

CRAFT AN ELEVATOR PITCH

One of the most terrifying questions that any scientist will receive is, “What do you do?” We have all seen scientists (and frankly non-scientists alike) freeze up when asked this question. This just illustrates that we all should be able to explain what we do in a short period of time. This has been termed the “elevator talk”, in other words, could you explain what you do in the time it takes to ride an elevator (*not* a space elevator)? In addition to speaking to someone in an actual elevator, an elevator talk is incredibly useful when anyone (scientists included) asks you, “What do you do?” Below we further divided elevator talks into the science one-liner, and the under-two minute explanation.

The one-liner: Think of this as a plainspoken thesis title. If you had one sentence to explain your research, what would you say?

Under-two minutes: You have two minutes. Keep it short, and...go!

- **Introduction**– Necessary if you are the one making the introduction.
- **One-liner** – Incorporate the aforementioned one-liner to start things off.
- **Reel ‘em in**– What is the major question/problem you study? What was your motivation (e.g. *I noticed X but no one was looking at it...*).
- **What are you doing?**– How are you answering this question? For example, you could describe your use of field surveys, experiments or modelling.
- **And?**– What have you found? What’s next?
- **Why does this matter?** Don’t think of it as a justification for your science. Think of it as an opportunity to show others the value of science.

Common Mistakes:

- **Misjudging your audience.** The main idea of an elevator talk is that it can be universal. Having said that, if you can judge your audience, it’s likely useful to take advantage of that. For example, you would likely tailor a message to a room full of 1st graders differently than a room full of museum-goers.
- **Too much jargon.** Jargon can (and does) confuse and bore audiences. Learn how to **identify and avoid it**.
- **T.M.I.** Don’t try to cram an entire thesis into two minutes. That’s the point. This is more about distillation and dissemination and less about the actual time it takes to talk about your science.