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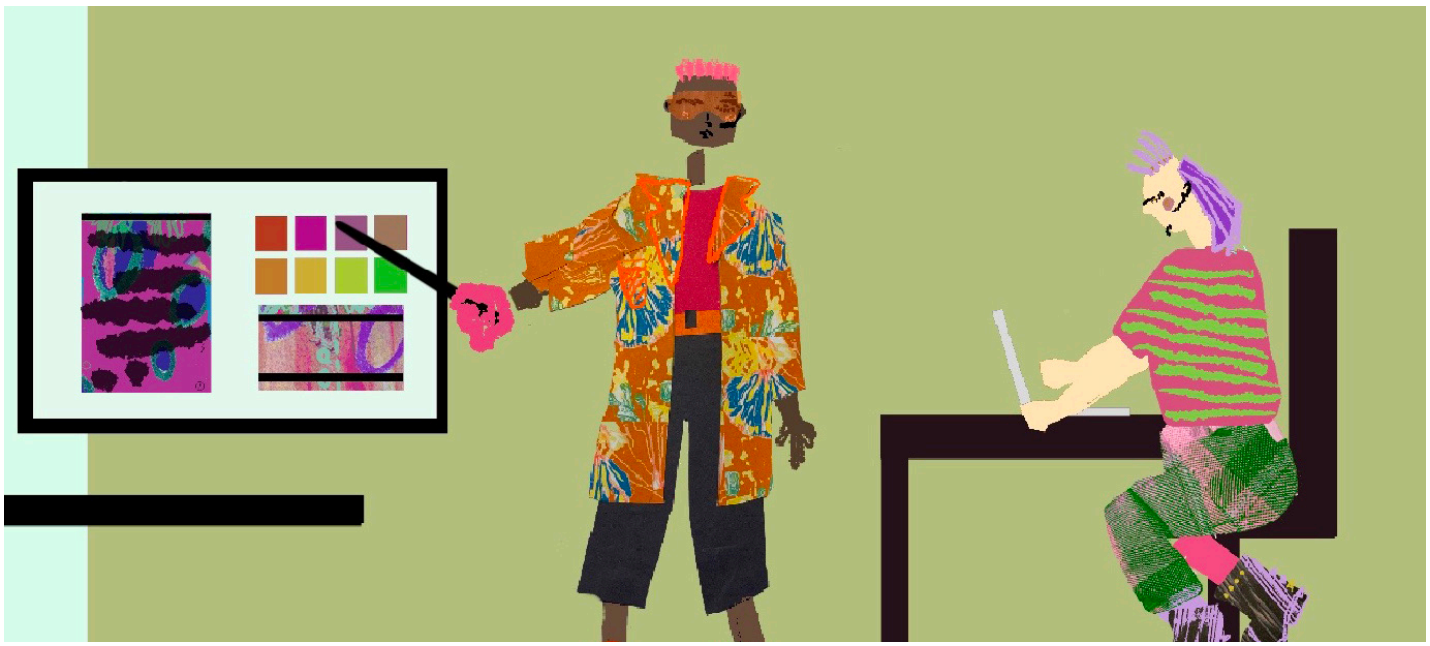


Illustration by Priscilla Fung



How to give an Elevator Pitch

One useful tool you can use to make introductions simply and effectively is an elevator pitch.

If you are able to professionally introduce yourself to someone in a compelling way, it can help set you up for a successful conversation, whether it's at a networking event, or at a job interview.

What is an elevator pitch?

In brief, an elevator pitch is a quick summary of yourself. It's aptly named as it's the approximate amount of time it should take to deliver it in a short elevator ride (so roughly 30 to 60 seconds or **75 words**).

Why is an elevator pitch important?

A good elevator pitch is important because it's a great way to demonstrate your professional aptitude, strengths and skills. An elevator pitch is also useful in multiple situations which makes it especially valuable. If possible, you should always have some talking points about yourself prepared (so you're ready to take advantage of unexpected opportunities), but an elevator pitch is particularly helpful during job searching, a job interview and or the recruitment process.

You can use your pitch to prepare for an interview. From phone screen to in-person interview, you'll be asked to provide a summary of who you are, your background and what you want from your next job. The elevator pitch can be a good framework as you're planning your answer to the popular interview question "tell me about yourself".

An elevator pitch can be used to summarise your cover letter or the personal profile at the top of your CV. Both are intended to tell the reader who you are professionally, what work you are passionate about doing and why you are qualified to do it in a way that helps you stand out from other applicants. If you've already crafted a personal summary and/or cover letter, then this is a great way to repurpose it.

A key benefit of using an elevator pitch when speaking about your career or aspirations is that it shows your confidence and that you are capable of taking the lead. Instead of waiting on the other party to direct the conversation, and potentially away from what you'd like to discuss, you can assertively explain what you have to offer. In many interactions, such as a job interview, internship or placement opportunity, this can be impressive, your audience will be pleased to see you know both what you want and how to ask for it.



Image: John Sturrock



Image: Georgina Capdevila Cano

When you should use an elevator pitch?

At a careers fair

A polished elevator pitch is useful at career fairs where your time to interact with employers is often limited to just a few minutes. In this instance, use your pitch to quickly make a good first impression and stand out from other candidates. When you introduce yourself to an employer at a career fair, lead with your elevator pitch but try not to jump into it immediately. First, exchange names and greetings, then the employer will likely reply with, “Tell me about yourself.” If they don’t, then you could say, “I’d love to tell you about myself—would that be ok?” Then begin your pitch.

During professional networking events

Whether you are actively looking for a new job or simply interested in meeting new people, use your elevator pitch during professional events to build your network. You might be pleasantly surprised to find that someone has advice, helpful connections or an interesting opportunity for you based on the experience and passion you mention in your pitch. On the other hand, you may be able to help someone else in their career after sharing your pitch if you have the experience they’re looking to gain.

For internal networking

Internal networking refers to exchanges you have with peers or leaders within your current workplace or university. An internal networking opportunity might occur spontaneously when you introduce yourself to someone in the minutes before a meeting or event, while collaborating on a project or maybe even when sharing an actual elevator or other common space.

In your online profiles

Include a written version of your elevator pitch in your online profiles to “introduce” yourself to employers virtually. This can help recruiters find you in a targeted search and encourage them to contact you.

It can also generate higher quality contacts from employers since you are proactively addressing what kind of opportunities interest you and the skills you bring.

How to write and deliver an elevator pitch

Your elevator pitch should answer the following questions:

- Who are you?
- What do you do?
- What do you want?

1. Start by introducing yourself

As you approach someone to pitch to at an event, interview or anything in between, start off with an introduction. Start your pitch by giving your full name, smile, extend your hand for a handshake and add a pleasantry like, “It’s nice to meet you!”

2. Summarise what you do

This is where you’ll give a brief summary of your background. Include the most relevant information such as your education, work experience and/or any key skills or strengths. If you’re not sure what to include, try writing everything that comes to mind down on a piece of paper. Once you’ve got it down to a few points, structure them in a way that makes sense in your story.

Here’s an example:

“Hi, my name is Sara. It’s so nice to meet you! I recently graduated from the London College of Fashion with a degree in Fashion Journalism. I worked on the college newspaper as a reporter, and eventually, as the editor of the style section. I'm looking for a job that will put my skills as a journalist to work…”

3. Explain what you want

This step will depend on how you’re using the pitch. The “ask” of your pitch could be an introduction in a job interview, consideration for job or internship opportunity or to connect and get contact information. This is a good opportunity to explain the value you’ll bring, why you’re a good fit for a job, or generally what your audience will gain from your interaction. Focus on what you have to offer during this section of the speech.

Let’s go back to Sara’s example:

“Hi, my name is Sara. It’s so nice to meet you! I recently graduated from the London College of Fashion with a degree in Fashion Journalism. I worked on the college newspaper as a reporter, and eventually, as the editor of the style section. I'm looking for a job that will put my skills as a journalist to work and I find the work your team does to be innovative and refreshing and I’d love the opportunity to put my expertise to work for your company…”

4. Finish with a call to action

You should end your elevator pitch by asking for or stating what you want to happen next. Examples can include asking for a meeting, expressing interest in a job, confirming you’ve fully answered an interview question or even asking someone to be your mentor.

Asking for what you want can be intimidating, but it’s important you give the conversation an action item instead of letting it come to a dead end. Remember: You’ve just met this person, so make the ask simple with little required on their part.

Here’s an example from the pitch we’ve been building for Sara:

“Hi, my name is Sara. It’s so nice to meet you! I’m a PR manager, specializing in overseeing successful initiative launches from beginning to end. Along with my 7 years of professional experience, I recently received my MBA with a focus on consumer trust and retention. I find the work your PR team does to be innovative and refreshing and I’d love the opportunity to put my expertise to work for your company. Would you mind if I set up a quick call next week for us to talk about any upcoming opportunities on your team?”

If they agree to your request, be sure to thank them for their time and get their contact information. End the conversation with a concise and action-oriented farewell, such as, “Thank you for your time, I’ll send you a follow-up email tonight. Have a great day!”. If they don’t agree to your request, gracefully end the conversation with a polite, “I understand, thank you for your time! If it’s all right, I’ll send you a follow-up email and see if there’s a better time for us to connect.”

Ways to avoid common mistakes in your elevator pitch

Speak naturally

Sounding too rehearsed can make the conversation feel forced, so do your best to deliver your elevator pitch with a conversational tone. Practice giving it, you’ll train yourself to remember ideas instead of memorising a script which can make your presentation sound more organic.



Image: Alys Tomlinson

Slow it down

If you speak too quickly, the listener might miss some important information. Give your elevator pitch at a slower, thoughtful pace to ensure they have time to process what you're saying. It might be your natural tendency to speak quickly or it may occur if you feel nervous. Regardless, make a conscious effort to reduce your speed and incorporate this strategy when you rehearse your pitch.

Use one pitch for most (but not all) occasions

You may not need to customize your elevator pitch for all audiences. It's a good idea to have one general pitch that you can use at any moment, but you should try to tailor your pitch whenever you can. For example, if you are approaching a start-up company at a career fair, you could include in your pitch why you're especially excited about start-up businesses.

Make it easy to understand

Use plain language in your elevator pitch that all audiences can understand. For instance, if you include a lot of technical jargon and industry-specific terms that only someone with your skill level would know, then you might alienate a recruiter, or anyone else, who doesn't have the same level of knowledge. This can make it difficult for them to ask you follow up questions and it might make them less likely to continue the conversation with you. Save niche terms for a technical interview and make your pitch easy for everyone to follow.



Image: Ana Blumenkron Zertuche

Express confidence

Even the best elevator pitch can lose its effectiveness if your delivery lacks confidence. Keep your chest high, shoulders back and smile when meeting someone and delivering your pitch. Use a strong speaking voice to show confidence in your experience and what you want in the future. If you're nervous, try mentally reversing roles: If you were the person being pitched to, you'd likely be happy to listen and help the inquirer as best you could.

Elevator pitch final tips

After you've taken the time to develop a pitch that's focused on your background and immediate goals, practice and refine it. Reading your elevator pitch out loud to yourself can reveal



Image: Georgina Capdevila Cano

any mistakes, opportunities for better wording or extraneous information that might distract from your main points. Ask a friend to help you practice out loud and give feedback to start polishing your speech. Here are a few tips on delivery as you practice:

An elevator pitch is a quick conversation by nature, but try to avoid speaking too fast. Keeping your pitch to around 75 words should help you deliver optimal information in a clear, digestible way. Be mindful of rushing through it or trying to add in too much information.

Developing an elevator pitch one step at a time makes it simple to create a speech that can be used in any professional situation. Elevator pitches can be helpful as you take them into your next networking event or interview. Your elevator pitch could be the beginning of a new opportunity, so draft, review, refine and deliver with confidence.