

Presenting your value proposition to a potential collaborator

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Who is this guide for?

This guide is for researchers who have a clear value proposition for each of their potential collaborators and want to present it to them to see if they might be interested.

This guide will help you figure out how to pitch your value proposition/collaboration idea effectively to a non-academic organisation by explaining how to develop an elevator pitch and a speculative email.

You are ready to work on this guide if you have developed the value proposition that you are going to present to your potential collaborator(s) and have received some feedback on it that reassured you it is clear and written with your target audience in mind. If this is not the case, please have a look first at the online guide on “Crafting a Value Proposition”.

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How can I present my value proposition?

Once you have prepared a value proposition and translated it into a written text, you need to share it with your desired collaborator. There are two key options to do so. Neither option will enable you discuss and present your whole value proposition straight away. The goal will be to introduce the key points of your value proposition and then ask for a follow-up meeting or call to explain your idea in further detail.

Value proposition ready to present



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The typical content of a speculative email or of an elevator pitch includes:

1. An introduction of who you are and of your background (in relation to the goal of the conversation)
2. A statement of what you care about/the problem you want to solve
3. An explanation of what you or the collaboration would bring to them/why you are connecting with them
4. A specific ask

Before presenting your idea, you need to make sure:

- A. You know very well what you want out of the conversation. For this reason, it is helpful if you work on your value proposition first. Your end goal will shape what you are going to say and how!
- B. To introduce yourself and/or your proposal succinctly, in a way that will resonate with your target and that will highlight the reasons why they would want to collaborate with you or hire you or contribute in some way to your research project.

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Advantages of email

- Chance to think more and thoroughly about content
- No risk of not being clear due to tension
- Opportunity to double check content
- Chance to deal with rejection or lack of interest behind closed doors

Advantages of pitch

- Chance to get immediate feedback
- Chance to learn more about your potential collaborator through their body language
- Guaranteed attention
- Chance to be asked clarification and other questions

You should never go for the “easier option” just because it feels more comfortable, because that might hamper your ultimate success. The pros and cons of each option should be carefully evaluated based on:

- The ultimate goal of your introduction
- The existence of an opportunity to meet in person

How can I write a speculative email?

Writing a speculative email to a business or other non-academic organisation often seems scarier than it actually is. The structure is very simple and the shorter and more straightforward the email is, the better.

See below for top tips on how to write a speculative email.

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TOP TIPS TO WRITE A SPECULATIVE EMAIL

Subject line

Spend significant time thinking about what you are going to write in the subject line. It needs to be compelling, to the point – you need to grab the attention of the reader and make them understand at a glance why you are writing. Moreover, you need to write a subject line that will be easy to search.

Start of email

Address it to a specific person and do so in a formal way, unless you met them before (e.g. write Dr. or Mr. or Ms. and their surname, rather than just their name). To know how to find a specific person, please refer to the online guide on “Identifying ideas and collaborators”.

Mention, if applicable, a mutual connection (even if tenuous) or write something brief (around a line) about them that shows your interest and background research. Mutual contacts can be found through social media, personal networks, reading their blogs, books or articles, etc. The key aim of this paragraph is to create a connection between you and them and to show your keen interest.

Main Body

Explain why you are reaching out in a single, clear, and as-polite-as-possible, sentence. This could be taken from your value proposition. Avoid making a harsh request or a demand that is too complex or burdensome. It is better to use the introductory email to ask for a follow up meeting/call/email or to introduce your idea rather than to already pursue your ultimate goal. Do not make the reader feel like they have to do something for you or that you do not appreciate how busy they are.

Mention what you could do for them.

Close with a clear call-to-action and thanking them for their consideration. Be very clear about what you want (e.g. chance to meet) but leaving the door open for alternative suggestions.

The image shows a 'New Email' window with the following fields and content:

- To:** Business Contact
- Subject:** Compelling subject line
- Body:** Dear Dr Smith
I am reaching out to you...

Green arrows point from the text blocks to the corresponding parts of the email form: one to the subject line, one to the salutation, and one to the main body text.

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Other key things to keep in mind when writing introductory emails are:

- A. Keep them short. They should have maximum 3 paragraphs, each no longer than a couple of lines or sentences.
- B. Tailor it to each specific collaborator you are trying to get the attention of.
- C. Use an email signature where the reader can easily find ways to contact you or to learn more about you (e.g. links to your department's website or social media profiles) if they so wish.
- D. Send a copy to yourself first to check that all is in order and that there are no spelling mistakes or other issues.
- E. Avoid anything that is not strictly necessary information.
- F. Follow up with them (after 1-2 weeks) if you do not get a reply the first time.

Check out the following example of a speculative email to see how it might work in practice.

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EXAMPLE

Imagine John. He is a postdoc in business who wants to collaborate with a large UK corporation to develop a research and exhibition based on their marketing campaigns. Here is a potential draft email he could write:

Hello Ms Jones,

I'm inspired by the work you've done on your most recent campaigns, to the point that I decided to develop a research project to explain why they are so effective and what they can show to other companies in terms of marketing best practices.

I believe that I would have interesting information to share with you on the effectiveness and value of your campaigns. Moreover, I think we might both benefit from collaborating on an exhibition based on your past campaigns.

If you're interested in learning more about my project and how it could support your future campaigns, I'd love to share more. I appreciate you are very busy and I would be happy to co-ordinate with your availability.

Thank you,

Best wishes,
John

Now that you have the top tips, it's time to give it a go!

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EXERCISE 5.1

Write an introductory email

Write an email to a potential collaborator, employer or interviewee, following the tips provided above as far as possible.

Once you wrote it, send it to yourself and check it to make sure there are no mistakes and that the message is clear. Ask your colleagues and friends to read it and to give you feedback on its content and clarity. If at least 2 people think it is clear, send it out to your intended reader and see what happens!

How to prepare an elevator pitch?

An elevator pitch is a brief and succinct speech to outline your background, or your idea for a project, service or product. It should be delivered in 20 to 60 seconds.

For the purpose of this guide, an elevator pitch is intended as the brief introduction of yourself or of your idea for a collaboration project in front of a potential collaborator from a non-academic sector.

An elevator pitch can be performed at a networking event, on the phone, when introducing yourself at a seminar or workshop, at a career fair, as part of your online profile or at the start of an interview. In any of those occasions, an elevator pitch often represents the best chance of succeeding in triggering the interest of a potential collaborator, employer or funder.

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Always keep in mind your goal and target - put yourself in their shoes

Prioritise information that is of interest for your target

Surprise your target with something unexpected or unusual

Avoid niche or technical words and sentences

Draft a text of around 60 words (it would equal to a minute of talking)

Be authentic/ be yourself

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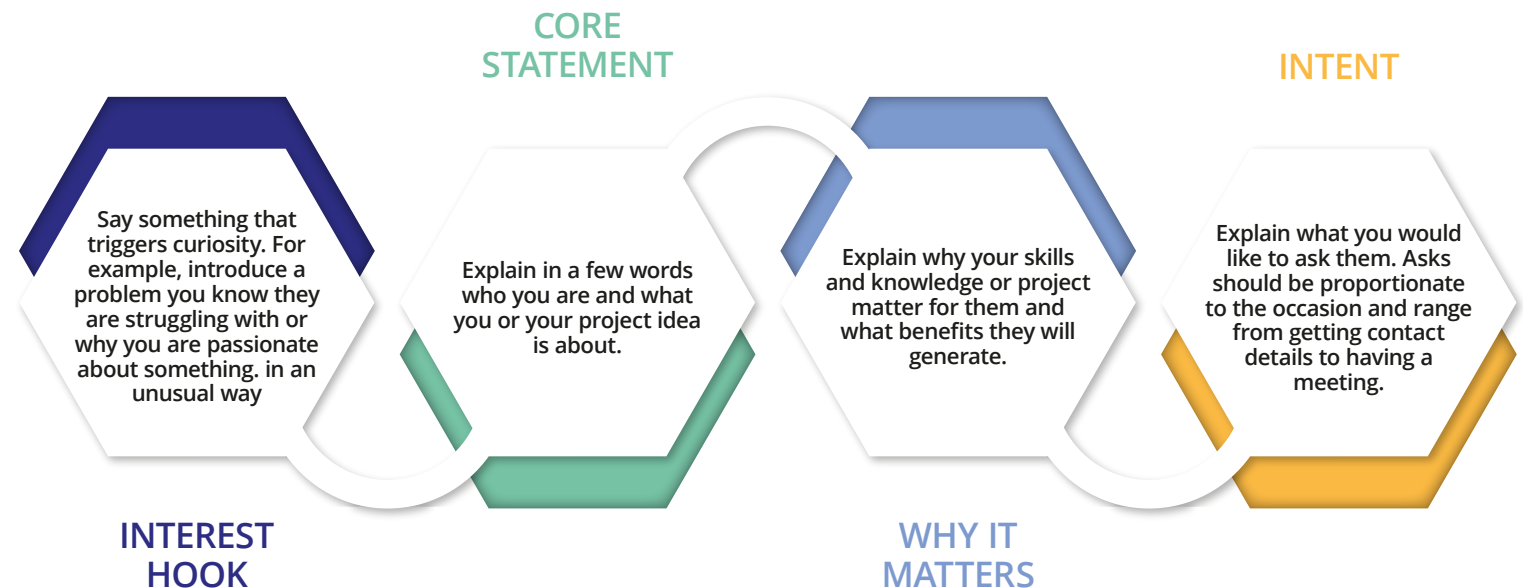
Links to helpful resources

To introduce your value proposition through an elevator pitch, you have 2 options:

- You can present a summary of the value proposition, mentioning the key characteristics of the project you have in mind, why it is relevant for the other person and the benefits it is going to bring.
- You can introduce yourself and what you are working on and then hint at the possibility of working together or create enough curiosity in what you are doing to generate a follow up conversation when you can present your value proposition.

You should have a different elevator pitch for each person or organisation you are targeting, as well as one for presenting your project to your research colleagues.

COMMON STRUCTURE OF AN ELEVATOR PITCH



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EXAMPLE

Imagine Jane. She is doing a PhD in Sociology and wants to collaborate with the Big Issue on a project on homelessness. A baseline pitch, for her, could be the following.

“Hi, my name is Jane. I believe we are not equipped as a society to support a rising amount of homeless people. So I decided to learn more about how other countries are dealing with homelessness. Based on my work, I will soon pilot a project to improve the support to homeless people here in Oxford. Would it be possible to reach out to you or your colleagues to see if you might be interested in contributing?”

Any pitch you are preparing should be repeated multiple times in front of friends and colleagues. You should listen to their suggestions and try to incorporate all of those that are helpful, before you present the pitch to your actual target.

Check out the pitches made by two researchers who collaborated with businesses before. What do you think? What can you learn from these examples?

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EXERCISE 5.2**Write and practice an elevator pitch**

Print the template provided below and develop your own elevator pitch for a specific target (research collaborator, non-academic collaborator, potential employer, etc.) by answering the questions in the template.

What is the purpose of this elevator pitch (E.P.)?

How long should it be?

Ideally, try with max 30 seconds

What do I know about the audience?

How does what I know about the audience shape or constrain the language I use?

What do I want to achieve from this E.P.?

What model will I use to structure my E.P.?

For our purposes today, the structure below

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Components

Interest hook: I.e. We don't know... It's increasingly important... Can you imagine...
How can it be fair that...

Core statement: I.e. My research [explores, asks, challenges, illuminates, etc.] X by Y.

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Why does it matter? I.e. [Understanding, establishing, disproving] this will help us...
This is innovative because it will allow us to...

Intent / Call to action:

I.e. I'm here to find out... I'd appreciate if we could... Our interests seem to intersect, would it be ok to email you some [ideas, thoughts, questions]...

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Once you have filled in the template, try to convert it into a short statement. Then rehearse the pitch, first in front of a mirror and then in front of friends and colleagues. Gather feedback and adjust the content of your elevator pitch until you are confident you have a good introduction.

When you are ready, use the first networking opportunity to try it out!

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Well done for completing the online guide on “presenting your value proposition”! This was the last guide we wrote to support you in getting ready to collaborate and in finding a suitable collaborator. There are two more guides in this series but they are meant for researchers who are about to start a collaboration or that are already working on one. If that is the case, keep going! If not, we hope that these guides were helpful and we wish you best of luck in securing a collaboration!

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SPECULATIVE EMAIL

[How To Introduce Yourself Over Email](#)

ELEVATOR PITCH

[Elevator Pitch Examples](#)

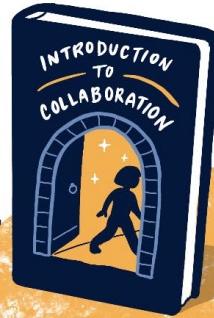
[Deconstructing the Elevator Speech](#)

[The Best Elevator Pitch](#)

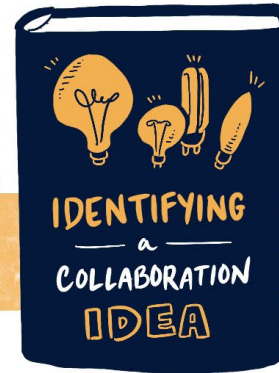
[How To Create Your 30 Second Elevator Pitch! | The Intern Queen](#)

the
**COLLABORATION
JOURNEY**

COLLABORATION
IS IT FOR ME?



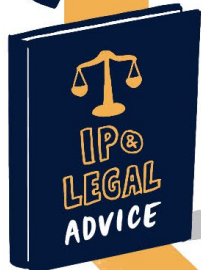
WHAT KIND OF
COLLABORATION
IS BEST FOR
ME?



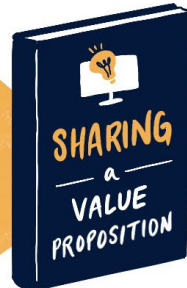
HOW DO I
FIND
SOMEONE
TO
WORK
WITH?



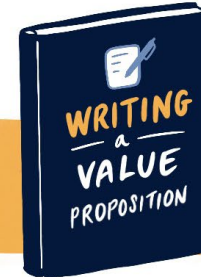
HOW CAN I
PROTECT
MY
RESEARCH?



HOW DO I SET UP A
PRODUCTIVE
COLLABORATION?



HOW DO I
PRESENT
MY COLLABORATION
IDEA?



HOW DO I
EXPLAIN
MY IDEA
EFFECTIVELY?

WHAT SHALL I BE
CAREFUL
ABOUT DURING A
COLLABORATION?



TOUGH
JOURNEY
— BUT —
WORTH
IT!