

# How to Pitch

You are the expert! Nobody in the room knows your idea better than you do!

## What a short pitch must contain: A.K.A an Elevator Pitch

Time: 60 - 90 Seconds

1. An **opening sentence** that stops the room. We call it 'a show stopping statement.' Something surprising, specific or uncomfortable. We recommend you do not use curse words or language of a sexual nature, as this can offend the audience and turn them off to your idea.
2. **A little about you.** Why is the problem you are trying to solve important to you?
3. **The problem** you are solving, and for whom you are solving it. This is a marketing question - identify the demographics of who would buy from you.
4. **Your solution.** What are you going to build to fix the problem?
5. **How this makes money.** Try to think about 3 revenue sources.
6. **IMPORTANT: Your ask.** It does not have to be an investment. For example, following your journey on Instagram is a legitimate ask. Make the ask something you believe everyone in the room could help you with. I.E., if you are pitching to a class filled with students, ask them for connections or to do a customer discovery interview with you.
7. Make sure to have a **closing statement** like your show stopping statement. Make them remember you!

## The first sixty seconds and the last sixty

Those two minutes carry the most weight. The opening decides whether the room leans in or checks out, and the close is what people remember while they are scoring you. **Start** with a facial expression that matches the statement you are making. I.E. You don't want to start with a smile and say, "my father died last year." **Finish** with the three things you most want the judges to remember, said plainly and in order.

## Speaking mechanics

Practice **the power of the pause!** Do not say "um" or other filler words. When you feel one coming, pause instead. The silence sounds like control. The "um" usually takes just as much time as the silence, but the silence gives the audience the ability to breathe and understand what you are saying. Filler words are any word that fills a time in which nothing should be said. Examples of other filler words include "Okay," "You know," "Actually," "Like" and "To be honest." Identify your default filler word, then practice speaking without saying it. One way to do this is to practice speaking in front of someone and have them count when you use your filler word. The goal is to say none but usually saying one or two go unnoticed.

**Make eye contact with the judges and with the rest of the room** too. Looking someone directly in the eyes can sometimes make people feel uncomfortable. Even though it is okay to look someone in the eyes from time to time, you can also look at the top of someone's head or at their ear. If you are talking to a large room pick people in various points around the room to focus on. You can also pick items, like a water bottle on a desk, a door handle next to someone, or a poster behind your audience. Combining the two makes people feel like eye contact has been made. Use the typewriter method of looking around the room. Start looking at one side, then slowly turn your head to the other side as you speak, then restart back at the side you started on and repeat.

**Breathe.** If you catch yourself speeding up or getting nervous, stop for a second and take a breath. It also helps the judges because it gives them a moment to process what you said. You should feel like you are going excruciatingly slowly. If you feel like you are going at a normal speed or faster, this is your sign to slow down and take a breath.

**Keep it simple** and clear. Complexity in a pitch reads as confusion, not sophistication. Use the “76-year-old grandma” rule - a 76-year-old grandma with no prior knowledge should be able to understand what you are saying. This is also called the “5-year-old” rule which is the same concept—a 5-year-old should understand what you’re saying. Research your audience and use language they will understand. Pitching to a general audience at a college is very different than pitching to a venture capital fund that specializes in your industry.

**Tell a story.** Entrepreneurship is storytelling, especially when you are trying to get people to commit resources to you. Don’t be afraid to talk from the heart. Be respectful but open. Let them know you care about what you are working on and that you are committed to making it work because you understand the need for what you are building. If you can’t do this in a pitch, you may be creating the wrong company.

**Do not read directly off the slides.** Slides are a guide or support for what you are saying. The focus is on you and the work you are doing to build trust and respect from the people in front of you. Also think about your transitions between slides, not just the slides.

**Watch your time.** Do not go over the time you are given, because it comes across as lack of respect for the audience’s time or your lack of preparation. Most pitch competitions will cut you off when your time ends. It is better to use less time and allow for questions than to go over time. If you are permitted to use more time than allotted, take a second to acknowledge that the allotted time has ended and let them know how much longer you need. This lets the audience know that you respect their time. Never take more than an additional 5 minutes.

## Know how your brain works.

Some people speak better from a few bullet points that jog their memory. Others need their whole speech written out and then they read it twenty times until it sounds natural. Identify what works best for you. No matter what, **you must practice** what you are saying before you get up to pitch. The more you practice, the better your delivery.

## Where to put your hands.

This is a question everyone asks. You don’t want too much movement, but you don’t want them in your pockets either. It’s best to keep them at your sides and then use them to draw in the crowd. Do this by keeping your hands open when you point to something and slowly bring your open hands to your body, making a motion towards yourself when you are done pointing. Never point with one finger and never make a fist when you are presenting. These are aggressive motions that can be seen as offensive in some cultures.

## If you mess up, keep going. Just keep swimming!

**Do not stop.** If you keep moving, most of the audience will never register that anything went wrong. The pause where you visibly lose your place does more damage than the mistake itself. Do not overthink it either. Get up and talk about your idea. **Remember, no one knows what you have planned to say other than you.** So, if you keep going no one will know that’s not what you intended to say.

A trick to use when this happens is the “Rather” method. When you make a mistake, keep talking, then say what you wanted to say and end it by saying “rather.” You can also use the word rather and then correct yourself. This projects a confidence, an important trait when public speaking.

## Rehearsal is the whole thing.

Consistent rehearsal is what makes delivery look effortless. Practice enough times that the material is familiar, and you are free to think about how you are speaking (your delivery) rather than what comes next. Time your pitch, including transitions, and be sure your entire presentation is well within the allotted time limit, with room to spare.

Find a practice audience. Ask friends or teammates to listen and give you real feedback, reflect on what they say, adjust and run through it again. Pitch as often as you can to as many people as you can. Learn from each delivery, including the feedback that stings, because success in this is mostly resilience.

## The LaunchPad

The LaunchPad offers pitch coaching and an audience for feedback. Stop by the first floor of Bird Library for support. Confidence is what carries a pitch, so breathe, talk from the heart and be confident that the people in the room are there to hear your idea.

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