

Presenting Yourself to Others

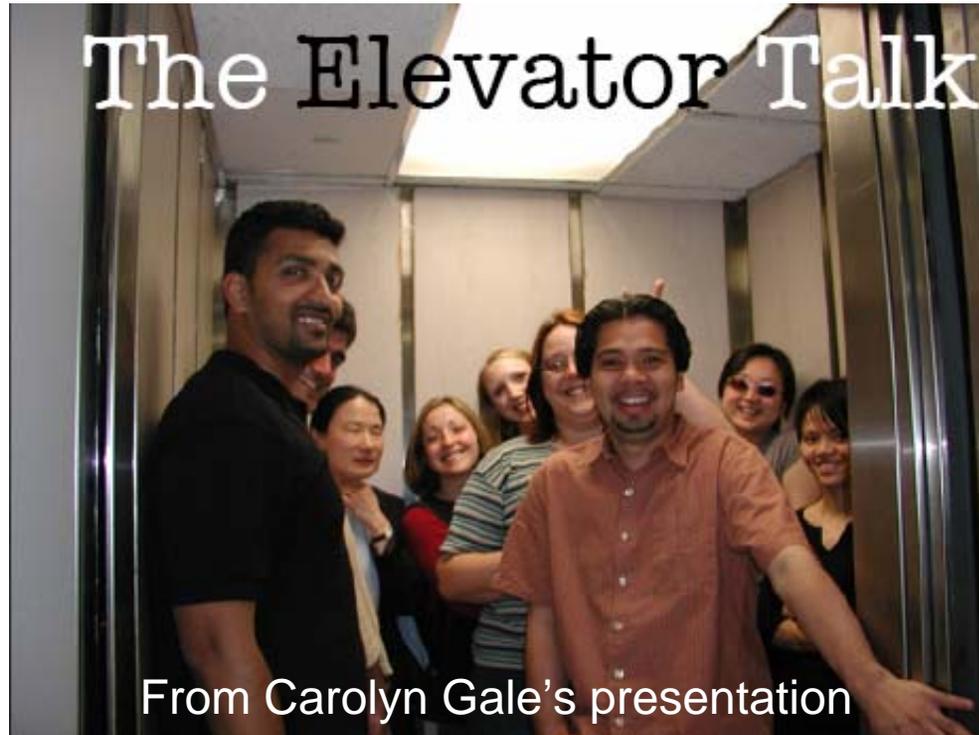


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(modified from Carolyn Gale's presentation to the 2006 workshop)

What's the Goal?

- Practice writing and speaking about your research in an “elevator talk”
- Learn key points for translating research to a more general audience

The Elevator Talk



From Carolyn Gale's presentation

Imagine that you walk into a elevator.
Someone asks you, "What do you do?"
You have 30-60 seconds to tell them.
Now what?

Some Considerations

- Audience
 - the Dean or Provost during an interview (this person may not be a scientist)
 - Undergraduates during an interview
 - Graduate students during an interview
 - **Other scientists, other geoscientists**
 - Program officers from funding agencies
- Methodology vs results

Construct a Paragraph that Addresses Key Questions

- What is the field I work in?
- **What is the research I do?**
- **Why is it important?**
- **What makes it new?**

- Goals: to **inform** and to **persuade**

One Example

“I model the **diffusion** of drugs through the skin using a method called **finite elements**. This is to understand better how **transdermal delivery** works and also to help improve their performance.

“The complex structure of the skin makes this quite challenging and I’m looking at both the diffusion on molecular scales through **molecular dynamics simulations** and also at the macroscopic scale through **finite element calculations**.”

Key research terms can help your listener to follow what you’re saying – this works well when talking about your work with other scientists. But, be careful!

Less is not always more

- “I study the effects of plant secondary compounds on herbivory.”
- OR
- “Have you ever wondered why certain plants taste really bitter? It’s because they produce those bitter compounds to protect their leaves from being eaten. This explains why certain plants are eaten more than others.”

Another Example

“Imagine what you could do with an airplane if you didn’t have to have a pilot in it, but you still could make it behave as if there were a thinking person inside. You could send the airplane on dangerous missions, it could fly for a very long time, and the human constraints will not impose on the design of the plane.”

“How this could be done is what I try to figure out.”

This is a good example of an “elevator talk” for a non-specialist.

How to Improve

Three areas to consider:

1. **Clarity** appropriate to audience
2. Compelling **content**
3. **Delivery**

How to Improve

1. **Clarity appropriate to audience**

- Watch out for technical terms
- Short sentences
- Write as you speak
- Focus on action (vs. passive construction)
- I rather than we (when possible)
- Test with someone outside your field

How to Improve

2. Making the content compelling

- What excites you most about your research? Start with what you do (not a history of the discipline).
- Why should we care? What is the significance of your research?
- Consider beginning with a puzzle, story, or something concrete that the person can connect with.

How to Improve

3. Delivery

- Show passion/enthusiasm for your research (being true to your personality and style)
- Vary the tone of your voice
- Concentrate on a "I'm glad you asked" expression and posture
- Establish eye contact
- Watch the time and watch for eyes glazing over

Advice

- Just imagine you are talking to someone in an elevator and write down what you would say.
- Avoid starting with “My research is ...”
- Don’t take the time limits literally.
- Think of a radio program.
- It’s a bridge for further discussion.

Exercise

- Modify your elevator talk → short paragraph.
- Read your paragraph out loud – or give your elevator talk aloud – to your partner or group.
- The listener should try to repeat what the first person said in their own words. No notes, no questions.
- Then: Does it make sense? What is clear? What is not clear?
- The first person should try to explain what is not clear.
- *Repeat with next person*

Build on Progress

- Audience should learn something new, but not learn EVERYTHING there is to know about your area of research.
- Prioritize, prioritize!
- Patience, patience!
- Goal: **“That sounds really interesting. Tell me more (about your research).”**