

Pitching

Practice presenting your idea briefly and consicely.

CAKI's Miniguide to pitching

The pitch is a communication technic, where the idea or proposal is presented in a very limited time. Therefore, the pitch must be short, sweet and to the point.

A pitch usually takes 5-10 minutes or sometimes even only 30 seconds, if you are doing an 'Elevator Pitch', the concept being that you present your idea in the time it takes to ride the elevator. Because when you pitch, it is because you want something from someone, and that someone might just happen to be in the elevator next to you.

There can be many reasons for pitching. Perhaps you are looking for partners, investors, participants, publicity or feedback on your idea. Most likely you are pitching in order to improve, sell or realise your idea. Whatever your reasons are for pitching, remember that the pitch should always fit the context. This means that you adjust your pitch according to whom you are pitching to, how much time is available for you to pitch, as well as where you are pitching, also taking into consideration which tools or media you can use for your pitch.

If you are in the elevator or by the pool, you will probably only have your verbal skills and body language available to you, whereas if you are in a conference room, some sort of written and/or visual presentation might be expected of you. If you are pitching in the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter, you are asked to make a video pitch of your proposal. So make sure that your pitch fits the context, whatever it is.

The NABC method:

Your pitch is only going to include a small part of a bigger idea. Choosing what to include and how to structure the content can be tricky, so using a model for developing the pitch is often a sensible way to go. Using the NABC method is one way to structure your pitch. The NABC method was developed by Stanford Research Institute as a way to quickly structure, analyse and develop a value proposal. It is also a tool used for developing, assessing and presenting ideas. Using the NABC approach to develop your pitch, you should answer the following:

(Hook: Why should we stay and listen to you? Introducing your idea.)

- **Need:** What is the purpose of your idea?
- **Approach:** What is the concept – what is it that you want to do?
- **Benefit:** What are the advantages of your idea? Who benefits from it?
- **Competition:** What is special or unique about the idea compared to similar ideas?

(Exit: Summarize: This is why you should support, buy, join, participate...)

Here is an example of a 30 second elevator pitch structured around the NABC:

“I understand that you are looking for someone to design a dinner table for your new flat (hook and the need). I can do that for you (the approach). I just graduated as furniture designer from the Design School, and I actually specialised in designing tables during my studies. Because I am new on the market and need to build my customer base, I will be able to give you a good price. Also, since you mentioned you would prefer a wooden table, I know this guy, who has some beautiful pieces of redwood in store, and I think that could look amazing if used for a dinner table (the benefits). The alternative of course is to buy a table in a store or at an auction, but having one designed specifically for your place would be amazing (the competition or alternative). Here is my card – please give me a call if you want to hear more about what I had in mind in terms of designing something custom made for you (exit).”

Before you pitch:

Before you begin to work on your pitch, there are a few things that you should take into consideration. The first one being who you are delivering your pitch to, and secondly, what is the purpose of the pitch? Once you have decided on that, you can start working on your message and your argument as well as deciding in which order you can structure your argument. Also, you should choose which tone and style you want to use in your pitch.

To get the most out of your pitch, we advise you to adjust it according to who you are pitching to, and what you are pitching for. The style of your pitch is going to be different if you are pitching to colleagues, business angels, school children or someone down at the mayor’s office. You also need to take into consideration how much time you will have to deliver your pitch, as well as where you are pitching. If you are doing an elevator pitch or pitching to someone at a dinner party or reception, you are probably only going to have your verbal skills and your business card available to you, whereas if you are pitching in a board room or to a larger group of people, you will probably have a projector and printed materials available to you.

The commercial pitch:

If you are using the pitch for commercial purposes, you might also have to think about your target group or the customer base for your pitch. This includes thoughts on where you can find your target group (in real life as well as in digital life). Where do they go? Which SoMe are they using? Which news media are they reading, and which sites would they visit on the web? Are they members of tribes or communities? Who are in their crowd – and are there any influencers you might want to influence? The answers to these questions are going to influence your choice of media as well as the tone and style of your pitch.

We are not going to get more into the more commercial side of the pitch. If you are into that, you might want to have a look at the CAKI Handbook on 'PR and Communication' or other publications about marketing.

Your message and argument:

When you are pitching, you only have a limited amount of time available to you, and you are probably not going to be able to present all there is to know about your idea or proposal. You will have to choose one or two key points and structure your message and argument around them.

Less is more in terms of building up your argument in a pitch, because usually too many arguments and mixed messages will only confuse the listener and weaken your position.

Here are some tips for you on finding your message:

1. Focusing on a small part of your idea or proposal, develop a core phrase:

"My message is that..."

If we take the example with the dinner table, the message could be that: *"I can design an elegant, custom made dinner table for you"*

2. Select your arguments. For example, choose two strong arguments and one counterargument (which you then engage).

Using the example with the designer again:

Argument 1: *"Because I am new on the market and need to build my customer base, I will be able to give you a good price"*

Argument 2: *"I know this guy who has some beautiful pieces of redwood in store, and I think that could look amazing if used for a dinner table"*

Counterargument: *"The alternative of course is to buy a table at a store or at an auction, but having one designed specifically for your place would be amazing"*

3. Use active and direct 'to'-sentences instead of the more passive 'about'-sentence:

GO: *"My proposal is to..."*

NO-GO: *"My project is about..."*

Disposition:

The next thing is to decide in which order you will present the different parts/elements of the idea or proposal. If you need inspiration for this part, you can always use the NABC-method, or you can try building your pitch in layers as an article.

The NABC Method:

(**Hook:** Why should we stay and listen to you? Introducing your idea.)

Need: What is the purpose of your idea?

Approach: What is the concept – what is it that you want to do?

Benefit: What are the advantages of your idea? Who benefits from it?

Competition: What is special or unique about the idea compared to similar ideas?

(**Exit:** Summarize: This is why you should support, buy, join, participate...)

Layers:

Writing in layers is a technic used by journalists. It is also a useful approach, if you're a writing a project description for a funding application, and it can be used for structuring your pitch as well.

It goes like this:

1. Hook: Descriptive and catchy heading
2. Intro/subheading: 1-3 lines of 'elevator speech'
3. Info: what, where, why, who
4. Argumentation and context
5. Exit: Tie a bow or make a grand finale

Whichever way you decide to structure your message and arguments, always remember to:

- **Be clear about what it is you want to say:** Avoid confusing the receiver – guide them to an understanding of your proposal
- **Tell them about it (pitch):** Be specific, be clear, be bold!
- **Summarize what you have said:** Repeat your strongest argument in a one-liner

This also has to do with avoiding beating around the bush and just get to the point. For instance, you would not say “This story is about a four-legged creature with mane and tail, about 1,5m high and with hooves instead of feet.” Perhaps if you were pitching a children’s story, you would, but most likely it would be better if you got to the point with “This is story about a horse.”

Also, always remember to give one argument or one message at the time. It is like throwing a ball: if you throw ten balls at one, probably none of them are going to get caught and will just end up on the ground. Whereas if you throw one ball at the time....

Presentation:

How do you present your idea? For one, you should use a tone and a style in line with what the receiver, customer or target group are used to or will be able to identify with. You can challenge them on this, but make sure not to scare them off.

The medium you choose to use for your pitch should also reflect the receivers’ own choices – again, you can challenge them on this, but do it carefully. Your verbal skills will probably be your main medium, but maybe you also want to add some more spice to the pitch, either on site or as a follow up. This could be a pop-up show, a Facebook site, an app, an event, flyers, personal contact, a performance.

Here are some key points for choosing the tone and style on your presentation:

Use a precise and clear language

Avoid technical terms (unless you are pitching to peers) – assume that the receiver does not have the same professional or technical knowledge as you do.

Be specific

It is easier for the receiver to relate to specifics rather than abstract messages – something specific is often more visible for the inner eye. Think about the example with the horse: This story is about a four-legged creature with mane and tail, about 1,5m high and with hooves instead of feet’ or ‘This is story about a horse.’

Visualize

Show-don’t-tell, use examples and metaphors. You can do this, and still be specific.

Control your body (if you are doing a live-pitch)

Find grounding, breath, speak slowly and use your (controlled) body to support what you are saying.

And remember

A pitch is just a pitch – it is not the final idea or the whole story. It is made to capture someone’s interest and provoke a certain response. Accept that you cannot include everything in your pitch.



CENTER FOR
ANVENDT
KUNSTNERISK INNOVATION

Publication published by CAKI
Center for applied Artistic Innovation
A knowledge center for the arts educations

Other miniguides in the series:

Business Forms
CV for artists and creatives
Contracts and negotiation
Effectuation
How to present your pitch
Online portfolios
Pricing and negotiation
Registering a personally owned business
Tax
VAT
Working with volunteers

Find more publications on www.caki.dk