

An Elevator Speech With a Twist: Instructions to Students; Stimulus and Exercise Ideas

(This is the script that you can adapt to fit your unique students)

At the end of our last class, I asked you to come to this class with an elevator speech. We talked a little about what that is and how the typical elevator speech that people do in a class can be pretty boring if it doesn't change through the years (if you stay in the same major with the same people for all your four years, they're going to know this by heart) . So I also asked you to include something memorable about yourself that others would not know.

Before we get into that elevator, though, let's do some role-playing. Here we go.

You wake up/come to and realize that you are in a big city. You're in a building and hear lots of traffic outside. You're confused because you don't know how you got there or why you're there. You notice that your fist is clenched. When you open it, you find a note that says:

Meet at X (an address) at the top of the building by 5 p.m. on that day's date. It says that if you do that, all will be explained.

You check the time. It is nearly 4 p.m. You rush outside and call an Uber. You tell the driver that you have to get to the address by 5 p.m. The driver asks, "Are you sure? That's a really bad part of town."

You answer that you're sure. You say that if she makes it on time, you will give her a huge tip.

You speed off through heavy traffic. You notice that as you go along, the neighborhoods are becoming increasingly dirty and rundown. You don't see people outside. There isn't even much traffic in the area. Most of the buildings look abandoned.

The driver gets you to the destination five minutes earlier. It's a very tall, derelict building. You ask the driver to wait. The driver replies, "Are you crazy?" You pay the driver, who speeds off. You assure yourself that you can easily get another Uber later on.

You rush into the building. You don't have much time to get to the top. Can you make it? The inside of the building is even worse than the outside. But you notice, to your relief, that it does have an elevator. You rush over, jump in, and hit the button for the roof.

The elevator is very dark and dank. It begins to lurch upward, slowly. Impatient, you say out loud, "If this were going any slower, it would stop." As you finish speaking, the elevator grinds to a halt. Annoyed, you say out loud, "Well, we must be stopped at a floor. I'll just get out here and run up the rest of the way." Then you notice that you are in between floors and so cannot leave.

By this point, you're getting nervous. Getting to the top doesn't seem so important anymore. You just want to get out. You look for the emergency phone. There is none. You look for the emergency alarm. Again, there is none.

Trying to fight down your panic, you say, aloud, "Well, at least I'm in here alone—not like all those silly horror movies."

But as your eyes adjust to the darkness, you realize that you are NOT alone. You notice that the cab of the elevator is exceptionally high. It has to be because over in the corner is a 10-foot tall ax murderer. It has multiple arms and multiple hands gripping axes. There's red liquid running down the axes, and you're pretty sure that you know what it is. It looks at you out of its multiple eyes and begins to speak.

You're completely terrified and think that whatever horrible voice comes out of it, you'll probably die right on the spot. But the scariest thing about the monster is that it speaks in soft, calm voice that sounds exactly like me. It says, "Tell me why I should let you live."

So now, for your life, tell us **Your Name, Where You Come From, Your Major, and Something Memorable That Will Get You Out of the Elevator.**

The students really love this exercise. It never traumatizes them because the scenario with me as the ax murderer is just so improbable and over the top. They learn things about their classmates that they will remember always.

The instructor can stretch out the scenario as long as desired. Instructors can also heighten the drama and channel their inner actor/ham by drumming on the table, for example, between the dumb things that the person says while trying to keep down panic when in the elevator.

To engage the rest of the class in this, we have all the other class members vote on whether the person gets out of the elevator and say why they voted as they did.

After you've escaped from an elevator with people, it's hard to be nervous around them when you speak. There have been so many memorable "life-saving" speeches through the years.