

PERFECT PITCH: HOW TO SELL YOURSELF IN 30 SECONDS

The best possible first impression is one that has been thoughtfully prepared and practiced. By pre-preparing a short and snappy speech that explains who you are and why you'd make a good employee, you'll be ready to take advantage of the next job opportunity to come your way. Often called "elevator pitches," these brief sales speeches typically last thirty seconds, or about as long as a network television commercial. (Or, of course, about as long as an elevator ride.) Delivered with purpose, a strong pitch should clarify your job target, touch on your qualifications, and say something about your unique skills and individual value. If you're serious about finding a job, your pitch should be logically organized, and your language should proceed thoughtfully from one sentence to the next. Here are a few more pointers:

Begin with the basics: An effective pitch should, at least, explain who you are and what you want. *Who are you? What are you looking for? What makes you uniquely qualified?* If your pitch effectively answers these three fundamental questions, you're off to a strong start.

Know what you want: It's important to have a clear goal in mind before delivering a pitch to a recruiter. How can somebody else help you get what you want if you're unsure yourself? *Why do you want to work in the industry you're targeting? Are you looking for a stepping-stone position or a lifetime vocation? In what cities are you comfortable working?*

Brand yourself: If you think about it, your pitch is really a personal professional branding message. What do you *mean*? What do you *represent*? If a recruiter had to describe you briefly, what could he or she say that would differentiate you from dozens of other applicants? To help this process, try to include a memorable statement or touch on a personal quality or experience that makes you unique.

Prepare professionally: If you're actively looking for a job your pitch should be at the ready, in your quiver, at all times; you never know when an opportunity might present itself. Prewrite on paper and edit yourself ruthlessly. Eliminate fluff so as to use your time to your advantage. You want to memorize your pitch without sounding rehearsed.

Count your words: The rule of thumb is that an average-paced speaker can deliver 150 words in a minute. For an introductory pitch, aim for under 100 words on paper.

Don't get too clever: Steer away from clichéd expressions, and leave out jokes as a general rule. While these gambits are normally used in an attempt to demonstrate personality, they are very rarely effective.


Don't come on too strong: An appropriate tone might be described as "confidently conversational." As in any networking situation, never outright ask for a job. Listen politely and attentively, and never interrupt.

Write your pitch how you speak: Be natural. If you don't normally speak in "elevated" academic language, it will sound stilted and unconvincing if you write your pitch that way. You want to sound polished rather than affected. As a revision activity, read your pitch out loud to catch awkward phrasing.

Mind your language: Be careful about using "keywords" and specialized jargon; it's good to demonstrate that you're comfortable speaking the language of your industry, but the last thing you want to do is use opaque vocabulary that makes the person to whom you're speaking feel uninformed or confused.

Establish appropriate goalposts: Articulate reasonable professional goals that will be attractive to the employer. Leave yourself some room to grow, but avoid referring to long-term goals that cannot be satisfied at his or her company. Establish that, if hired, you won't immediately bolt at the next opportunity.

Consider your audience: What does the person to whom you're speaking already know and expect? If you're a student attending a career fair, the person to whom you are speaking probably already understands that you a) are a student, and b) want a job. What else can you add that will make you stand out? It's also important to be flexible; different audiences will demand different variations of your pitch that contain the same core talking points.



So what? Challenge yourself when writing your pitch by constantly asking yourself why what you're saying matters. Why is this important that you've done the things you've done and learned the things you've learned? For example, if you held an internship last semester, what did you learn from it that will help you in the workforce? If you studied abroad or completed a special certification program, how did the experience make you a stronger candidate?

Embody your performance: A perfect pitch is as much about what you do with your body as what you say with your voice. Pay close attention to your posture and body language, maintain consistent eye contact (but don't forget to blink!), and offer a firm handshake. Be especially sure to smile while you speak. In addition to the visual benefits, smiling while speaking really does modulate the tone of your voice in a positive way.

Eliminate vocal tics and "filler words": Avoid words and expressions like "um," "like," "you know," "right," and "okay." While it's hard to completely eradicate this sort of subconscious speech, concentrating on enunciating clearly, speaking slowly, and articulating your thoughts can make a real difference.

Earn bonus marks: You're talking to an employee or representative of a real company that deals with real-world problems. If you're familiar with this company's operations, can you identify a significant need it has or issue it faces? Are you aware of a problem that you credibly believe you can solve? If you can convincingly argue yes, you'll make yourself significantly more attractive. Use "benefit-focused terminology" to articulate what you do and have done in a way that will be attractive to recruiters.

Place a call to action: Your pitch should end on a note that subtly demands something from your audience. This could mean a closing question, or a statement of intent along the lines of, "I'd love to talk more about what I learned at my last internship." Ideally, your pitch should pique a recruiter's interest and lead him or her to logical follow-up questions. Leave the listener wanting more.

Example:

Hi, I'm Alexandra, and I've been practicing for a job in Public Relations since I was six years old. I'm in my last semester of an honours degree in Communications at the University of Windsor. During my last internship, at WEtech Alliance, I learned that my strong ability to meaningfully engage the public was a perfect match for the tech sector. I'm currently looking grow with a small but ambitious company anywhere in Southern Ontario. I'd love to talk about how I think I can help your business reach out to potential clients via three specific new media platforms.

Perfect Pitch Checklist:

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Name, major, and institution | <input type="checkbox"/> Current educational/employment status |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strong delivery and body language | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural-sounding memorization |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Valuable work/internship experience | <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate tone and vocabulary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unique and/or memorable attribute(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> Career goals and aspirations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Informed interest in recruiter's company/industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Closing call to action |

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