

A VC Guide to Lightning Talks

What's A Lightning Talk?

A lightning talk is a short, often five to ten-minute, focused presentation. These talks quickly share a new idea, spark interest, bring insight, or breakdown a topic. Speakers must be concise, and deliver the content in a clear and engaging manner. For audiences, this format provides an opportunity for a diverse exploration of topics, making it an ideal way to discover and engage with new ideas or technologies.

Present your ideas concisely



Be aware of time constraints



Focus on clarity and engagement



Be creative and efficient



Explore diverse topics, dynamic format



Creating Your Lightning Talk



“Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Getting Started

1. **What’s your main message?** With a limited time to share, focus on one main idea to ensure clarity and memorability. Keeping it simple helps you to avoid cramming in extra information.
2. **Who is your audience?** Tailor your topic to their interests and knowledge level.
3. **Is there a theme?** If yes, ensure your topic aligns.

Writing Your Talk

1. **Start Strong.** Appealing to the audience’s emotions is a great way to gain their attention and create a memorable talk. This can be an anecdote, a surprising fact, or an invitation to participate.
2. **Focus on Your Main Message.** What’s the single biggest takeaway you want listeners to remember?
3. **Create a clear structure.**
 - Briefly introduce yourself and why you’re giving this talk. What makes you credible?
 - Explain the significance of your topic.
 - Share your core message with supporting details.
 - Conclude by letting your audience know what they should do next (more exploration, take action, share the message), by sharing an impactful message, or by challenging your audience.

 **Less is more:** Make sure you condense complex information into clear, concise language.

Slides

Not everyone uses slides, and that’s ok. But if you are using slides, here are some pointers:

- **Keep it visual:** Use strong visuals (images, infographics, memes) to support your points.
- **Minimal text:** Limit text to key points or short phrases. Use large, clear fonts.
- **One point per slide:** Don’t overload slides with information.

Best Practices & Tips

- **Capture their hearts:** If you want your audience to remember your talk, engage them emotionally.
- **Tell a story:** Humans connect to each other through stories. Find the right story for your subject and audience.
- **Energy and enthusiasm are contagious:** Speak clearly and confidently.
- **Simplicity is Key:** Avoid disorganization, too much information, and focus on essential points. Give the audience insight into what you'll be covering in your talk.
- **Practice Makes Improvement:** Rehearse to improve your delivery and hit your timing.
- **Engage Visually:** If you're using slides, think of them as an opportunity to connect to the audience.
- **Feedback Loop:** Practice with others and ask for constructive criticism.
- **Adapt and Overcome:** Be prepared for technical mishaps by testing your setup and having backups.

Striking Gold: An Aristotelian Approach

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, emphasized three pillars for effective communication: Ethos (credibility), Pathos (appeal to emotions), and Logos (logical reasoning). Let's leverage these pillars to craft a lightning talk that shines:

1. Ethos: Establish Credibility

- **Introduce Yourself Briefly but Effectively:** Right at the start, establish why you are a reliable source on your topic. Aristotle emphasized character and credibility (ethos) as key to persuasion. Your introduction should quickly convey your experience or passion for the subject matter.
- **Show Humility and Respect:** Even in a brief talk, showing respect for differing viewpoints builds your credibility and rapport with the audience.
- **Confidence is Key:** Speak with conviction and passion. Project your voice and maintain good eye contact with the audience or camera.

2. Pathos: Connect Emotionally

- **Engage Emotions Early:** Start with a story, a surprising fact, or a question that taps into your audience's emotions. Aristotle knew that pathos, or emotional appeal, could be powerful in persuasion, making your message more memorable.
- **Use Relatable Examples:** Choose examples or anecdotes that your audience can relate to personally, making the abstract concrete and the impersonal personal.
- **Storytelling Power:** Weave a narrative throughout your talk. Relatable stories resonate with audiences and make information more memorable.
- **Humor (Wisely Used):** A well-timed joke can lighten the mood and increase engagement. Always avoid offensive or overly technical humor.

3. Logos: Present Logical Arguments

- **Be Clear and Concise:** Given the short format, every word counts. Structure your talk to present a clear, logical argument or narrative. Begin with your thesis or main idea, then support it succinctly.
- **Use Data Wisely:** Support your arguments with data or evidence, but choose only the most compelling and understandable bits. Data strengthens your argument and creates a sense of trust, but overloading with data can be counterproductive.

4. Kairos: Seize the Moment

- **Tailor Your Message:** Consider the timing and context of your talk. What is most relevant or urgent to your audience right now? Kairos, or the opportune moment, was another key aspect for Aristotle. Your topic or message should feel timely and urgent.
- **Call to Action:** End with a clear call to action. What do you want your audience to think, feel, or do immediately after your talk?

5. Teleology: Purpose-Driven Content

- **Define Your Purpose:** What is the ultimate goal of your talk? Aristotle's notion of teleology—the end or purpose—reminds us to have a clear objective. Whether your purpose is to inform, persuade, inspire, or provoke thought, keep this purpose in mind throughout your preparation.
- **Align Content with Purpose:** Ensure every part of your talk contributes towards this end goal, trimming anything that doesn't serve your primary objective.

6. Ethical Use of Rhetoric

- **Respect Your Audience's Intelligence:** Avoid manipulation. Use rhetorical strategies ethically, aiming to enlighten and engage rather than deceive.
- **Strive for Clarity and Truth:** Your talk should strive to be truthful and clear, avoiding obscuration or misrepresentation of facts.

Remember, a successful lightning talk is a well-balanced blend of these elements. By establishing yourself as a credible source, captivating your audience with emotion, and delivering a logical argument, you'll leave them wanting to learn more - the true mark of a golden lightning talk!



“It’s alright to have butterflies in your stomach. Just get them to fly in formation

Rob Gilbert