

Elevators and Coffee Lines: Practicing Your Pitch

One of the most challenging – but crucial – parts of scholarly work is describing our research to others. Academics need to be quick on their feet (and with their words), as important networking opportunities often occur in brief encounters – in quick conference chats, in coffee and bathroom lines, and, yes, in elevators. It is thus imperative to have a brief but descriptive “pitch” of one’s project that can be communicated with ease and enthusiasm.

For this activity, you will practice two different versions of your “pitch” – a **15-second pitch (elevator)** and a **minute-long pitch (coffee line)**.

The best *15-second pitches* are crisp and to-the-point but give your listener a good sense of your topic and intervention (yes, this *is* possible to do in 15 seconds!). As we’ve discussed in class, some great starting points include phrases like: “My research focuses on…” “I’m interested in…” “I show how…” *Minute-long pitches* can go into further detail about your specific argument and the sources you’re using. These longer speeches are in some ways trickier; it’s tempting to get bogged down in details when you have a bit more time.

For this activity, you and a partner will travel to different spots on campus to practice your pitches. While we could simply practice this in the classroom with timers, I believe that it is valuable for you to get out into the world and practice talking about your research in more informal, casual settings.

Step One: Elevator pitch

For this step, you will give your 15-second speech *in* an actual elevator. Go to a building on campus with an elevator that travels at least six floors (the Photonics Building, CAS, Warren Towers, StuVi 1 or 2, etc.). Ride up and down several times until you have each perfected your 15-second pitches. Give your partner feedback on how they might improve their speech.

Step Two: Coffee line pitch

For this step, get in line at a busy coffee shop (Pavement, Starbucks, etc.) and use the time it takes you to get to the front of the line (which, as we all know, is usually longer than a minute! ☺) to practice a longer version of your speech. (Note: no need to actually purchase a coffee, just politely exit the line shortly before it is your turn to order). Again, be sure to give each other feedback. If there are no busy coffee shops nearby, you can time this same exercise by walking around the block or waiting for the T.

During our next class session, we will share our pitches as a group and discuss the features of each version.