

How to Give an Elevator Pitch

Whether at a networking event, with a colleague or at the beginning of an interview, introducing yourself well sets the stage for a professional conversation.

What is an elevator pitch?

An elevator pitch is a quick summary of yourself. It's named for the time it takes to ride an elevator from bottom to top of a building (roughly 30 seconds or 75 words).

Why are they important?

An elevator pitch is useful to have ready throughout the interview process. It's a great icebreaker to start a conversation. Folks are routinely interested in you, your background and career pursuits. The elevator pitch can be a helpful framework as you're planning your answer to the popular interview question, "Tell me about yourself", or considering what to include in a cover letter. Another benefit of a pitch is that it prepares you to introduce yourself when opportunities present themselves in everyday life. In line at the grocery store, at a cocktail party or networking event, maybe even in an actual elevator, the pitch can help new contacts understand why they should connect with you or consider you when an opportunity arises.

How to write an elevator pitch

Elevator pitches should answer: Who are you? What do you do? What do you want?

1. Start by introducing yourself

As you greet someone, begin with an introduction. Give your full name, smile, and a handshake. Add a pleasant, "It's nice to meet you!"

2. Provide a summary of what you do

Give a brief summary of your background. Include the most relevant information like your education, work experience and/or any specialties or strengths. If you're unsure what to include, write everything that comes to mind down on a piece of paper, then go through and remove everything that's not absolutely critical and why you fit what the employer or company is looking for. Consider the most important highlights on your resume. Once you've got it down to just a few points, organize 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'm a PR manager with a special focus in overseeing successful initiative launches from beginning to end. Along with my seven years of professional experience, I recently graduated with my MBA from XYZ University, with a focus on consumer trust and retention..."*

3. Explain what you want

This step will depend on what you're using the pitch for. The "ask" of your pitch could be consideration for a job opportunity, internship, or obtaining 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 has to gain from your interaction.

Let's go back to Sara's pitch: *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 seven 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 innovating and refreshing—I'd love the opportunity to put my expertise to work for your company..."*

Finishing your elevator pitch

You should end your elevator pitch by asking for what you want to happen next. If you feel an elevator pitch is appropriate for a certain situation, begin with the goal of gaining a new insight or next steps. Examples can include asking for a meeting, expressing interest in a job, confirming you've fully answered an interview question, or 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 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 Sara's pitch:

"Hi, my name is Sara. It's so nice to meet you! I'm a PR manager, specializing in overseeing successful initiative launches. 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 really innovative—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!"

How to practice and deliver your elevator pitch

Take your time

- An elevator pitch is a quick conversation by nature, but try to avoid speaking too fast
- Deliver your information in a clear, digestible way
- Be mindful of rushing through it or trying to add in too much information

Make it conversational

It's good to plan your pitch ahead of time and practice it – read your pitch out loud to yourself and ask friends for feedback. Avoid sounding rehearsed in delivery. To keep the pitch conversational, memorize a general outline or key points of your speech. Always adapt your pitch to your audience.

Avoid niche words and phrases

- Using acronyms, technical terms or industry-specific words and phrases can be confusing or may alienate your audience
- Try replacing technical terms with general, easy to understand language

Express confidence

Be confident — 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. There is potential that your audience won't be open to hearing your pitch. If it's not the right time or the person you're speaking to doesn't seem receptive, gracefully draw back. If you've asked for an in-person meeting and they said no, you can ask if they'd prefer email or a phone call. If you get the sense at any point that the conversation is an inconvenience, use this opportunity to negotiate for a lesser ask. Leave the conversation with empathy for your audience: you prepared a speech and they weren't expecting it—you can probably relate to the feeling of being caught off guard.

Elevator pitch examples

Context: In an interview

Job Title: Executive Assistant

"Hi, my name is Cory. Thanks so much for sitting down with me today. After graduating with my Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, I've spent the last three years building professional experience as an Executive Assistant. I've successfully managed event coordination and have generated a strong professional network. I was excited to learn about this opportunity in sports management—I've always been passionate about the way sports brings cultures together, and would love the opportunity to bring my management and leadership abilities to this position."

Context: Adding a contact

Job Title: Business Analyst

"Hello! My name is Angela, it's a pleasure to meet you. I have a background in Business Analytics with just over 10 years experience creating data-driven solutions for various business problems. I love and have had great success in the strategic evaluation of data analysis with our executive staff. It sounds like you do similar work—I would love to keep in touch to learn more about what you and your company do. May we exchange business cards or emails?"

Context: Seeking a job opportunity

Job Title: Media Planner

"Hi, I'm Shawn. I've spent the last eight years learning and growing in my role as Media Planner, where I've developed and optimized strategic media plans for our top client and managed a subset of planners as a Team Lead. One of my proudest achievements was a pro-bono project that was recognized as a top non-profit campaign last year. I've been interested in moving to non-profit for quite a while, and love what your company does in education. Would you mind telling me about any media planning needs you may have on the team?"

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.