

How to build a pitch deck

Around 10 to 12 slides that spark interest and prove your venture is viable.

What the deck is for

A pitch deck exists to spark interest in your startup and communicate your story.

It is not meant to answer every question. It is meant to prove there is something worth asking questions about.

A slide flow that works.

There is no single recipe, but this order has produced good results for students who followed it. Some of these will become one slide, some will merge and some will end up as auxiliary slides.

1. **Title.** Logo, team name, contact info.
2. **You and your story.** What is **your why**? Judges invest in founders even more than ideas, so make it personal.
3. The **problem/** opportunity. **Who else does this matter to**, and how did you validate that it is worth pursuing? Use both **customer discovery** and **market research**. The biggest mistakes people make is talking too much about the problem and not enough about the solution. Keep this short!
4. Your **solution**. What you are building and how it **works from the user experience**, not the backend. Show features and functionality. Wireframes, photos or mockups bring your product to life. This can turn into two or three slides.
5. **Competitive landscape** and value proposition. A chart comparing your features against competitors, with specific examples. Use a “check mark” and/or “red X” box to explain this.

Example: Competitive Analysis Matrix

	Trait 1	Trait 2	Trait 3	Trait 4	Trait 5
Competitor 1	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
Competitor 2	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Competitor 3	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗
Your New Organization	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

6. **Market** size. Include Total Addressable Market (TAM), Serviceable Available Market (SAM), Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM) and where your growth will come from.
7. Your customer acquisition/ **go to market** strategy, explaining how and where you will sell to your target customer. Most of the time people use timelines to present this.
8. **Traction** to date. Include, but do not limit to, the amount of customer discovery interviews, prototype or Minimum Viable Product (MVP) progress, testing, team members, advisors, incorporation and Intellectual Property (IP) status, prize winnings/ funds raised to date, early customers or signals of interest such as letters of intent. This is the third most important slide after solution and problem. Make it visual and show as much progress as possible. You need to prove that if you get the money, your company will be successful. If you are a late-stage company you should put this after the solution slide.
9. **Roadmap** ahead. Three years of milestones across product development and business development, written as measurable goals. Be realistic but optimistic. Do not project beyond 3 years since anything beyond that will change drastically with progress.

10. **Revenue sources.** The ways you make money. Most investors will look for 3 sources to minimize investment risk.
11. **Expenses.** Identify the major startup costs tied to specific milestones. A simple graphic of revenue against expenses over three years shows the gap you need to raise. This can be combined with the revenue slide.
12. **Breakeven point.** When will you break even or turn profitable? How much do you need to sell in total, at what stages, and how will it be allocated? Most high growth startups breakeven in about 5 years. This can also be combined with the Revenue and Expenses slide.
13. **Your ask.** How much are you asking for and what specific goals will it help you accomplish?
14. **Team and advisors.** Solopreneurs rarely succeed, and **not having a team is a red flag**. **Advisors** should be people with real industry and functional expertise **who you have talked to and received permission to include in your pitch**.
15. **The wrap.** End with something memorable. Make this your Q and A holding slide. Logo, contact info, QR codes for LinkedIn, social channels and your website. Judges may want to reach you even if you do not win, so make it easy.

Budget the time before you design anything.

That list is a lot of ground for a 4-minute pitch. Fifteen slides would mean spending 16 seconds talking about each, which is too fast to land anything. Decide what to include in the main deck and what becomes an auxiliary slide, then write how many seconds you'll spend on each one to add up to the total time allotted.

Keep the slides nearly empty

This is the part students get wrong most often. Slides are not speech notes. If you overload them with words, the judges will read your slides instead of listening to you, and you lose the room's attention. **Use graphics instead of text.** A good rule of thumb is no more than 10 words per slide.

Auxiliary slides

Anything you wish you could have said but had no time for becomes a backup slide behind your last one. Build the slides that way, because **having them ready shows you anticipated the question, which is worth more in Q and A than the answer itself.**

The LaunchPad offers pitch coaching and one on one advisory. Bring a draft deck, even a rough one, to the first floor of Bird Library. It is easier to fix a deck three weeks out than three days out.

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