

---

# The Elevator Pitch: Presenting Your Research in Conversation

Gretchen Busl, Ph.D.

Associate Program Director, Grants and Fellowships

Matthew Capdevielle, Ph.D.

Director, University Writing Center

---

# What is an *Elevator Pitch* or *Research Spiel*?



- a concise statement of your research interests and experience to be shared *informally* and *orally* in various professional contexts.
  - a brief encounter with a scholar in your field at a conference
  - introductions around a table at the beginning of meeting
  - introduction to a guest speaker in the hallway right before his/her talk
  - conversation at a reception for a speaker
  - an actual elevator ride with a search committee member

# What is the *goal* of an elevator pitch?



- To create a memorable and positive impression
- To open the door to further conversation

# Questions your elevator pitch should answer:

- What is the **topic** of your research?
- What is the **problem, issue, or question** that you are asking and addressing in your research?
- Why is that problem interesting and important?  
(i.e. **So what?**)
- How does your work connect with a **broader disciplinary conversation** about this topic/problem in your field, and what does it add to that conversation?

# Language:

## – key nouns

- offer topical touchstones that are accessible to wide range of educated people
- avoid jargon if possible or deliver specialized terms using appositives

## – action verbs

- express relationships among these key nouns using action verbs
- describe the *movement* of your work and the *activity* or *action* of your involvement

“I...”

### Analysis:

- analyze
- define
- categorize
- classify
- compare
- contrast
- systematize

### Application:

- apply
- argue
- articulate
- conclude
- defend
- demonstrate
- differentiate
- employ
- establish
- extend
- hypothesize
- illustrate
- implement
- propose
- theorize

### Synthesis:

- combine
- construct
- create
- design
- formulate
- frame
- integrate
- merge
- project
- solve
- synthesize
- unite

### Evaluation:

- critique
- defend
- evaluate
- interpret
- justify
- reassess
- re-envision

# Delivery:

- Eye contact--read your listener
- Enthusiasm
- Practice, practice, practice!

# Practice, practice, practice!



For the evaluator:

- What words or phrases stuck out to you as the most important?
- What intrigued you?
- Were you confused at any point?
- What might the speaker have emphasized more/less?
- Did they respond appropriately to your verbal or physical cues?

For the speaker:

- Did you get all your key points across?
- Did you get asked what you expected to be asked?
- Were you able to remain “in the moment”?

# The Interview Pitch



- Contexts
  - at a group conference interview
  - a one-on-one interview with an administrator
- Features
  - a concise statement that generates interest
  - a response to an actual question
  - not focused solely on your dissertation

# The Cocktail Party Pitch



- Contexts
  - telling friends or family what you do
  - discussing your work at poster sessions with possible collaborators, peers, etc.
  - cocktail parties, receptions, lunch meetings, campus visit engagements
- Features
  - Conversational, an actual dialogue
  - Listen very carefully, and respond!
  - Seek connections between your research interests and your interlocutor's interests
  - Ask questions

# Additional Resources



- Harvard Business School's *Pitch Builder*:  
<http://www.alumni.hbs.edu/careers/pitch/>
- Career Center
- Writing Center
- English for Academic Purposes Program
- Cocktail Party! "Elevator Pitch Essentials: Giving your Research Spiel," Monday, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 4:30-6:30PM



**University Writing Center**  
*Home of the Writing Irish!*

