checklist, top tips for introducing your speaker and hosting Q&A! 

Talk Formats

There are two main formats to be considered for your talk, be sure to advise your speaker on the format that would best suit your students. Be sure to agree the format with the speaker ahead of the talk and follow the below guidance.

All SfS events should be one hour long.

Both formats require an element of Q&A with the audience which should be moderated by a teacher/member of SLT. More information about moderating Q&A and ensuring the talk is hosted well can be seen in our On the day hosting guide [here](#).



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 (Audio/Visual 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 Q&A with the audience
- Q&A should be actively moderated and driven by a teacher with 5 pre-prepared student questions to get the ball rolling
- Students should be ready to take part in a Q&A. Prep sheets are available on [our website](#)

Talk Themes: Outcomes for Students

The focus and key messages of your talk should be agreed with the speaker in advance. Below are our suggested talk themes which our speakers use to frame their talk, we have also outlined the potential outcomes for your students to help ensure your talk has the most impact.

1 Industry Insights

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 the industry, how it affects the world and 'who' might be interested in it, in the future. Although it can link to future careers, all SfS talks are meant to be useful for a diverse student audience so a talk should focus on sparking a new understanding of and insights on the industry, over a vocational talk on job roles.

Outcomes for Students: This can engage your students as to bigger issues, ingredients for success (in general) and to raise their aspirations. This may alert students to opportunities they may not have been aware of. For example non-creative roles with the creative sector (logistics, planning, finance, HR), showing students opportunities that aren't always thought of or well known within a sector.

2 Life Lessons

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

Outcomes for Students: This kind of talk is ideal for a broad student group. The hope is that regardless of the exact angle the speaker takes, and no matter their background, it will help young people relate to the speaker, draw on their experiences and raise their aspirations.

3 Inspiring Action

This kind of talk will be driven by speakers' passions and an area where they hope to inspire action, such as democracy, the importance of participation, the environment, public service, human rights etc. – all encouraging 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 inspiring them to think about wider society.

Outcomes for Students: Talks of this nature engage students as to how issues are manifested, how progress can be measured and implications for students as potential activists for change.

4 Own Your Strengths

Some speakers have a much more personal message for students who are often at an age where they can be navigating difficult social issues, identity issues and trying to figure out where they fit in the world. These talks can work towards making your students think about their own personal development.

Outcomes for Students: Talks of this nature help students to see past their identity, backgrounds or circumstances as a barrier to their potential or success. Whether it's about embracing their accent or ethnicity or challenging the status quo on gender expectations.

5 Expert Insights

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, especially if the pairing has been made for a smaller, focused student group but can appeal to broader student groups also.

Outcomes for Students: Ideal for a smaller group on a more tailored topic where the speaker is aware of their knowledge level. Despite having a subject focus, the hope is to engage young people as to bigger issues and how a subject or specific topic can relate to a wider picture.



The Skills Builder Universal Framework

In addition to our talk themes, we also use [The Skills Builder Universal Framework](#) as part of our talks. We often find many of our talks naturally cover the skills and that it can be of great benefit when reflecting upon the talk with your students to use The Skills Key to identify and discuss potential development areas and moments of lasting impact.



We suggest adding this to your agenda when arranging your planning call with your speaker. Understanding the talk content, key skills that the speaker intends to talk about, and the expertise developed in their own careers can help with preparing and briefing the students.

Another way to embed the Skills Builder framework into your Speakers for Schools talk is to prepare your students to ask skills-based questions in the Q&A part. For example:



- What skills do you use in your current role and how have they changed since you started your career?
- What are your top tips for working effectively in a team?
- How in your career have you stayed positive and motivated? Why is this important to your success?
- Why is problem solving a key skill you need to develop in the world of work and how have you worked towards improving it?
- What skill have you most had to work on throughout your career?
- What new skill are you learning now and why?

FAQs

Who should organise a SfS talk?

Given the nature of the speakers we work with, especially as a charity, the headteacher/senior leadership team will need to help with off-timetable arrangements and should greet the speaker on the day. However, a deputy staff member can assist with coordinating the logistics in the lead-up.

How long should a SfS talk be?

SfS talks should be one hour long with plenty of interaction - more information about formats can be seen on page 3.

What will the speaker talk about?

The content and key messages of the talk should be agreed with your speaker in advance. Talks are bespoke and depend on the individual speaker, but fall into broader themes which can be seen on pages 4 and 5. Most speakers provide unique insights as successful figures in their field to help inform and encourage students, while others can be more specialised.

How many students should we have in the audience?

Talks should be a large assembly-style session with a large student audience unless a smaller group is requested by your speaker.

How can I prepare students for the talk?

We do ask that students are prepared ahead of the talk so they know why the speaker is attending and who they are, it is also a great opportunity to have students think about the talk and potential questions. Our Q&A prep sheets can be found here.

How should I introduce the speaker?

It is important to introduce the speaker and nature of the event to your students. On the day, please be sure to review the introduction with your speaker if possible. A template introduction can be found in our On the day hosting guide.

What's your number 1 tip for a successful SfS talk?

Having a phone call with the speaker/their office and agreeing on the key messages and themes of the talk is crucial to ensure a successful talk. Find out more about what should be agreed in your phone call on page 2.

Do your speakers have DBS checks?

Our speakers are not DBS checked as they are guests hosted by teachers at the school and should not to be left alone by teachers, unsupervised with students. Their visit should be treated within school guidelines for visitors to the school.

Who should manage the behaviour of the audience during a SfS talk?

It is the staff's responsibility to manage the behaviour of the audience. If a student/s is misbehaving in the audience, the speaker may ask for the staff who is overseeing the talk to assist in managing the behaviour or to issue a warning to the student/s.

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.

Skills Builder FAQs

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Where can I find more information?

Please visit 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 talk but we do recommend it as research has shown that 98% of students find essential skills important to for employment opportunities.

What is the purpose of using Skills Builder?

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

Who uses Skills Builder?

Individuals, Schools/Colleges, Employers
Partners and Other organisations

About Speakers for Schools

Speakers for Schools is a charity founded in 2010 by ITV's Political Editor, Robert Peston, with a mission to help level the playing field for young people of all backgrounds. Our aim is to end educational inequality by giving all young people access to the same prestigious networks available to the top fee-paying schools in the UK. We provide access to talks from today's influential figures as well as work experiences linking state school students to industry-leading companies and networked support partners.

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 talks and work experience programmes to support young people across the UK.

Need extra help or advice? Get in touch with us at: inspiration@speakersforschools.org