# Elevator Pitch

## Criteria for Success

An of who you are, what you do, and why you do it, but in all scenarios you have one purpose: secure the interest of the listener. A successful pitch should draw them in to hear your whole story. It doesn’t matter if you are introducing a professor to your poster at a conference or just chatting with a friend: your goal is to share your science in a way that your audience can access and get excited about.

## New Style

### Content

First, select pitch content by answering questions like “what aspect of my work will be most exciting to my audience?” When preparing a pitch to be delivered formally to a group, choose an aspect of your big problem and an application or advantage of your new thing that will interest the majority of the audience. When giving a pitch in a personal conversation, your pitch should be tailor-made for the specific person.

## Delivery

The way we write is different from the way we speak. When drafting your pitch on paper, you might find that your sentences and words tend to be longer and more complicated. This structure is nearly always overly rigid for a pitch and will feel forced when you try to deliver it aloud. Additionally, your audience will have difficulty following your ideas. Keep the sentence structure and words simple so that your delivery feels natural and your audience can follow the ideas you are presenting.

## Skills

Start by drafting a pitch. Don’t overthink it. Just jot down how you might respond to someone asking, “Hi. What are you working on? And why is it important?”

You may come up with something true and interesting, but long and involved. Listeners have a short attention span. To maximize your audience engagement, your pitch should not be longer than about 20 seconds.

To pare down your draft, cross out all the nonessential words until you feel you cannot cross out any more. Don’t worry about leaving complete sentences or phrases—push yourself to cut as much as possible. Now that you have a small handful of key words, insert as few words as possible to link together these concepts. Keep in mind that you are free to play with the order of your key words, leave out some where you see redundancy, or even decide that you do not need them after all.

**Author Tip:** I find it easiest to start with my one-sentence project summary and then add the motivation pieces I need to create value for that idea.

Chemotherapy resistanceis a pressing problem in the treatment of cancer *and has lead to a rise in combinatorial treatments. Recently, it was shown that a* ***cardiac drug*** *is sometimes inactivated by* ***bacteria*** *in the gut but can regain effectiveness when given with* ***antibiotics****. I am studying the* ***differences*** *in the* ***gut microbial communities*** *of* ***cancer patients*** *receiving* ***doxorubicin****,* ***a chemotherapeutic agent****, to discover if* ***antibiotics*** *could be useful in* ***cancer combinatorial therapies****.*

Limit new terminology

People will not understand your pitch if you try to introduce too many new things. Look back at those key nouns and verbs previously identified and assess how your audience will relate to those words. Try to limit the number of definitions and amount of jargon in your pitch.

Definitions

How many definitions, words followed by a clarifying phrase, are in your pitch?

You can keep one of those, but for the rest, toss the defined word or phrase and keeping the clarifying phrase.

~~The human gut microbiome~~, the community of bacteria that live in our intestine, is a key determiner of human health.

Jargon

Are there any specific terms that you think your audience will not understand? We will call those words “jargon.” They need to be replaced or removed.

There is obvious jargon, which are words completely foreign to your audience, such as “iPSC’s” or “monoubiquitylation.” These are useful in highly specialized arenas, but are not helpful for most audiences. Often you can substitute these words with less specific words or cut them from the pitch altogether.

There is also insidious jargon, which are words that have a different definition in your field than they do in the general population. For example, “work” has a definition in physics that is completely different from the definition in the general population. Though the word “work” is not foreign to an audience of non-scientists/engineers, it may still trip them up if you mean to use it in the physics sense. Using these words will not only lead to a miscommunication, but will be a distraction from your pitch.

Practice!

In conversation, we change our energy, speed, and volume naturally when speaking casually. When we have a more formal venue, our focus or our nerves can make us fall flat and bore our audience. Practice dynamics and delivery. Give your serious, concerned face when you talk about your big problem. Pick up the energy when you introduce your ideas. Smile when you share your vision for a better future.

And lastly, practice—again!