

## **Engineering the Future – Communicating Across Borders Through Elevator Pitches**

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## **Engineering the Future – Communicating Across Borders Through Elevator Pitches**

This is a GIFTS presentation.

Our first-year engineering students are goal oriented and not deterred by any levels of technicality. But when it comes to sharing their knowledge, they do face challenges in communicating concisely, logically, and persuasively. Communication is a valued professional skill that needs to be learned and practiced. It is a work in progress, and if imbibed in our freshmen engineering students, it will significantly enhance the quality of their first-year engineering experience.

This need can be addressed by teaching our first-year engineering students to make elevator pitches. For a freshman, an elevator pitch may not only be a compelling tool to talk very concisely about oneself, what they do, and why it's important to them, but it may also help break the ice in many networking situations. They will get connected and engaged personally, socially, and professionally. This ability may sharpen their communication and listening skills, which in turn will boost team performance, grit, leadership, and team building skills.

This is an evidence-based proposal. I have used this technique of presenting concisely, logically, and persuasively through pitching, as a learning objective for my graduate students who are academically, culturally, and linguistically very diverse. This tool enriched their learning experience by increasing their connectivity and inclusivity. Along with breaking communication barriers, they built cross-cultural relationships and developed a sense of belonging towards their peers who shared common interests, beliefs, and hobbies. They learnt to tailor their conversations depending on their audience. This assignment was assessed by me in a traditional class setting. I plan to repeat this activity in my subsequent classes. This pedagogical practice can be implemented with first-year engineering students who face similar challenges in their transition as they learn to explore different opportunities, connect with resources, and bond, socialize, and network with their peers and the greater engineering community.

A variety of novel techniques can be implemented to teach and assess communication skills through the delivery of elevator pitches. Students can pitch with dorm mates, peers, and outsiders in their dorms, cafeterias, on elevators, and corridors, and be assessed by peers who can be provided with a rubric of presentation expectations. Peer review can be in the form of a report or an executive summary, which is another innovative method of enhancing writing skills. They can face mock interviews in an active learning environment in class, with peers enacting as hiring managers, company executives, supervisors, and researchers. By playing the greetings' game with the first person they meet in the classroom, by improvising around their well-crafted introduction, and by tailoring their pitches, they can make these interesting, succinct, and memorable. These assessment-based activities can be incorporated in the first-year engineering design, communication, writing, professional skills development, or career related curriculum.

Thus, the concept of connecting and engaging our first-year engineering students through elevator pitches could be an innovative yet fundamental pathway for us to build our future engineers into better team players and global communicators.