Creating Your Elevator Pitch

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Workshop materials adapted from Chris Feak and Pamela Bogart
Elevator what??

http://books.google.com/ngrams tells us...

Graph these comma-separated phrases: elevator pitch, elevator speech, elevator talk

between 1994 and 2008 from the corpus English with smoothing of 3

1994 2008
So Pamela, what do you do?
I work with international graduate students at the University of Michigan on really advanced English language for things like dissertation writing and conference presentations. (24 words)
What is an elevator pitch?
An elevator pitch is...

- An informative and concise description of your work
- A response to “What do you do at U of M?” or “What are you studying?” or “Tell me about yourself” or “Tell me about your research”
- 10-15 seconds: important detail (~ 25-30 words)
- 30 seconds: what you do, how, and why (~ 60 words)
- 90 seconds: the above + what sets you apart (~ 150 words)
How do you feel about this example?

https://youtu.be/HUwcKuIASjw?t=17s
What are the goals of an elevator pitch?

What are your goals?

- Attend a conference: meet someone in the elevator and not be awkward—networking with multiple people.
- Give an effective self-introduction at the start of a conference paper: effective, concise, and NOT BORING.
- Group seminar or group meeting—round-robin introductions.
- An essential skill for me as a graduate student—I must do this with every person I meet in a professional setting.
What are the goals of an elevator pitch?

Some common goals:

- Continue the interaction beyond the initial 15-30 seconds
- Exchange contact information
- Leave a positive impression
- In sum: to interest someone, to continue interacting, and to establish your identity
Where do we “give” our elevator pitches?

- Meetings: “Let’s have everyone introduce themselves.”
- Conferences
- Departmental events (talks, colloquia, etc.)
- Receptions
- Job fairs
- Any opportunity for networking
Useful phrases to open & close

Question: So, what do you do at Michigan?

Openers
Well, imagine ___________________.
So, in our lab/research group, we work with __________ called _____________.
… but what if you had ____________?
If you had to guess the ____________, what would you say?
My research is to reveal/figure out/find out/design/model/discover _____________.
My goal is to _______________.
Have you ever … ?
Today, we have over [number] in the world.

Results/Impact
This will result in _________________.
Through ________________, we can revolutionize _______________.

Let’s try it

☐ You have 3 minutes to prepare. (What you do, how, & why.)

☐ Turn to a person you don’t know.
☐ Introduce yourselves by name & department
☐ One asks the other, “So, what are you studying?”
☐ Respond in 30 seconds.
What did you find out about your partner?

☐ Name
☐ Department
☐ What next step your partner aims for, what goals your partner has
☐ Why my partner is doing a particular thing
☐ Why my partner is analyzing data a certain way
☐ How my partner can contribute to his/her field
☐ The significance or importance of my partner’s work to me/or to the world
What would make the pitches even better?

- Use a specific example to illustrate importance
- Practice to make it seem natural and spontaneous even under stressful situations (practice 5 different versions for every context)
- Avoid jargon with non-specialists (words only a specialist would know) Noble Gas, Isotope
- Show your enthusiasm through body language, body position, vocal energy
Additional Recommendations

- Jot down the points you want to **highlight**.
- Use **words** that a non-expert would know.
- Build on what your **listener** likely knows — having a sense of common ground is essential.
- Use **metaphors** and analogies.
- Tell a **story** to tell your story.
- Explain the **problem** you are solving.
Let’s try it: new and improved (#2)

- Again, take 3 minutes to plan a revised elevator pitch using 1 or more of these suggestions.

- Return to your partner. The new listener asks, “So, what about you?”

- Respond in 30 seconds.
“I’ve got an elevator pitch, an escalator pitch, and, just to be safe, a stairway pitch.”
What could you add to your pitch to interest your listener?

What do we care about in academia or in the workforce?

- Problems
- Dilemmas
- Challenges
- Advances
- Novelty

What can we add to this list?

- Outcomes/Impacts
- Social impact
- Usefulness
- Cost & Profit
- Service
It takes 4 seconds for silence to become awkward.

Cone/Cup Organization of content

To Experts/Peers

Background

Details

More specific details

Results/implications

To Non-specialists

What do you do and why?

Details

How does this work connect to the world? Why should I care?
3-part Organization of Content

How to organize the content?

- Challenge-Action-Results
- Motivation-Explanation-Impact
- Context-Problem-Solution
- Story-Intervention-New Outcome
Tailoring to Audience

How would elevator pitches be different for these three academic/job search audiences?

- Someone *in your broad discipline*, but not your specific research area (e.g. cancer research, but not genomic cancer research)

- Someone who is in the same very general area, but not familiar with your specific discipline: (e.g. you are both in engineering, social sciences, or humanities)

- Someone completely outside of any related fields
How do you Communicate with Non-Experts?

Give them the view from 3,500 feet
Example “Out of Area” Audiences

- Members of a non-profit organization
- Potential employers
- Friends and family
- Policy makers
- Grant funders
- Others?
How do you Communicate with Experts?

☐ With your advisor and peers you may need to be at ground level.

☐ They don’t necessarily want the aerial view.

☐ But be ready in case they do want it.
Experts might expect a zoomed-in view
But sometimes you need to zoom out
Kaposi's sarcoma-associated herpesvirus (KSHV) is considered the etiologic agent of Kaposi's sarcoma and several lymphoproliferative disorders. Recently, the KSHV genome was cloned into a bacterial artificial chromosome and used to construct a recombinant KSHV carrying a deletion of the viral interferon regulatory factor gene (F. C. Zhou, Y. J. Zhang, J. H. Deng, X. P. Wang, H. Y. Pan, E. Hettler, and S. J. Gao, J. Virol. 76:6185-6196, 2002). The K8.1 glycoprotein is a structural component of the KSHV particle and is thought to facilitate virus entry by binding to heparan sulfate moieties on cell surfaces. To further address the role of K8.1 in virus infectivity, a K8.1-null recombinant virus (BAC36ΔK8.1) was constructed by deletion of most of the K8.1 open reading frame and insertion of a kanamycin resistance gene cassette within the K8.1 gene. Southern blotting and diagnostic PCR confirmed the presence of the engineered K8.1 gene deletion. Transfection of the wild-type genome (BAC36) and mutant genome (BAC36ΔK8.1) DNAs into 293 cells in the presence or absence of the complementing plasmid (pCDNAK8.1A), transiently expressing the K8.1A gene, produced infectious virions in the supernatants of transfected cells. These results demonstrated that the K8.1 glycoprotein is not required for KSHV entry into 293 cells.

How do you Zoom Out?

Let’s watch an example from Professor Raphael Luna.

For Grandma
Features of this zoomed-out pitch

Begins with a very broad statement of the area.

Talks about bricks, building blocks, chief, factory workers.

☑️ Process is described as brick manufacturing.

☑️ Problem is described as how to make fewer bricks.

☑️ Aim is to slow down brick making and find a cancer treatment.
Other Ideas for Zooming Out

- Focus on the problem you are addressing.
- Highlight how your work is aimed at helping someone or something.
- Discuss how you are doing your work.
- Relate your work to a well-known story.
- Use an analogy to a well-known, concrete part of everyday life.

These ideas are much like our original list of ideas for helping our audience get interested, understand, and remember.
Audience: Why should your listener care?

Say *why* your work is important.

- The significance of your work is evident to you, but maybe not to others.

- Focus on how your research is going to shed light on a problem that people care about.

- If the listener is in the same field as you, describe what makes your research unique.
Avoid jargon.

- Technical terms may sound impressive, but they won't help anyone understand your research.

- The average intelligent person does not know the jargon.

- Example

  I research *mindfulness-based cognitive therapy* →
  I’m interested in helping people with autism succeed at work and in social settings.
Try Again--Audience-Specific (#3)

☐ Turn to a new person.

☐ First, find out their name and their department.

☐ Next, ask what their familiarity level is with your broad area of study.

☐ Then, based on their answer, give your audience-sensitive elevator pitch (30-45 seconds).

*If you have extra time, reverse roles.*
Summary

Be prepared.

☐ Know your key points.

☐ Know the identity you want to project.

☐ Practice until smooth.

Know your audience: have several versions ready.

Know your goals.

☐ Share your research?

☐ Secure funding?

☐ Get a job or internship?

☐ Find a collaborator? Find an advisor? Find a mentor?

☐ Just network?
Tips to remember

Think about big picture.

☐ Elevator pitches are meant to be short. Avoid details.

☐ Give your listener time to ask questions. If your listener wants more detail, he or she will ask for it.

☐ If you're looking for a job, pick two or three points that would make you look like a valuable employee.

Relate this speaking event to your writing skill.

☐ Think about what you might write in the discussion section of a paper.
How to get ready

☐ Practice, practice, practice.
☐ Rehearse your elevator pitch with a mirror, a webcam, your phone, or friends.
☐ Practice can also help calm your nerves when it comes time to deliver.
☐ But don't sound stiff and mechanical.
☐ Perhaps memorize key points rather than a full script.

☐ Be enthusiastic.
☐ You don't want to put your elevator audience to sleep between floors.
☐ If you're not interested in your project, why should anyone else be?
Useful resources

American Psychological Association advice to graduate students on creating elevator pitches

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yi41U9ahyoE
Before and after elevator pitch with Vanessa Van Edwards: movement, hand gestures, story

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82unpCQRQHQ
Lowering your overall vocal tone in your elevator pitch by taking a big breath

http://graduate.rice.edu/90secondthesis
Lots of winning elevator pitch contestants

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_1GWuKFNfQ
What kinds of questions you might be asked at a conference

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2N03L6OaxeE
TED Talk about turning around the elevator pitch--getting the other person to reveal lots about themselves, and then using what they’ve shared as openings to identify connections and bridges. Michelle Golden. “The Elevator Speech is out of order.”
Let’s pause to touch base about the **English Language Institute** (ELI).

What other English for Academic Purposes resources can the ELI offer you?
English for Academic Purposes Courses for Graduate Students

Writing
ELI 521 Academic Writing I
ELI 522 Research Paper Writing
ELI 620 Dissertation Writing + Writing for Publication I
ELI 621 Dissertation Writing + Writing for Publication II

Speaking + Listening
ELI 531 Language + Communication
ELI 533 Interactive Listening + Communication
ELI 534 Discussion + Oral Argumentation
ELI 544 Academic Presentations
ELI 560+561 Community-Engaged Language Practicum
ELI 601 Speaking in Research Contexts

Pronunciation
ELI 536 Pronunciation I
ELI 537 Pronunciation II
ELI 538 Pronunciation in Context

Grammar + Vocabulary
ELI 510 Academic Reading + Vocabulary (online)
ELI 512 Spoken and Written Grammar

Discipline-specific
ELI 530 Academic Speaking + Writing for Architecture & Urban Planning
ELI Non-Credit Offerings

Language Clinics
- Graduate Writing Clinic
- Graduate Speaking Clinic
- GSI Speaking Clinic

Conversation Circles
- Volunteer leaders: Students, faculty, staff
- Everyday social conversation
- Free
- Year ‘round
- Sign up still open now!

EAP Workshops for Graduate Students
- Writing Academic Email
- Self-Editing Your Written Work
- What Is Academic Style?
- Power Up Your English With Great Self-Study Apps & Sites
- Creating Your Elevator Pitch: Here you are!
ELI Academic Advising + Counseling + Registration

Advising sessions
- Individual meeting
  - 15 - 20 minutes
  - Informal needs assessment
- ELI Study Plan
  - Course recommendations
  - Other resources
- Follow-up sessions encouraged:
  - End of first term
  - Anytime during time at U-M
- Sign up: eli-advisor@umich.edu

Registration
- Register via Wolverine Access
- No extra course fees -- included in full-time tuition
- Courses are credit-bearing
- Many graded pass/fail
- Grades do not affect GPA

ELI Academic Advisor: Theresa Rohlck /ELI Academic Advisor
Workshop Evaluation

Your feedback is valuable to us and will help us improve the experience of future participants. Thank you!

bit.ly/umicoration
Thank you and good luck!
What are you doing?

- “I'm working hard to get a good paycheck and reference for another job.”
- “What does it look like I'm doing? I'm pouring concrete!”
- “I'm building a shelter for the homeless. There’s where the kitchen will be and over there are the bedrooms. This over here is . . .”
Extending an analogy

- My work is focused on finding treatments for cancer, which is essentially a disease in which cell growth is not properly controlled.

- Then talk about the bricks, building blocks production process and how the focus is on controlling the manufacturing problem—how to make fewer bricks.

- If we can find a way to make fewer bricks, we will have a treatment.