

Strategies for Connecting with a General Audience The Big Pitch

I. Connect with the Bigger Picture

When we get really involved in a topic, it sometimes becomes harder to take a bird's eye view and see the bigger picture. Doing this, though, clearly conveys why the audience should care about your topic, how it relates to them, and what it means compared to other similar topics. Conveying significance is a vital step in addressing a general audience.

Significance Brainstorming Process

Topic: I am studying _____

(Convey this as concisely as you can at this point)

Question: because I want to find out what/why/how _____

Significance (pure): in order to help my audience *understand* _____

Significance (applied): in order to be able to (*do something differently*)* _____

*Not all projects have applied significance in that they aim to change something in the world apart from changing our understanding about something in it. However, for a presentation to a general audience, applied significance goes a long way. So, if you don't think your project has applied significance, try and see if there's something there that you haven't considered yet.

II. Engage the Audience’s Curiosity

Again, getting very involved in a topic often causes us to lose track of what might be really interesting about it to an audience that is encountering it for the first time. Put yourself behind the eyes of someone who has never encountered the details of your topic before—see it as if you were encountering it for the first time again. Convey that feeling and awe to your audience.

Unexpected Element Brainstorm

Take a moment and imagine you are an audience member encountering your topic for the first time. Then, brainstorm at least 4 interesting facts about your project, research, or art that such an audience would not know without you highlighting it in your presentation.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Share these points with someone who does not know about your topic. When you discuss it, pay attention to how you explain it—either record it or take notes. Often times, we explain things in conversations with others in inspired ways that are easy to forget unless we keep track of them. Tell them your interesting facts, or if you had trouble brainstorming some, explain your research to them and try out some unique points about it. See if they find it interesting! Use that feedback to rule out some points and keep others. You probably won’t have time to use all 4 in your pitch.

III. Get A Lot Accomplished Quickly

Concision Brainstorm

Complete the following sentence in 50 words or less.

The purpose of my research is _____

Think of a metaphor or analogy that can make your work concrete. You can convey a lot of information by comparing something unknown to the audience with something they know. Use this for parts of your presentation or for your presentation as a whole. For examples, see some of the sample videos on the website (Finding Nemo, underwater aquarium).

Brainstorm examples for every key concept you discuss in your presentation. You may not have time to use them all, but it's better to edit them out rather than not have them at all.

IV. Structure

Typical academic written structures will not engage a general audience well enough within the limitations of a 3-minute time limit and single PowerPoint slide. Instead, you will need to develop a clear and familiar structure for the presentation based on either narrative or theme.

Try structuring your talk narratively. Who are the characters? What is the beginning, the middle, and the end? What's the crisis, change, or call to action? Be sure to include a hook to get the audience's attention and convey significance (a surprising fact, powerful example, or analogy). For the ending, be sure you tie up the presentation and ensure things have come full circle.

Beginning: _____

Middle: _____

End: _____

Can you integrate mystery or sadness into your presentation? How?

What other emotions could you possibly integrate into your presentation?
