

# Showing Your Work:

How to Help Others Understand What You Do  
and Why It Matters

Community Friday

October 11, 2024

# The “why” of what you do

- Most pitches discuss the who, what, when, and why of the project. Another way of describing the “why” is significance.
- Significance is often a primary factor in evaluating a proposal of some kind (grant application, book proposal, or another type of pitch).
- Significance is also very important in less formal situations, like getting colleagues on board with a project or even just helping someone appreciate the significance of what you do.

# Significant to whom?

- Always important to keep your audience(s) in mind: What are their values? What is important to them?
- You probably need to make a different case for your work—and its significance—different audiences.
- How do you find out what your audience cares about?
  - Guidelines and revealed preferences for funders/publishers
  - Conversations with the people you'll need to convince about something you are working on, being observant over time about what is important to other members of your community

## What significance is not...

- Statement of novelty or complexity: “My project is the first to use [these sources/this technique] in this context,” “My project complicates the story of [topic].”
  - Both phrases can be great ways to start your significance case—but you still need to answer the “so what?” question as clearly as you can.
- Appeals to authority: “It’s a best practice!” We need to show *why*, especially when people aren’t doing the same work you are doing.

## Special cases in significance

- Justifying the selection of case studies/research sites.
- Defending unusual approaches.
- How do you connect your specific project back to a broader discussion?
  - Make the case that your project is directly related to that broader discussion. Sharing insights that your specific case can provide to the larger discussion is a great way to do that.

## Example: Pitching yeast meiosis project

### NIH NIGMS R01:

- Model system for homologous recombination in humans—role in cancer, and other human disease.
- Genetically tractable way of studying birth defects, infertility, and other human ailments.

### NSF MCB RUI:

- Model system for homologous recombination in eukaryotes—insight into critically important but rapidly evolving process.
- Undergraduate-friendly model system allows students to make significant contributions to the work.

## Example: Pitching a campus initiative

Curricular and Pedagogical Partnerships (CAPPs), which bring together students and faculty to work on assessing, revising, or creating courses

CTLA:

High Impact Practice (hands-on experience, likely to leave a lasting impression through deep learning)

DAR:

Promotes academic belonging among students and faculty development around accessibility and course engagement

# Time to show your work!

- Think of an audience to whom you'd like to show your work—publisher, granting agency, public venue, colleagues at Grinnell or beyond, etc.
- Take five minutes to write up a short statement of significance for your project or initiative with that audience in mind.
  - If you don't have an audience in mind, imagine who you will need to convince to invest time or resources in what you are proposing.
- Share your statement with your small group.
  - Who's your audience? What do they care about?
- Does your statement match up with your audience's values? Are you answering the “so what?” question?