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"How-to" TEDx Talks: Stage organisations and meaning expansions

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ABSTRACT

TEDx has emerged as a prominent digital platform for public speaking that organises talks featuring experts' insights and innovative ideas for a global audience. The "how-to" talks, where the speakers deliver a compelling idea to persuade the audience to take action or to adopt a belief, have become one of the most popular. These talks present structured ideas in stages that set up and resolve expectations. Drawing on Hasan's (1985) generic structure potential, Mann and Thompson's (1987) rhetorical structure theory, and Martin's (1994) concept of macrogenre, this qualitative study investigates how five popular "how-to" TEDx talks are organised in stages, how the stages are connected, and how meaning is expanded in each stage of the talks. The results of the analysis revealed that the talks are organised around four obligatory stages, further labelled as Hook, Contention, Advice, and Closure, with a possible addition of one optional stage Demonstration, creating a prototypical structure. Regarding the connections between stages, a nuclear structure is formed, resembling an orbital model. This model positions the Advice stage as the Nucleus, substantially delivering the "how-to" message, while the other stages act as Satellites, supporting the central message. The findings also reveal the predominant use of various elemental genres, such as procedure, observation, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, and factorial explanation, as well as non-elemental genres, including rhetorical questions and calls to action. All of these genres contribute to expanding the meaning potential of each stage.

Keywords: Generic structure; genre; public speaking; SFL; TEDx talks

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INTRODUCTION

Public speaking includes a range of communication styles, from formal speeches to informal presentations. These diverse forms display distinct language patterns, each conforming to specific formats and interacting uniquely with paralinguistic elements like delivery and staging, thus creating various genres. Within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the genre is defined as "a staged, goal-oriented social process" (Martin et al., 1987, p. 59), implying that all language use is driven by intention or purpose. This definition underscores the intentionality of all language use, emphasising the logical, staged patterns employed by language users to effectively achieve their communicative goals.

Public speaking practices have evolved alongside advancements in information and communication technology. The proliferation of online video has fostered diverse formats, which Rossette-Crake (2019) terms the "new oratory" and which Anderson (2016) argues to represent "the second great driver of the renaissance in public speaking" (p. 227). This evolution has brought key characteristics like an emphasis on visual experience and the use of language reflecting a less hierarchical relationship between audience and speakers, i.e., "conversationalization" (Fairclough, 1994, as cited in Rosette-Crake, 2019, p. 43). This conversational style is particularly evident in TED Talks, as reflected by the term "talk" rather than "speech."

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Originally focused on technology, entertainment, and design (as the acronym of TED suggests), present talks now include more diverse, thought-provoking topics, often addressed by speakers across the globe in independently organised TEDx conferences. While interesting subject matter is crucial, the need for a clear structure to build these topics is also emphasised (Anderson, 2016). To understand this structural organisation—how TEDx talks are staged to achieve their goal—this study adopts SFL-related theories, which treat language as "a meaning-making resource" (Halliday, 1978, p. 1).

While SFL-related studies often focus on dialogues and conversations, where meaning-making is readily apparent through interlocutor responses, this study examines monologue. A common area of SFL research is classroom interaction, which explores how participants (students and instructors) adopt roles in knowledge construction to achieve instructional goals. Examples include studies on mood structure in online and face-to-face classes (Bukit & Naipospos, 2021), student-teacher power relations in science classrooms (Danielsson et al., 2023), student negotiation of authority and mathematics content during group work (DeJarnette, 2022), co-construction of knowledge in foreign language classrooms (Digruber, 2019), teacher's English talk in EFL contexts (Farangi et al., 2024), dialogic pedagogy in primary literacy classrooms (Thwaite et al., 2020), and other related studies (see Fattany, 2022; Febriyanti & Rozelin, 2024; Kuswoyo et al., 2021; Mulatsih & Yuliasri, 2021; Sun et al., 2024; Yang & Yin, 2022; Yonata, 2021).

Recent monologue studies, particularly in public speaking, tend to analyse speeches by prominent figures, often focusing on metafunctions and rhetorical devices used to reflect socio-political situations and create audience unity. These include studies on political leaders' speeches (see AlAfnan, 2022; Ashiq et al., 2021; Darong, 2021; Darong, 2022; Gea, 2024; Hardiyanti et al., 2023; Insiadah, 2024; Malkawi & Fareh, 2023; Megah & Noor, 2021; Mushtaq et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2023), celebrity talks (see, for example, Aliffudin & Cahyono, 2023), and religious leaders' talks (see Hadifi, 2023; Wardani, 2021).

Despite the attention given to content delivery and audience engagement in public speaking, less emphasis has been placed on the structural and functional aspects contributing to speech effectiveness. Some studies have addressed structure from a rhetorical perspective, such as those focusing on rhetorical moves in TED Talks (see Kraisriwattana & Poonpon, 2021) and the rhetorical structure of presidential speeches (see Noermanzah et al., 2019). A more systemic functional approach can be found in studies of generic structures, such as that of Friday sermons (see Sukarno & Salikin, 2022). In fact, studies on organisational structures often utilise the label "rhetorical structures or moves," especially in written language analysis from non-SFL perspectives (see, for example, Ahmadi, 2022; Gobekci, 2023; Hajimia et al., 2022; Vilar & Tolchinsky, 2022).

Considering what has been elaborated above, this study aims to address a gap related to the structural and functional aspects of talks, particularly from an SFL perspective. It investigates the organisation of "how to" TEDx talks by exploring how these talks are structurally organised in stages, the connections built among these stages, and the patterns of meaning expansion within each stage. Five popular TEDx talks, chosen for their widespread dissemination of ideas (Anderson, 2016), become the research object. Drawing on SFL-related theories, this study expects to enrich the knowledge related to SFL and genre and provide practical insights for public speakers seeking to enhance their talks through effective linguistic strategies, including staging and meaning expansion.

METHOD

This study is descriptive qualitative in nature. The data, in the forms of the five most popular "how-to" TEDx talks, were analysed utilising SFL-related theories—Hasan's (1985) generic structure potential, Mann and Thompson's (1987) rhetorical structure theory, and Martin's (1994) macrogenre – to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the stages are structured, how they are connected, and how the meaning in each stage is expanded to achieve the speech's purpose.

The data were obtained from the TEDx YouTube channel. Videos were filtered by popularity, and five "how-to" talks were selected. Details of these videos, including the latest viewer counts as of February 28, 2024, are presented in Table 1 below.

The five talks were selected for several reasons. First, their high viewership indicates significant interest and engagement from online viewers worldwide, suggesting that these talks not only cover intriguing topics but are also delivered effectively. Second, while coincidentally sharing a similar theme of self-improvement, the speakers addressed different aspects—physical, emotional, and intellectual—through unique creative approaches. The variety of content delivery structures and genres within these talks allows for the identification of stage organisation in "how-to" TEDx talks, the connections between stages, and how different genres may appear as speakers further convey their ideas to achieve their purpose. Third, investigating these five highly-watched TEDx videos provides insights into speech structures, language devices, presentation aids, and other factors contributing to their notability. Therefore,

understanding the elements that resonate with such a broad audience can inform those interested in public speaking on how to organise and deliver engaging talks.

Table 1
Information of the five "how-to" TEDx talks as research documents

No.	Video titles	Speakers	View count	Date uploaded
1.	Why people believe they can't draw - and how to prove they can	Graham Shawat TEDxHull	39,746,953	1 April 2015
2.	The first 20 hours – how to learn anything	Josh Kaufmanat TEDxCSU	38,282,789	15 March 2013
3.	How to learn any language in six months	Chris Lonsdaleat TEDxLingnan University	33,974,122	21 November 2013
4.	How to stop screwing yourself over	Mel Robbinsat TEDxSF	32,570,140	12 June 2011
5.	How to know your life purpose in 5 minutes	Adam Leipzigat TEDxMalibu	19,526,343	2 February 2013

Following a viewing of the five talks, the data collection process involved transferring their embedded YouTube transcripts to word processing software, Microsoft Word. Given the volume of detail, the data were formatted for readability to facilitate the data analysis process by placing them into tables. Data analysis involved four key steps. First, meaning units constituting a stage were identified and labelled. The identification was carried out by considering the completeness of meaning, the gestures of the speakers, and also examining the prosodic features of the talk, such as the appearance of falling tones and pauses. The labelling was then conducted by considering each stage's function in the talk, resulting in functional terms such as Hook, Contention, Advice, Demonstration, and Closure. This process, grounded in Hasan's (1985) theory of generic structure potential, helped determine obligatory and optional stages. Second, connection patterns between stages were analysed using Mann and Thompson's (1987) rhetorical structure theory, focusing on Nucleus-Satellite relations. This was done by examining the stages' roles in their overall contribution to the meaning-making in the talks, whether as the core or complementary unit. Third, drawing on Martin's (1994) theories of macrogenre, the study examined how meanings are expanded to achieve the talks' purpose. Meaning expansions can be potentially realised by embedding genres inside a talk's stage. Therefore, identifying potential genres inside a talk was carried out here. Finally, the analysis was completed by mapping and interpreting the overall findings of the study. The findings were described and interpreted to provide insights into the staging, stage connections, and meaning expansions in "how-to" TEDx talks.

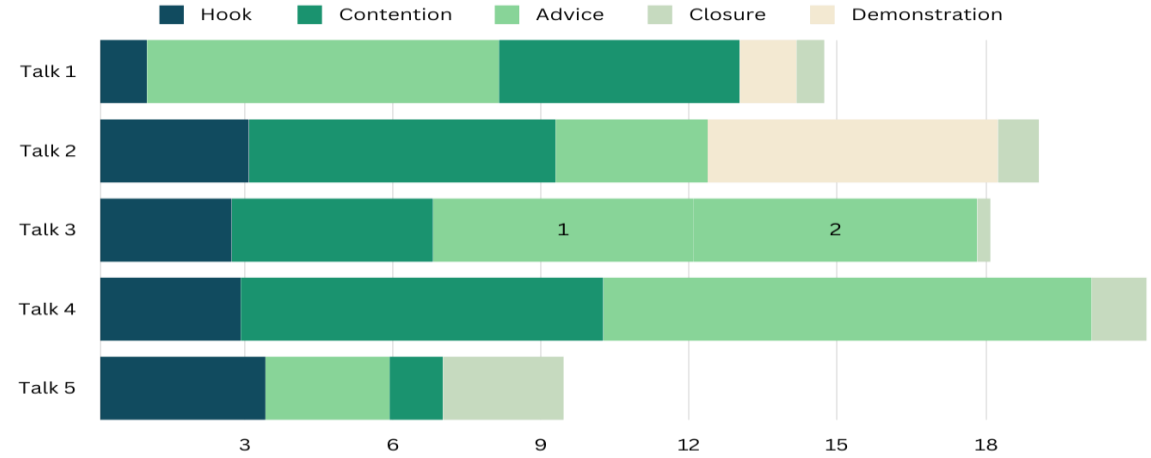
FINDINGS

The data analysis shows that four obligatory stages—Hook, Contention, Advice, and Closure—are present in all five of the most popular "how-to" TEDx talks. Firstly, the Hook serves to intrigue the audience's interest in the subject introduced by the speaker so that they are compelled to continue listening. Next, the Contention stage presents a phenomenon's underlying reason(s) or explanation that helps the audience contextualise the talk's core message. It is usually framed in a way that challenges the audience's initial belief, provoking their thought and inviting them to consider a new perspective or a change in routine. Advice is designed to give the audience practical recommendations on performing an action or mental guidance to achieve a particular result. In other words, this is where the speaker elaborates on the "how-to." Lastly, Closure is where the speaker reiterates the key takeaway, often offering a call to action or a reflective conclusion that reinforces the talk's impact. As for the optional stage, Demonstration, it appears in two talks. It includes live demonstrations in addition to the speaker's verbal instruction, illustrating how the advice may work when applied in real life. The staging of each analysed talk can be depicted in Figure 1.

The figure shows a consistent occurrence of the four obligatory stages, represented by blocks in shades of green. The Hook and Closure always appear, respectively, at the beginning and end of the talks, despite the variety of organisations and the number of appearances for the Contention and Advice stages. Talks 2–4 have a relatively similar progression, with the speakers first introducing an issue and its importance (Contention) and following it with practical or mental guidance (Advice). This differs from Talks 1 and 5, which invert the order of both. Additionally, Talk 3 includes two interconnected Advice stages—one outlines the principles underlying the "how-to," and the other lists the series of actions to achieve the goal of learning a new language in six months.

In terms of the use of the optional stage, represented by the colour cream, Demonstration appears in two talks. In Talk 1, Graham Shaw engages his audience by having them follow step-by-step drawing instructions to reinforce one of the talk's purposes: to prove that people can draw. So does Josh Kaufman in Talk 2, who, in addition to addressing the methods of efficient practice in the

Figure 1
Stage Distribution (Timeline-Synchronised)



preceding Advice stage, performs his newly learned skill in playing the ukulele to prove that his 20-hour rule theory can be implemented. Thus, besides noting the obligatory and optional stages, this analysis highlights that the sequence of some stages, such as Contention, Advice, and Demonstration, can be adjusted to emphasise certain messages of the talk.

After all the stages are identified and mapped, the next step is to describe the structure's dynamics based on the Nucleus-Satellite relation proposed by Mann and Thompson (1987), which can also reveal the purpose of each stage and the talk's overall logical flow of ideas. The Nucleus, having the closest function to realising the purpose of the talk, conveys the core message and serves as the focal point around which other elements are organised. Meanwhile, Satellites are supporting elements that provide additional context or elaboration to the Nucleus, expanding the central idea but not as fundamental to the ideational impact of the talk. Thus, considering that talks with "how-to" themes typically suggest that the content will provide guidance to achieve a particular goal, the Advice stage holds the nuclearity.

Although there seems to be a consistent stage organisation in "how-to" talks, two generic structure potentials, with regard to Contention's attachment to Advice, can be recognised. They are formulated as follows, with the caret symbol (^) indicating sequence and the round brackets indicating optionality.

1) Hook ^ Contention ^ Advice ^ (Demonstration) ^ Closure
2) Hook ^ Advice ^ Contention ^ (Demonstration) ^ Closure

The first formula delays the Advice in favour of Contention. This relation appears in Talks 2–4, where each speaker first establishes their position on an issue or informs the factors forming the basis for principles or actions they put forward in the Advice stage. The Nucleus-Satellite orbital models are represented below, with the direction of the arrow suggesting the Satellites' dependency on the Nucleus.

Figure 2 shows the presence of all four obligatory stages and their positions: Advice is the Nucleus that the Hook, Contention, and Closure gravitate toward as Satellites. First, the speaker sparks the audience's curiosity by using relevant stories illustrating the point(s) to be made. The "why" in Contention is then explained to help the audience understand the logic behind the topic, subsequently persuading them to consider the suggested actions or ideas (i.e., the "how-to") presented in Advice. Finally, the Closure serves as the concluding element that emphasises the importance of the talk's main point(s) and encourages the audience to do something specific, such as changing their behaviour or adopting a new perspective.

The same relation appears in Figure 3, with one difference from the former being the presence of the Demonstration as an additional Satellite. In this stage, Josh Kaufman shares his experience implementing the four steps of rapid skills acquisition to learn to play the ukulele. At the end of his medley performance, Kaufman confesses that he had just hit his twentieth hour of practising the instrument on the TEDx stage, demonstrating how applying the 20-hour rule allowed him to become reasonably proficient in something new.

Another variation of the first formula is represented in Figure 4, where the three Satellites are structured based on the interdependency between the two Nuclei. The initial stage progression of Talk 3 is still the same, with Hook and Contention serving as the buildup. In Advice 1, Chris Lonsdale introduces the five principles underlying the seven actions to practice learning a language in six months, which he then lists in Advice 2. The two Nuclei are structured serially since both hold equal importance to the overall

meaning of the talk. Lonsdale then concludes his talk by reiterating the idea that learning a language in six months is achievable with these principles and actions and emphasising that consistent practice and a positive mindset are the keys to success.

Next, the second formula foregrounds the Advice, where the speaker immediately directs the audience's focus to the vital message of the talk. The models, as seen in Figures 5 and 6, depict this Nucleus-Satellite relation in Talks 5 and 1.

Figure 2
Nucleus-Satellite Model of Talk 4

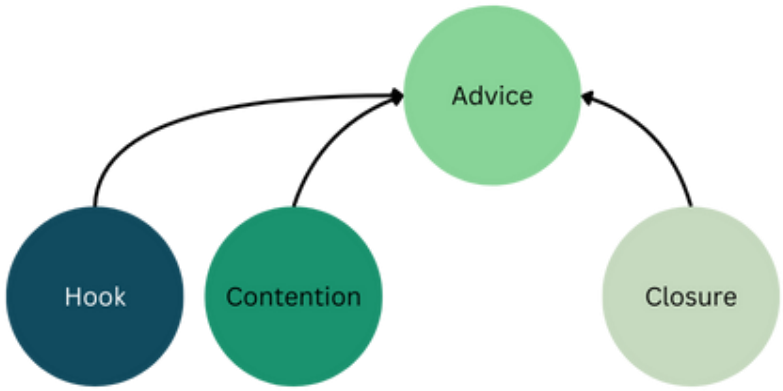


Figure 3
Nucleus-Satellite Model of Talk 2

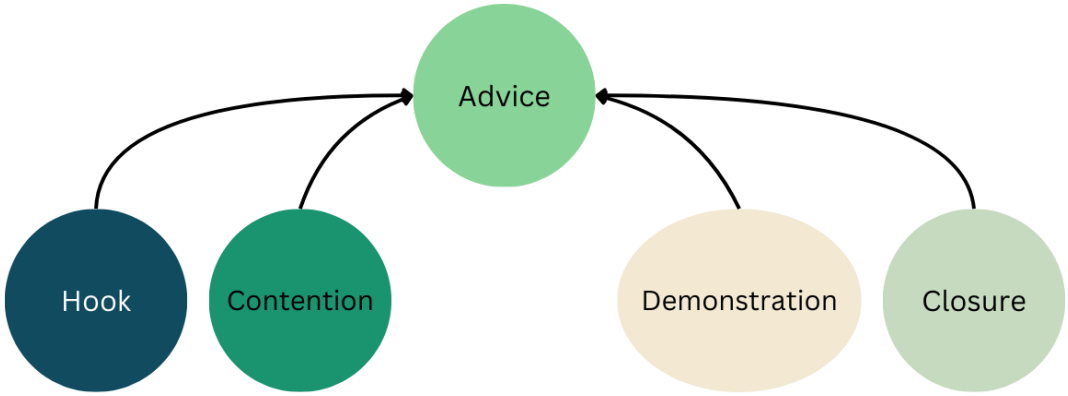


Figure 4
Nucleus-Satellite Model of Talk 3

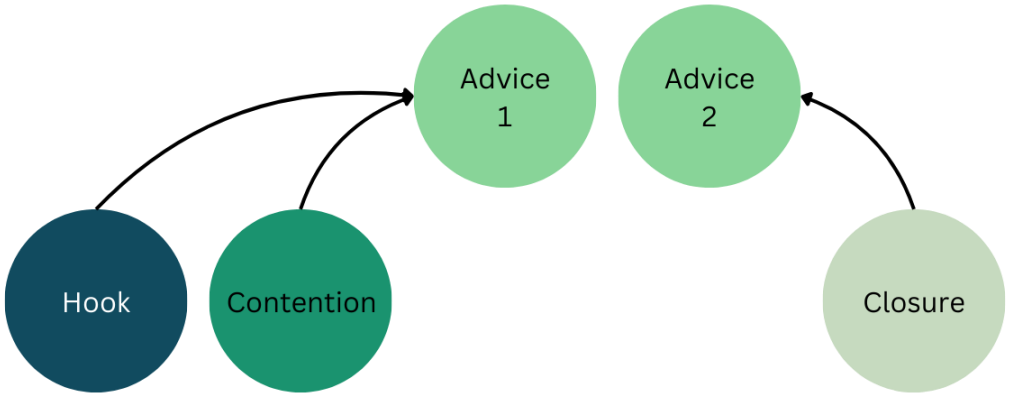


Figure 5
Nucleus-Satellite Model of Talk 5

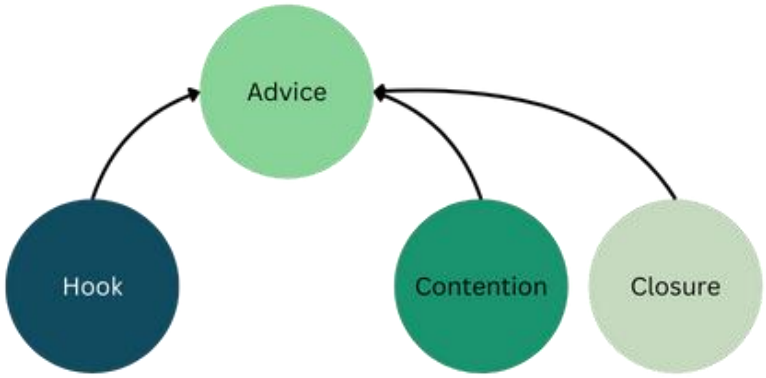
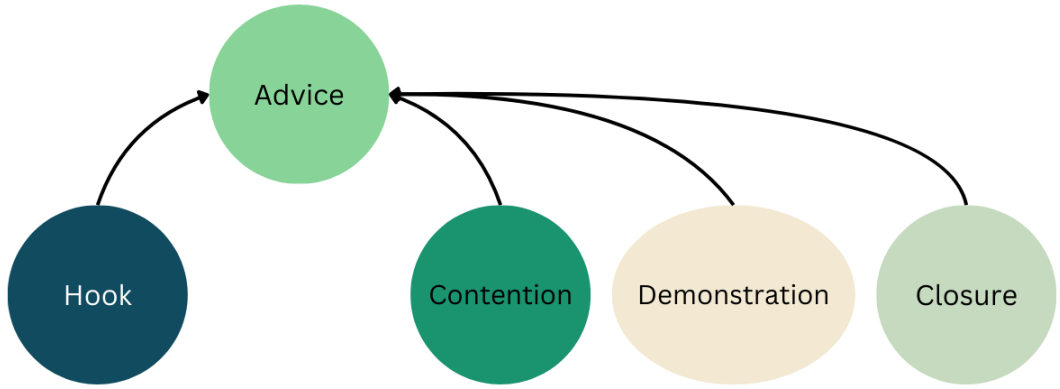


Figure 6
Nucleus-Satellite Model of Talk 1



Identical to the previous descriptions, the two orbital models above represent Advice's function as the nucleus that anchors the entire sequence. The Hook preceding Advice serves as the attention-grabbing element to captivate the audience, preparing the foundation for the Advice in which the speaker elaborates on what needs to be done (i.e., Identical to the previous descriptions, the two orbital models above represent Advice's function as the Nucleus that anchors the entire sequence. The Hook preceding Advice serves as the attention-grabbing element to captivate the audience, preparing the foundation for the Advice in which the speaker elaborates on what needs to be done (i.e., the "how-to"). The arguments supporting the guidance are then provided in the Contention stage to help the audience contextualise the core message. Finally, the Closure stage follows as another Satellite, drawing the talk to a conclusion that reflects on the Advice.

While Talk 5 contains only the obligatory stages, Talk 1 includes the optional stage, Demonstration, as another supporting element to Advice as the Nucleus. The speaker demonstrates his approach to drawing by breaking down rather detailed character illustrations into simple, easy-to-follow steps. He encourages the audience to engage in hands-on exercises that reveal how drawing can be learned through practice and patience. Considering its arrangement after the Contention, where Graham Shaw shares stories of individuals who have transformed their perception of drawing and developed newfound skills through his method, it seems that the Demonstration further emphasises that drawing is accessible to everyone, regardless of their artistic background. Such a message is also brought up in Closure, where Shaw calls the audience to challenge their beliefs about their perceived inability not only to draw but also to do many other things in life.

Based on the findings above, this Nucleus-Satellite relation analysis highlights the pivotal role of the Advice stage as the Nucleus, with other stages as the Satellites strategically aligned to support and amplify the core message. The variety of organisation between Advice and Contention and the presence of (or lack thereof) Demonstration shows that Satellites can be rearranged or omitted completely without significantly affecting the talk's ideational impact.

In relation to the expansion of meanings, it is found that stages are predominantly expanded through embedding elemental genres in the instructional, narrative, expository, and explanatory

families, such as procedure, observation, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, and factorial explanation. These elemental genres are genres that are commonly found in academic settings. Non-elemental genres, such as rhetorical questions and calls to action, also appear in several talks, particularly in the Hook and Closure stages. The distribution is depicted below. "how-to"). The arguments supporting the guidance are then provided in the Contention stage to help the audience contextualise the core message. Finally, the Closure stage follows as another satellite, drawing the talk to a conclusion that reflects on the Advice.

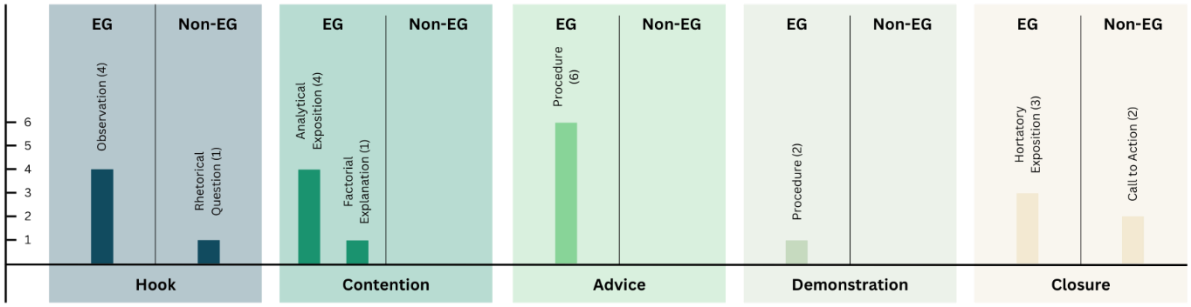
While Talk 5 contains only the obligatory stages, Talk 1 includes the optional stage, Demonstration, as another supporting element to Advice as the nucleus. He demonstrates his approach to drawing by breaking down rather detailed character illustrations into simple, easy-to-follow steps. He encourages the audience to engage in hands-on exercises that reveal how drawing can be learned through practice and patience. Considering its arrangement after the Contention, where Graham Shaw shares stories of individuals who have transformed their perception of drawing and developed newfound skills through his method, it seems that the Demonstration further emphasises that drawing is accessible to everyone, regardless of their artistic background. Such a message is also brought up in Closure, where Shaw calls the audience to challenge their beliefs about their perceived inability not only to draw but also to do many other things in life.

Based on the findings above, this nucleus-satellite relation analysis highlights the pivotal role of the Advice stage as the nucleus, with other stages as the satellites strategically aligned to support and amplify the core message. The variety of organisation between Advice and Contention and the presence of (or lack thereof) Demonstration shows that satellites can be rearranged or omitted completely without significantly affecting the talk's ideational impact.

In relation to the expansion of meanings, it is found that stages are predominantly expanded through embedding elemental genres in the instructional, narrative, expository, and explanatory families, such as procedure, observation, analytical exposition, hortatory exposition, and factorial explanation. These elemental genres are genres that are commonly found in academic settings. Non-elemental genres, such as rhetorical questions and calls to action, also appear in several talks, particularly in the Hook and Closure stages. The distribution is depicted below in Figure 7.

Figure 7

The Distribution of Elemental Genres (EG) and Non-Elemental Genres (Non-EG) in Each Stage



As seen in the Hook box, observation, as a variation of the narrative genre, appears four times in Talks 2–5. Typically, the speaker first briefly describes a significant event and follows it with a personal comment expressing appreciation for a particular aspect. Setting the tone by telling relatable stories grabs the audience's attention; commenting on them helps make the experience meaningful. One example of an observational Hook is in Talk 5, where Adam Leipzig introduces a phenomenon by reflecting on a reunion with his Yale University friends, from which he discovers that many of them were not feeling fulfilled in life despite their successes. He then contrasts this finding with the minority, who were happier and lived more purposeful lives because they understood the fundamentals of their existence.

> On the last evening of my 25th college reunion, there was a party in a tent with dancing, and music, and noise. So much noise that a lot of us started to drift out of the tent so we could hear each other talk and catch up with classmates that we had not seen in more than two decades. As I talked with my friends, I made an astounding discovery: 80% of them were unhappy with their lives. "I feel as though I've wasted my life, and I'm halfway through it," they said. "I don't know what my life is all about." … And 80% of them were unhappy with their lives. Who was happy, the 20%?
>
> As I spoke with the 20%, the happier 20%, I discovered that each of them knew something about their life purpose because they knew five things: (1) who they were, (2) what they did, (3) who they did it for, (4) what those people wanted or needed, and (5) what they got out of it, how they changed as a result. (Leipzig, 2013, 0:36)

Once he lays out the context, he asks the audience an interactive question: "Would you like to know your life purpose in the next five minutes?" to which they answer positively. The talk continues with Leipzig guiding the audience to answer the five questions and understand their implications for self and others.

Meanwhile, Graham Shaw opts to immediately ask a rhetorical question, as a non-elemental genre item, to intrigue the audience in Talk 1, creating a sense of curiosity and inviting reflection. At the same time, he reveals the talk's subject and aims, setting clear expectations and giving the audience a gist of what to expect in the following stages.

> Hi. I've got a question for you. How many people here would say they can draw? I think we've got about one or two percent of the hands going up, and it's interesting, isn't it? It's a little bit like people think of spelling or singing. They think, "You can either do it, or you can't." But I think you can. Because when people say they can't draw, I think it's more to do with beliefs rather than talent and ability. So, I think when you say you can't draw, that's just an illusion, and today, I'd like to prove that to you. (Shaw, 2015, 0:15)

As for the meaning expansion in the Contention stage, two possible genres under the expository and explanatory families are identified. The first is analytical exposition, which appears in four talks (1, 2, 3, and 5). With this approach, the speaker aims to persuade the audience to adopt a position on an issue or idea by providing supporting reasons. In Talk 2, for instance, Josh Kaufman prefaces his argument by addressing the widespread misconception that it takes 10,000 hours to become proficient in a skill. He clarifies that this rule applies to achieving world-class expertise in highly competitive fields, not to learning for personal satisfaction or practical use. Having debunked the myth, Kaufman proposes that significant progress in learning a new skill can be made with just 20 hours of focused practice, making the process sound more accessible and less intimidating.

> How long does it take from starting something and being grossly incompetent and knowing it to being reasonably good? In, hopefully, as short a period of time as possible. So, how long does that take? Here's what my research says: 20 hours. That's it. You can go from knowing nothing about any skill that you can think of. Want to learn a language? Want to learn how to draw? Want to learn how to juggle flaming chainsaws? If you put 20 hours of focused, deliberate practice into that thing, you will be astounded. Astounded at how good you are. Twenty hours is doable. That's about 45 minutes a day for about a month. Even skipping a couple of days here and there. Twenty hours isn't that hard to accumulate. (Kaufman, 2013, 8:28)

The second possible genre to appear in the Contention stage is factorial explanation, which identifies the factors that lead to a particular outcome. In Talk 4, Mel Robbins uses this genre to outline the conditions that result in her contending that achieving something is simple but not easy. Below is an excerpt from the talk.

> So why don't you have what you want!? When you have all the information that you need, you have the contacts that you need, there are probably free tools online that allow you to start a business, or join a group, or do whatever the heck you want!?
>
> It all comes down to one word: F*©#. … And of course, you know I'm talking about the word "fine." … Here's the deal with saying that you're fine. It's actually genius. Because if you're fine, you don't have to do anything about it. … The bigger issue with "fine" is that you say it to yourself. That thing that you want, I guarantee you, you've convinced yourself that you're fine not having it. That's why you're not pushing yourself.
>
> All day long, you have ideas that could change your life, that could change the world, that could change the way that you feel, and what do you do with them? Nothing! … In any area of your life that you want to change, any, there's one fact that you need to know. This one: You are never going to feel like it. Ever. No one's coming. Motivation isn't happening. You're never going to feel like it. (Robbins, 2011, 4:14)

In the first half of the Contention stage, Robbins explains that the habit of saying "I'm fine" can be detrimental because not acknowledging emotions leads someone to avoid dealing with the problems at hand. Once someone becomes comfortable living with their issues, the motivation to change becomes less likely to come. This part emphasises Robbins' point that change is hard because one will never feel like doing the difficult things that lead to success.

Next is the Advice stage, where the "how-to" messages are conveyed in the procedure genre as it functions to guide the audience with instructions to perform a specialised sequence of activities. Typical procedural text often employs specific language devices, such as imperative verbs and sequencing words. The following are some of the seven practical steps to learning a language presented in the Advice 2 stage of Talk 3, showing the variety of expressions of the two language devices.

> Number one: Listen a lot. I call it brain-soaking. You put yourself in a context where you're hearing tons and tons and tons of a language, and it doesn't matter if you understand it or not. …
>
> The sixth thing you have to do is copy the face. You got to get the muscles working right so you can sound in a way that people will understand you. …
>
> And the final idea here, the final action you need to take, is something that I call "direct connect." So, what you do is you go into that imagery and all of that memory, and you come out with another pathway. … And you build it over time, you become more and more skilled at just connecting the new sounds to those images that you already have into that internal representation. And over time, you

> even become naturally good at that process, that becomes unconscious. (Lonsdale, 2013, 12:21)

However, some procedures are presented in a non-typical structure that deviates from the standard step-by-step format. The most distinct example of this stylistic difference can be found in Talk 5, where Leipzig guides the audience to clarify their life purposes in a Q&A-like manner—alternately asking the five questions, letting the audience answer, and putting them all together into a meaningful sentence. Meanwhile, in Talk 4, various principles are referenced to explain the expected outcomes of following specific steps, namely when Mel Robbins encourages the audience to use the five-second rule to force themselves out of the autopilot stage and act on their impulses.

The procedure genre also appears in the Demonstration stage in typical and non-typical structures. In Talk 1, Graham Shaw invites the audience to follow his step-by-step drawing tutorial to prove that, contrary to their belief, they indeed have the ability to draw. Eight characters are drawn, and the following are the steps to draw one called Spike.

> I'd like you to draw along with me. I'll draw the first line, you draw, and when you've done that, look up, and I'll know you're ready for the next line. Okay, here we go. (1) Start with the nose. (2) Now the eyes. They're like 66s or speech marks. That's it. (3) Next, the mouth. Nice, big smile. (4) Now, over here, the ear. (5) Next, some spiky hair. (6) Next, put the pen to the left of the mouth, a little line like that. (7) Pen under the ear, drop a line like that. (8) Pen to the left of the neck, top of the T-shirt. (9) Line to the left, line to the right. (Shaw, 2015, 1:58)

In Talk 2, instead of a straightforward list of instructions, the non-typical procedure is embedded within Kaufman's recount of learning to play the ukulele.

> So, one of the things that I've wanted to learn how to do for a long time is to play the ukulele. … And so, the first thing about playing the ukulele is in order to practice, you have to have one, right? So, I got an ukulele. You have to get the tools that you are using to practice. You have to make sure they're available. My ukulele didn't come with strings attached. I had to figure out how to put those on. …
>
> Now, one of the things when I was ready to actually start practicing was I looked in online databases and songbooks for how to play songs. … And when I started looking at songs, I had an ukulele chord book that had like hundreds of chords. Looking at this, and, "Wow, that's intimidating." But when you look at the actual songs, you see the same chords over and over, right? … So, while I was doing my research, I found a wonderful little medley of pop songs by a band called Axis of Awesome. And what Axis of Awesome says is that you can learn, or you can play pretty much any pop song of the past five decades, if you know four chords, and those chords are G, D, Em, and C. Four chords pump out every pop song ever, right? So, I thought, "This is cool! I would like to play every pop song ever." So, that was the first song I decided to learn, and I would like to actually share it with you. Ready? (Kaufman, 2013, 12:37)

Kaufman proceeds to sing the song accompanied by the ukulele, entertaining the audience and demonstrating what the 20-hour rule may result in real life.

Lastly, the hortatory exposition genre predominates the Closure stage by appearing in Talks 1, 2, and 5, in which the speaker reiterates the key takeaway and gives a reflective conclusion that amplifies the talk's significance. In Talk 5, for instance, Kaufman draws a broader picture of everything he brings up in the talk—the 20-hour rule theory, the four steps to efficient practice, and his personal ukulele learning experience—saying that it is emotions that hold people back from jumping into learning something new, indirectly motivating the audience not to give up on any learning opportunities just because they are not instantly good at it.

> And so, it's amazing, pretty much anything that you can think of, what do you want to do. The major barrier to learn something new is not intellectual. It's not the process of you learning a bunch of little tips or tricks or things. The major barrier is emotional. We're scared. Feeling stupid doesn't feel good. At the beginning of learning anything new, you feel really stupid. So, the major barrier is not intellectual; it's emotional. But put 20 hours into anything. It doesn't matter what you want to learn. Do you want to learn a language? Want to learn how to cook? Want to learn how to draw? What turns you on? What lights you up? Go out and do that thing. It only takes 20 hours. Have fun. (Kaufman, 2013, 18:25)

Calls to action also appear in the Closure stage as a non-elemental genre item that the speaker uses to conclude their talk. At the end of Talk 4, Mel Robbins encourages the audience to practice the five-second rule at the TEDx post-event gathering, conveying a sense of urgency to prompt immediate action and highlighting the important message of her talk, which is to not allow doubt or procrastination to dictate their actions.

> So, I want you to practice this today. When we go off to party—thank God it's coming soon because I think we all could use a cocktail—I want you to practice the five-second rule. You see somebody, and you think you have an impulse: they look interesting? Walk over there! You were inspired by somebody, and you have a request? Make it! That's why you're here! Experiment with it, and I think you'll be shocked about what happens. … And if there is anything that I can do, if I can do anything to make you do the things you don't want to do so you can have what you want, I will do it. But you need to walk over, you need to open your mouth, and you need to make the request. You got it? Good. Go do it. (Robbins, 2011, 20:20)

Overall, the elemental genre that appears most frequently in the five most popular "how-to" TEDx talks is the procedure, which appears in every talk's Advice stage. This finding aligns with its nuclearity status of having the closest function to realising the purpose of a text, which in this case is to give instructions or guides on performing a task or achieving a specific outcome.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the five most popular "how-to" TEDx talks shows that the meanings are realised in stages to achieve their general purpose of providing actionable instructions or guidance on how to accomplish a specific task or achieve a particular outcome. Such talks typically consist of four obligatory stages—i.e., Hook, Contention, Advice, and Closure—with Advice being the Nucleus around which the others orbit as Satellites. Demonstration may also appear in the talk as an optional Satellite. Within these stages, genres are embedded to expand their meaning potential, unfolding the talks to achieve their goals.

The findings on stages and their progression confirm Hasan's (1985) theory of generic structure potential (GSP), which includes the notion that texts of the same genre may have different structures, but each realises a possibility built into the GSP. The set of obligatory stages recognises a particular GSP because the optional stage has broader applicability in that its occurrence can be predicted. In this case, the Hook, Contention, Advice, and Closure stages make up "how-to" talks. Demonstration, although not always required, can be expected to occur when it is relevant. In Graham Shaw's talk, Why People Believe They Can't Draw - and How to Prove They Can, Demonstration is appropriate because it further elaborates the two mental guidance suggestions in the Advice stage: "One is to have an open mind. And two, just be prepared to have a go; so, grab a pen and a piece of paper" (Shaw, 2015, 1:16).

Among the four obligatory stages, Advice is the most instrumental in realising the purpose of the text. It holds higher significance than the Nucleus, in which the "how-to" message is addressed. If it is removed, the importance of the content in its Satellites will not be clear, and the audience will be left with incoherent pieces of information. What is found here justifies the point underlined by Hannah and Densmore (2024), which emphasises that the organisation of a talk has to be effective and logical. Information needs to be arranged in such a way that it can help the audience comprehend information easily.

The appearance of Advice can be organised variably. As formulated in the findings, two generic structure potentials can be recognised in terms of Contention's attachment to Advice: one delays the Advice, while the other foregrounds it in favour of Contention. Regardless of the variety, the progression of stages in these orders is consistent with, for example, the findings from Sukarno and Salikin's (2022) study, with speeches generally moving from the introductory stage (orienting the audience and grounding the topic) to content delivery (developing the messages) and ending with closure (giving concluding statements and/or calls to action).

Talks with the first kind of organisation follow the sequence of "What? So what? Now what?" questions (Anderson, 2016). The speaker starts by making an effort to grab the attention of the audience toward the topic (Hook), elaborating on why the topic is important (Contention), laying out what the next steps are (Advice), and calling on the audience to take further actions (Closure). According to Sinek (2009), starting with "why" not only "sets the audience's expectations" (p. 162) but also "provides a clear filter for decision-making" (p. 188). Meanwhile, talks with the Advice-Contention structure put the "how-to" in their broader context, enabling the audience to grasp their significance and implications.

The consistent appearance of Contention, which typically appears in talks aiming to answer questions related to cause and purpose (i.e., "why" talks), is an interesting finding in itself. One fundamental reason for this, from a psychological perspective, is that humans are inherently curious and always in pursuit of guidance, and questioning everything helps to make sense of the surrounding world (Adams, 2016, as cited in Neirotti, 2021). In this case, the "why" and "how" go side by side as the former provides the motivation or justification, and the latter determines the appropriate methods to achieve it. Knowing "why" something matters can inspire action, and asking "how" ensures that action is carried out effectively. This process adds to and rearranges the audience's existing thoughts, or in the words of Sinek (2009, p. 83), it is "the upgrading of a worldview to better reflect reality." In short, the Contention stage helps clarify intricate ideas, ensuring the audience understands the content more fully and grasps the underlying significance.

The findings on meaning expansion indicate that "how-to" TEDx talks, as a macrogenre, combine elements from multiple elemental and non-elemental genres, including those of the instructional, narrative, expository, and explanatory families, through embedding (Martin, 1994). According to Szenes (2022), elemental genres are characterised by a staged, goal-oriented structure that unfolds in predictable schematic stages. In contrast, non-elemental genres are smaller, more flexible units embedded within stages, contributing to the overall purpose without adhering to the full schematic structure of elemental genres. This blending allows speakers not only to instruct but also to inspire and connect with their audience on a

personal level. For instance, observational stories in the Hook stage allow the speaker to grab the audience's attention and create an emotional connection with them by sharing commented personal experiences. Adam Leipzig, in his talk, How to Know Your Life Purpose in 5 Minutes, reflects on a familiar situation of attending a class reunion during which he discovered that only a small portion of his accomplished friends felt content with their lives. Not only does this technique encourage the audience to reflect on themselves, but it also helps Leipzig to guide the audience toward the topic without being overly direct. As Anderson (2016, p. 66) noted, stories are "instant generators of interest, empathy, emotion, and intrigue" that "establish the context of a talk and make people care about a topic."

Another instance is the use of personal recount as a variation of the narrative genre that appears within the instructional procedure in the Demonstration stage of Josh Kaufman's talk, The First 20 Hours—How to Learn Anything. He further specifies how the methods of efficient practice may be implemented in real life by telling his experience learning to play the ukulele, from making the instrument available, researching the chords, and finally performing a medley in front of the audience. Not only does it make the instructions more relatable, but Kaufman's demonstration also maintains the audience's interest, proving that storytelling profoundly affects the delivery aspect of the talks. Furthermore, these findings correspond to Martin and Rose's (2008) theory on genre relations, illustrating how genres are interconnected—i.e., one can influence or lead to another—and that genres are not solely realised through language but often involve multiple modes of communication, such as visual and auditory elements.

Non-elemental genres also play a role in expanding the meaning potential of the Hook and Closure stages in several talks. The opening rhetorical question asked by Shaw (2015, 0:18), "How many people here would say they can draw? I think we've got about one or two percent of the hands going up, and it's interesting, isn't it?" encourages the audience to reflect on their opinions of themselves. Calls to action appear in the Closure stage, during which the speakers elevate the instructional content, transforming it from mere advice into a powerful call for personal growth. Such a motivational element energises the audience, creating a sense of urgency and possibility that encourages immediate action.

This study reveals that "how-to" TEDx talks are realised in stages, each incorporating genres to pursue a particular goal. Although there may be variations in its order, it is the obligatory stages that identify the generic structure potential. The strategic use of various elemental and non-elemental genres also demonstrates that they contribute to the enhancement of talk delivery. While the findings offer valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations. Firstly, considering that the talks analysed in this article were uploaded more than a decade ago and focused only on one theme, future research may observe more recent videos on contemporary topics using a similar framework to offer more comprehensive insights into the staging, stage connections, and meaning development of the TEDx corpus. Secondly, involving participants for opinions on the content's listenability and delivery engagement should also be considered to produce findings that are grounded in their lived experiences and needs, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the research. Lastly, based on the observation of how contemporary public speaking emphasises both the visual experience and the speaker's quality, future work should look into the TEDx talk presentations, especially the variation of visual aids the speakers use to engage the audience. As Rosette-Crake (2019, p. 41) noted, "People no longer listen to speeches; they watch them, and they have come to expect the speaker to be in full view."

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to examine the organisations of "how to" TEDx talks by dissecting five videos of the TEDx talks. This study reveals that every talk is structured to achieve its purpose. In offering clear, practical instructions or intellectual guidance, TEDx speakers typically build their talks around the "how-to" message comprised in the Advice stage. The strategic use of embedded elemental and non-elemental genres to support and amplify the core message is also demonstrated to enhance both the audience's engagement and comprehension. This approach not only exhibits the versatility of genre conventions in contemporary public speaking but also highlights the potential for rich and impactful communication. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of how genre can be leveraged to achieve specific communicative goals, offering valuable insights for both theoretical exploration and practical application in instructional and persuasive contexts.

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