Tech Talk Proposal Drafting Kit

This worksheet is a starting point to help guide you towards crafting a strong talk proposal.

If you are fairly certain about what topics you'd like to propose on, you can skip the first step.

Step One: Ideation

You do not have to be a domain expert to talk about something! But it is worth taking some time to assess your own expertise on your proposed subject matter, so that the talk can be authentically pitched to the correct audience. Take a few minutes to brainstorm some topics. They can be as broad as "front end development" or as specific as "monitoring Neo4j with Prometheus".

Topics I could present on to an audience of **beginners**	Topics I could present on to an audience of **peers and experienced practitioners**

For topics in the first column, you should consider proposing introductory-level talks. Almost every multi-track conference has room for introductory talks. For intermediate-level talks, you should clearly manage expectations for getting the most out of the talk. We'll cover this in Step Four.

Step Two: What unique angle do you bring to this topic?

Here are some questions to get you started.

What personal experience do you have with this tool/process? How would you talk about this, as a story, to your peers?

What would you do differently if you were to use this technology/process again? How did you come to those conclusions?

If you substituted “TECH”, “COMPANY”, and other generic words in for the specific tools and entities, would this still be an interesting story? Ex. “We use Kubernetes at Megacorp to drive business-critical operators.” ➜ “We use TECH at COMPANY to drive business-critical operations.”

Step Three: What do you want for the audience to take away?

Three is a nice, round number of “key takeaways” to highlight in a talk proposal. For example: *“By the end of this talk about Istio, audience members will have a basic understanding of (1) the use cases for service meshes, (2) the trade-offs involved in centralizing inter-microservice communication, and (3) the class of problems that an open sourced tool can solve more effectively than vendor solutions.”*

Step Four: What should the audience know beforehand to get the most out of this talk?

This one is tricky. On the one hand, you don't want to accidentally discourage folks from attending. But on the other, expectation management is very important, for both you and your audience. Rather than writing "You should know how to deploy a Kubernetes cluster", try "Kubernetes operators who have set up clusters from scratch will get the most out of this harrowing tale of deploying on bare metal."

What prerequisite knowledge should audience members have in order to get the most out of your talk?

Step Five: Stitch it all together!

If you've been filling out the worksheet, by this point you will have already answered the main questions that will generally get your proposal out of the discard pile. **What, why you, and how? + Prerequisite caveats.**

Have a go at writing your first draft of your abstract:

Go show this to at least three people who have enough context to get value out of this talk. As you solicit their feedback, ask them, "What would you expect to learn?" If their answer doesn't line up with your assumptions, then *iterate, iterate, iterate*.