

APA DIVISION 15 PRESENTS

➤ ONE TIP

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Pithy Phrases Compel Action!

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Pithy phrases are highly useful for turning complex agendas into concise, directed calls to action. I invent pithy phrases to retain a sense of humor when faced with challenging activities. I also use them when offering direction to individuals and groups. When asked to convey my professional identity, for example, I convey a longterm, multigenerational agenda by simply noting that I study how individuals learn to participate in society. This pithy phrase conveys my behavioral signature, but I've also demonstrated nuanced depictions of the impact and trajectory of my signature when acquiring jobs, promotions, and awards.



ONE TIP

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Table 1 includes many of the pithy phrases I've used over my career as these align with the research process, organizational pressures, and professional agency. A few others can help you see how pithy phrases compel action.

Phrases name the research process. Professors generate new knowledge by engaging in entrepreneurship and serving as visible and invisible hands that collectively support complex social agendas. Personal agency is essential for career success, so we shouldn't be dismayed when someone takes our cheese. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, especially when such efforts enrich society and the cultural tapestry of a university.

Organizations develop, just like people do. As researchers, we work in organizations with evolving missions and growing pains that often force us to endure professional setbacks. Strong contributions are sustained by turning setbacks into opportunities. The tall poppy paradox, well understood in New Zealand, notes this with a mandate to avoid being a tall poppy. Poppies promote peace and hope. Disrupting such harmony, tall poppies are excessive self-promoters who destroy the harmony of a poppy field by blocking the sun from others around them. Likewise, anyone preoccupied with cutting down tall poppies promotes cycles of jealousy and hostility. Pithy phrases about the tall poppy paradox remind me how to recognize when my self-interest isn't in harmony with organizational priorities.

Phrases that direct careers. The last category of pithy phrases focuses on the range of activities that professors engage in as they manage their careers. Our families and members of the public don't often see the complexity of our work, detecting only the student-facing features of our teaching. Listeners rarely have the attention span to hear details about career-related intricacies, so pithy phrases can educate others as well as remind us that researchers always wear many hats.

Pithy phrases—part mantra, part method—transform our ambitions into professional habits. Offering direction and a sense of purpose, such phrases compel action even in the face of daily frustration or exhaustion. Embellishing the directives embedded in my collection, how might you generate pithy phrases to compel your professional goals?

Table 1: Sample Pithy Phrases and Possible Actions

Phrases	Possible actions
Conducting research	
Protect yourself from the literature	Read research carefully and critically.
No knowledge without comparison	Compare findings with at least two variables.
Mind the gap	Look for how new research adds knowledge.
Craft FINER questions	Craft feasible, interesting, novel, ethical, and relevant questions.
Resist chasing glitter	Avoid moving from topic to topic.
Show, don't tell	Build behavioral descriptions instead of using adjectives.
What story can your data tell	Limit your research to the evidence available.
Correlation does not support causation	Remember that height and weight are usually correlated but height doesn't cause weight.
Managing organizational pressure	
Seek timely coaching	Look for instruction when you're ready to hear it.
Institutions don't love, people do	Design structures that support human interaction.
The sounds of love don't just happen, we have to make them	Show people when and how you care about them.
Avoid jumping into crab pots	Avoid crabs who pull others down into a boiling pot.
Directing a career	
Remain learners as well as leaders	Resist being bossy by always seeking new knowledge.
Identify ropes to skip and ropes to tow	Focus on signature-relevant organizational details.
Ensure all missions have a margin	Generate funding plans to make a longterm impact.
Strengthen discourse communities	Identify and support scholars interested in your research.
Make the dream work with teamwork	Find collaborators; research can't be done well alone.
Use awards to stand out and fit it	Seek only awards that support your behavioral signature.
Practice storytelling	Disseminate research in clear and compelling ways.