Adjusting your Pitch to Different Audiences

Based on Workshop “Teaching the Humanities” by:
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It’s important to adjust your description of your research to different audiences.

1. How would you describe your work to your colleagues?
2. How would you describe your work at a cocktail party, or to your parents?
3. How would you describe it to a 10th-grader?

What’s different about each of these audiences? Both a teenager and a professor in your field is a kind of audience to whom you “pitch” your idea. Each has different expectations and a different reason to be interested in your work. There is no default form of explaining the work: every environment calls for a specific pitch that matches the audience.

The practices used in journalism can help us understand how to get your point across quickly. The key is to start with what’s most important and most interesting – do not leave it for the end!

When coming up with your pitch, ask yourself some questions to tease out the most exciting aspects of your work. Imagine what a journalist might ask you. Some helpful questions include:

1. What got you interested in your current research project?
2. How did you conduct your research (e.g. visiting archives, sitting and thinking, reading)?
3. What does your research reveal?
4. What’s unique about your project?
5. What’s the most important message that you would want a layperson to learn from you?
6. What are some of your upcoming goals with the project or your next project?

Beyond the dissertation, there are different aspects of your work that you could showcase:

1. Fields (i.e. What is Religious Studies?)
2. Jobs outside academia (i.e. What do the humanities teach you to do? What can you do with a humanities degree?)
3. Processes (i.e. archival work, quantitative interviewing, digital humanities methods, etc.)
4. Specific research (especially interdisciplinary research)
5. One specific portion of your project
6. The big question that your research addresses
7. Engaging historical materials
8. Interesting works of art
9. Unexpected similarities between opposing concepts
10. A new way to think about something that’s integral to your audience’s lives
**Things to keep in mind:**

1. Adolescents make up their minds very quickly about whether they’re interested in your presentation or not. It’s imperative to get their attention immediately. Lead with what’s most fascinating, most accessible, most exciting.

2. Consider that your audience is neither scholars nor children. Your presentation should be engaging, but you should not be trying to dumb your work down or erase all of its complexity.

3. Why is your work exciting? Scholars often state the most important part of their work – their findings or why their topic matters – at the very end of their statement. We have to rethink our presentation and push ourselves to state the most important part of the story first.