SIXTY SECONDS. ONE CHANCE.

Elevator Pitch

How to make someone care about your project before the doors open

Student edition | Updated 2026

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WHY BOTHER

You will need this sooner than you think

A pitch is not a speech. It is what you say when someone who can help you gives you one minute and no warning.

01 At Scholars Day

A judge stops at your poster and says, tell me about this.

02 With a community partner

You need a space, a donation, or a yes. You get one hallway conversation.

03 At a public meeting

Public comment is often two or three minutes. Yours needs to land in one.

04 In an interview

College, scholarship, or job. Every one of them opens with tell me about yourself.

THE SHAPE OF IT

Sixty seconds, five parts

1 Introduction

5 to 10 sec

Who you are

2 Hook

About 10 sec

Why they should keep listening

3 Value proposition

About 15 sec

What is different about this

4 Brief explanation

15 to 20 sec

How it actually works

5 Call to action

About 10 sec

What you want them to do

Time it. Sixty seconds is roughly 130 to 150 spoken words. If your draft is 250 words, it is not a pitch yet, it is a paragraph.

PITCH BREAKDOWN, 1 OF 2

Introduction and hook

Component	Definition	Student example	What good looks like
Introduction	Introduces who you are and what you do.	“I’m Maya Robinson, a junior at Heights High, and I run our school’s HPAC chapter.”	An effective introduction grabs the listener’s attention and establishes credibility. It should be clear, concise, and relevant to the audience.
Hook	A compelling statement or question designed to catch the listener’s interest.	“Did you know a person’s zip code can influence their health more than their genetic code? In our county the gap is 23 years across two miles.”	The hook should be engaging and thought-provoking. It must capture the listener’s curiosity and motivate them to want to hear more.

Your hook is the only line most listeners will repeat to someone else. Write it last, and write it ten times.

PITCH BREAKDOWN, 2 OF 2

Value, explanation, and the ask

Component	Definition	Student example	What good looks like
Value proposition	Explains the unique value or benefit you or your idea provides.	“We are not waiting for adults to fix it. Students are collecting the data on our own blocks and taking it to the people who make the decisions.”	The value proposition should clearly define what sets you or your idea apart and why it is beneficial or important.
Brief explanation	Elaborates on your idea, product, or service.	“We mapped every corner store and bus stop within a mile of school, then matched it against where students actually eat.”	The explanation should be concise but informative, providing just enough detail to understand your idea without overwhelming the listener.
Call to action	What you want the listener to do next.	“Could you give us fifteen minutes to show you the map before the board meeting in March?”	A successful call to action is clear, direct, and encourages the listener to take a next step that leads toward your goal.

Most pitches fail here. Students describe the problem beautifully and then never ask for anything.

MODEL IT

Two sample pitches, sixty seconds each

A SOCIAL DETERMINANTS PITCH

- I’m Maya Robinson, a junior at Heights High, and I lead our HPAC chapter.
- Did you know a person’s zip code predicts their health better than their genetic code? In our county the gap is 23 years across two miles.
- We are not waiting for adults to fix that. Students are collecting the data on our own blocks.
- We mapped every corner store and bus stop within a mile of school and matched it against where students actually eat. Two thirds of us buy dinner at a gas station at least twice a week.
- Could you give us fifteen minutes to walk you through the map?

A POLITICAL DETERMINANTS PITCH

- I’m Andre Wells, a senior, and I work on food access with our HPAC chapter.
- Our neighborhood lost its last grocery store in 2019. Everybody says people here eat badly. Nobody says the store closed because of a zoning decision.
- We are the only group in this city tracking that decision back to the meeting where it was made.
- We pulled the minutes, mapped what replaced the store, and surveyed 140 households about what it costs them in time and money.
- We are asking for five minutes on your agenda next month to present what we found.

Both pitches are about the same neighborhood. The second one names a decision, and that is what gets you invited back.

Introduction, hook, value proposition

Component	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Excellent
Introduction	The introduction is unclear, lacks credibility, or is not engaging.	The introduction is somewhat clear and credible but lacks a strong connection to the audience.	The introduction is clear and credible, and somewhat engaging for the audience.	The introduction is extremely clear, establishes strong credibility, and immediately engages the audience.
Hook	The hook does not generate interest or curiosity.	The hook generates some interest or curiosity but lacks impact.	The hook is interesting and prompts curiosity, but could be more compelling.	The hook is highly compelling, prompting strong interest and curiosity.
Value proposition	The value proposition is not clear, is too general, or does not convincingly communicate the unique value of the idea or individual.	The value proposition is somewhat clear and unique but fails to strongly communicate the benefits of the idea or individual.	The value proposition is clear and communicates the unique value of the idea or individual but could be more persuasive.	The value proposition is extremely clear, strongly communicates the unique value, and is highly persuasive.

Score each component 1 to 4. Twenty-four points possible across both pages.

Explanation, call to action, delivery

Component	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Excellent
Brief explanation	The explanation is too detailed, confusing, or does not provide enough information about the idea or individual.	The explanation provides some detail about the idea or individual, but could be clearer or more concise.	The explanation provides a clear, concise overview of the idea or individual, but could be more engaging.	The explanation provides a clear, concise, and engaging overview, effectively balancing detail with simplicity.
Call to action	The call to action is not clear or does not effectively encourage the listener to take the desired next step.	The call to action is somewhat clear and encourages a next step, but lacks persuasion or a compelling reason to do so.	The call to action is clear and persuasive, but could provide a stronger reason for the listener to take the next step.	The call to action is extremely clear, highly persuasive, and provides a compelling reason to take the desired next step.
Delivery	Reads from a paper or phone, rushes, or runs well over time. Little eye contact.	Mostly memorized but uneven pace. Some eye contact. Runs over or under time.	Steady pace, mostly natural delivery, close to sixty seconds, good eye contact.	Natural, confident, and conversational. Lands inside sixty seconds and holds the room throughout.

Delivery is a new row. A pitch that reads well on paper can still fail out loud.

BEFORE YOU PRACTICE

Six things that kill a pitch

1

Starting with an apology

"Sorry, this is kind of a long story" gives away the minute you were given.

2

Leading with the assignment

Nobody outside your school cares that it is for a class. Lead with the problem.

3

Too many numbers

One number lands. Four numbers is a report, and they will remember none of them.

4

Jargon

Determinants, disparities, equity. Use them with a professor. Say what you mean to everyone else.

5

No ask

If you do not say what you want, the answer is always nothing.

6

Ending on trailing off

Stop talking after the ask. Silence is fine. Let them answer.

RUN IT IN ONE SESSION

The three-round practice protocol

1 ROUND 1

Write and read

Draft it, then read it out loud to one partner. Time it. Cut everything past sixty seconds.

2 ROUND 2

Score and revise

New partner scores you on the rubric. Revise the two lowest-scoring components only.

3 ROUND 3

Stand and deliver

No paper. Stand up, deliver to a small group, and take one question afterward.

Three rounds takes about forty minutes for a group of twenty. Nobody gets good at this by writing it once.

SUPPORT FOR YOUR PITCH

Where to get a number worth quoting

Every strong hook rests on one fact you can defend. These are the sources to pull it from.

Healthy People 2030

The five domains, plus literature summaries and downloadable infographics.

odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health

World Health Organization

The global frame and the case that this is not only an American pattern.

who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health

Satcher Health Leadership Institute

The political determinants: voting, government, and policy.

satcherinstitute.org

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Health equity research, and County Health Rankings for county-level data.

rwjf.org

AHRQ

Federal research and measurement on the social determinants of health.

ahrq.gov/sdoh/index.html

ASPE, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

Federal policy reports, useful when your pitch names a decision.

aspe.hhs.gov/topics/health-health-care/social-determinants-health

Local beats national. A number about your own county will always land harder than a national statistic.

ONE LAST THING

Good luck

You already know more about your own community than the person you are pitching to. The only thing left is to say it in sixty seconds without apologizing for it.

Now go find an elevator.

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