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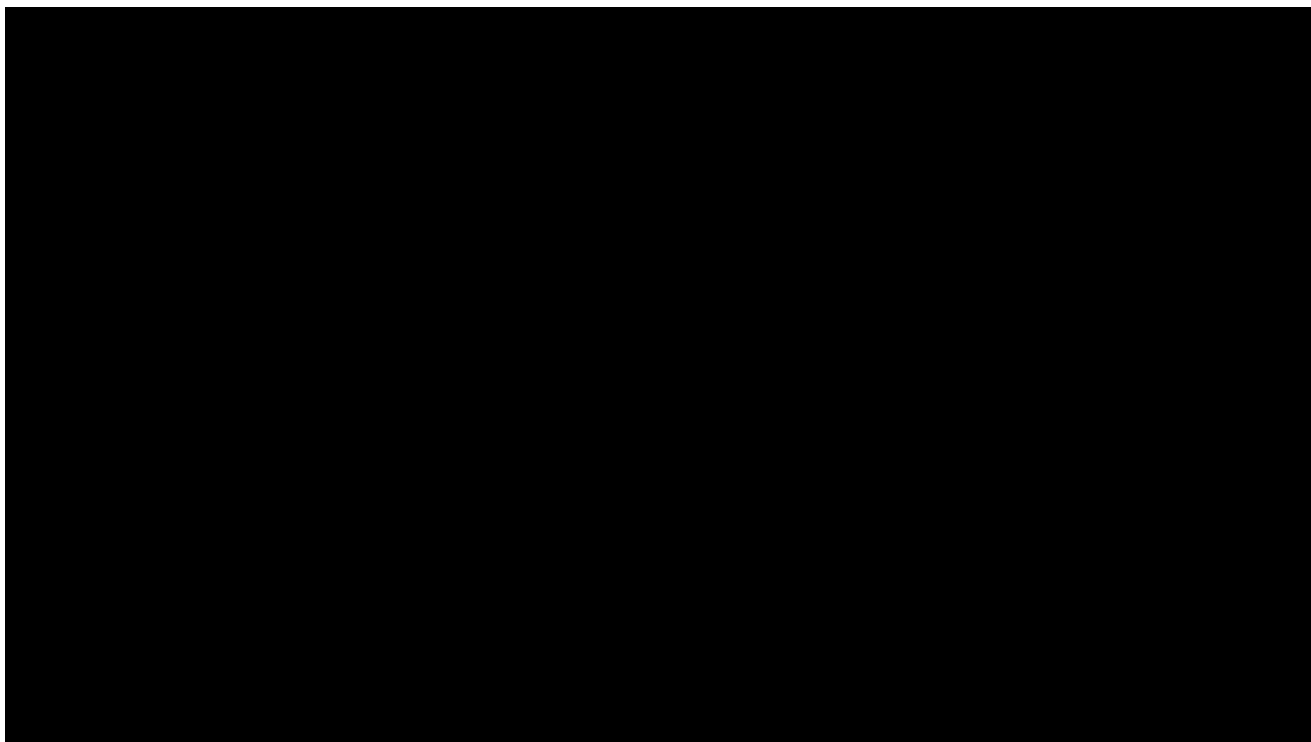
Public speaking: The elevator pitch

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Understand your audience and tailor your message accordingly when planning a 2-minute speech.

Every Thursday morning my alarm goes off at 6am. I get up, shower and dress in a sleepy daze before cycling over to Covent Garden in central London, UK. Instead of a cup much-needed coffee to wake me up, I do some public speaking. It's the best morning wake up you'll ever get.

A few years ago I joined Toastmasters, an international group of public speakers that help each other develop their speaking skills. It's a group that feeds on evaluations; every Thursday morning all speakers at our club (Early Bird Speakers) are evaluated so that everyone can learn from someone else's performance. In April I was tasked with a two-minute elevator pitch, addressing and inspiring the UK's brightest A-level students. Here's what I told them:



I'm not sure whether this would have inspired the nation's A-level students, but it inspired me to think about how to properly prepare an elevator pitch and how they benefit scientists. With some effort, scientists and researchers can compose an elevator speech to sell their science to a classroom full of 6 year olds, a neighbour, a potential employer or a politician.

Being able to present an effective elevator speech is a crucial skill. Scientists often need to summarise their research when they're going for job interviews, when applying for funding or when they have the chance to woo a potential collaborator. Friends and family members (read: fellow tax-payers) might also want to know why they should be investing in your work. Or you might find yourself addressing the media (at the *Naturejobs* Career Expo in London last year Steve Palmer, who was on the science communication panel, gave some great advice on how to communicate your science in the best way).

Deciding on what to say is the first step. Shortly afterwards, you'll want to think about how to say what it is you want to say. Here are just a few things I've learned along the way that might help.

The message. As scientists you will be cursed with Too Much Knowledge. You couldn't possibly fit all of the work you've been doing over the last X years into two minutes. And ALL of it is important to you – you slaved away at the bench or computer to do this work. I understand your conundrum, but others won't care. If you're pitching a concept to an investor they won't want to hear all the minute details about how your cell lines operate and what reagents you used. Remember that you've only got 2 minutes (or less, in some cases) to sell your idea. Your message needs to be punchy. The important points will vary slightly depending on your audience, but you can be sure that you will definitely need to include impact: Why is your research important?

The audience. Your speech isn't about you or your idea, it's about the connection you establish with your audience. To connect with them, you need to understand why they are listening to you. Think about what they are expecting from your speech. If you make it all about you, you'll lose them straight away (nobody likes a self-obsessed speaker). The purpose of your speech is about stirring that feeling of wanting more in your audience. You are trying to convince your audience that your ideas are worth investing in/working on/talking about and that she should want to find out more. By understanding who they are and what they want from you, you can pitch your piece in a way that will have

the most impact.

The jargon. Remember that conference talk you went to that one time? The one where that researcher went on and on (and on) and even though you were in the same field you got completely lost? They were the expert in their field but forgot that not many other people were at the same level. Remember that feeling, because that is what your audience will feel if you do the same to them. For the benefit of your listeners, if you work on pathogenesis and clinical implications of **microbiome** alteration in esophagitis and Barrett esophagus, for example, don't use those words. Instead, use analogies and props. Metaphors can also be extremely helpful here as it makes the subject more accessible to your audience. Of course, if you are presenting to an audience of your peers, you might have some wiggle room when it comes to picking your words, but even then you need to be careful not to lose them.

Practice. But not too much – you still want to come across natural and enthusiastic rather than monotonous and over-prepared. You know your research/idea better than anyone else in the business, so you don't need to write your pitch down word-for-word. Instead, pick just a few bullet points that you can use as reminders. Once you've had a go in front of the bathroom mirror, try your pitch out on family and friends. They'll be able to give you a good idea of what they understood and what was complete mumbo-jumbo.

You. When you're pitching an idea to an investor, they won't just be thinking about the product you're trying to sell them. They're also interested in you. The scientist. The person that came up with the idea in the first place. So don't forget to let your enthusiasm for this subject shine through. If they can see you're enthusiastic about the subject, they could reasonably think that others might be too.

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