

How To Do Lower-Case r research

Originally posted to [Mirror](#).

Introduction

This is my first shot at a "personal" post. I've been in crypto for just over a year, and somehow managed to trick people into thinking I know what I'm talking about despite lacking any of the knowledge, skills, or background I'd love to have.

Some people have awesome backgrounds and do [capital R Research](#), but I just embrace it and do lower-case r research.

These are some of my personal reflections and ramblings. Mostly it's my advice for how even as a newcomer to crypto, you can trick people into thinking you also know what you're talking about.

Be Obsessively Curious

This is the biggest thing I've noticed from the most successful people around me. You've gotta be a little messed up in the head to read about erasure coding on a Saturday at 2am. I don't really have any advice here tbh. Hopefully you like this stuff. If you don't, probably ngmi.

Nobody's an Expert in Crypto

This is awesome! I definitely was super nerd-sniped by the tech and aligned with crypto's ethos and politics.

"I am a cypherpunk", I whisper to myself as I fill out AML/KYC verification forms for a SAFE seed round

— laurence (@functi0nZer0) [April 27, 2023](#)

But possibly the biggest reason I dipped from my job in banking (lol yea) last year to work in crypto was that it's constantly changing

Huge reason to be optimistic about crypto - greatest nerdsnipe around for ppl who want to work on cool new shit

Moves so fast that a stacked resume often isn't the most important thing

Big vibes: <https://t.co/AFwDmkfsRP>

— Jon Charbonneau (@jon_charb) [March 28, 2023](#)

You can literally show up as a nobody and add value right away. Lean into that! I especially focus on areas that are constantly evolving and lack real "experts."

Recently I've been spending a bunch of time on [intents/preferences](#) and [how to decentralize rollups](#). That means going deep on things like SUAVE and shared sequencers. These are perfect as a newbie because nobody really understands them! The teams building them kinda do, and even they have open questions. Shared sequencers didn't even exist as an idea until the end of last year.

I'm not going to be the world's expert on the fancy new ZK SuperHyperMegaNova folding schemes or some other paper that I don't understand. I could spend the next year on some of that stuff alone, and I'll still be the 1000th smartest person in the room behind all the guys who studied cryptography for the last century. I'm usually just gonna do this:

Be Focused & Find Synergies

I don't think it's super helpful to be a gaming expert for a month, then try to be a ZK expert the month after, then a monkey PFP expert the month after. Find the general area you really like, and go deep. For me, that's loosely been "infrastructure" stuff.

Getting decently competent at this stuff isn't a magic trick, and you don't have to be Einstein. It just takes a lot of time. Part of that is the obsessiveness and curiosity I mentioned above. The other half is focus.

That tends to mean finding areas with synergies. Blending together related topics in a specific area is where you can add value. For example, rollups are hard because you've gotta think about how to scale blockchains, make sustainable economics, implement proofs, decentralize operators, and a bunch of other stuff.

There's a ton of brilliant developers, cryptographers, formal economists, and many others who are infinitely smarter than me. But not a lot of people have like 80% competency in several of the related areas that mesh together. That's often where you can be useful.

Write!!

I can't emphasize this enough. Write. But not crappy generic stuff. There's an overload of crypto content out there, but not a lot of good stuff. Quality > Quantity.

The simplest example of this was the first mega[report I did on Ethereum](#). I had just started and barely knew what I was doing. Ethereum was the most important thing in crypto, and people talked about it constantly. It was AMAZING to me that not a single comprehensive report existed which could take you from 0-100 in like an hour.

I didn't have to be a genius to do it. I just had to sit down for a month and ignore most of my other responsibilities. I made it because it's what I would have killed to have available to me to read, so I figured it'd be helpful for others too.

I was nowhere near the world's expert in a single thing I wrote there. Maybe you're an expert in data availability sampling, but then you might not understand MEV super well. Ethereum had become so big and complex that it's hard for people to find the time to fit it together.

Just find the synergies that are valuable and put those pieces together. Crypto is often about putting the puzzle pieces together. It weaves together so many seemingly unrelated disciplines. Get good at making puzzles.

Don't write for others. Be incredibly selfish, and do it for yourself. I'll often listen to a podcast or read some post, but then when I try to explain it I realize 1% of it stuck. At least for me, writing is by far the best way to learn.

Then, putting it out there is how you meet and attract likeminded people. If I wasn't writing for the past year, I'd literally be nowhere and know nobody.

A lot of people probably don't write enough because they're afraid of others saying you're a dumb idiot who doesn't know what you're talking about. That's fine! That's probably part of why I write such long pieces. Leave no stone unturned, and you'll be a helluva lot more confident in what you're saying. But only under one condition.

ELI5 & Information Density

The one thing I think I've actually been very good at is technical writing that's approachable to a broad audience. Your weakness is a strength here!

I could ELI5 when I'm writing about KZG commitments because when I started that report I didn't know what a polynomial was. I was literally watching Khan Academy videos. It's easiest to ELI5 if that's the process by which you have to learn it

. It's not magic. Write as you learn. Use your lack of technical background to your advantage.

A huge component of this is just writing style. Don't be afraid of long reports. I write borderline books. Be afraid of long reports that have the amount of information you could fit into a blog post

. Use bullet points, short sentences, simple graphics, etc. I make memes 50% because memes are dope, and 50% because they seriously work.

This also just takes legwork. Reread your book a hundred times to remove two commas and like half a word on every turn. Get to the point. Make it readable.

Don't try to write academic papers in such an incomprehensible manner that nobody will read them. Write like a literal 5 year old, otherwise nobody will know what the hell you're talking about.

Use the People Around You

Talk to the smart people! I didn't design shared sequencers when I made that Rollups Aren't Real post. I spent a ton of time talking to the people on the cutting edge who were when nobody else really was.

We host small research sessions every week or two in our office, and we had all the gigabrain in there for three meetings before I made that post. Shoutout [Josh](#) for even flying back and forth for each of them. Smart and curious people love to talk about this stuff.

But you MUST put in the work. Show you're interested and put in the time, then people will talk to you. If you DM "yo what do you think of my coin" then yea people won't respond. If you put in the work, then anyone will.

When I did that Ethereum report, I was a total rando. But I reached out to [Tim](#) and the man, the myth, the legend [Dankrad](#) himself. He hopped on a call for an hour to answer every dumb question I had. Then he reviewed my post in painstaking detail providing invaluable comments!

I couldn't have done a single meaningful thing in crypto without the absolutely brilliant and amazing people around me. Most of them are infinitely smarter than I am. But if you're obsessively curious and hard-working, literally anybody can leave a mark here.

That's what makes crypto so fucking fun.

Afterword

This isn't advice anymore. I just want to give a sincere thank you to all of the unbelievable people who've made the past year the best of my life.

[MJ](#) is top of that list. I never imagined loving what I do this much, and loving the people I get to do it with. I couldn't have dreamed for a better partner to guide me and hide my flaws.

I truly can't express how lucky I am to be in the position I'm in. I very rarely get emotional, but this one actually is for me. We get to work on some of the coolest problems in the world, building what I honestly believe can be some of the most important stuff in the world. [I just wanna do math and check the results with my friends](#)

I can't wait to look back on all of it with y'all one day.