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The 5-Minute Pitch: Say Less, Convince More

In one week, turn a blank slide deck into a tight five-minute pitch that lands — and that you can deliver without notes.

7-day guide · 6 chapters · Self-Directed Learning Framework

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was built with the Self-Directed Learning Framework (SDLF): every chapter gives you a short starting action, the one idea you actually need, a fully worked example, a checklist, and exercises to practice with your own material — no filler, no re-reading required.

Work through the chapters in order, one sitting at a time. Each one is designed to take 25–35 minutes. By the end of Chapter 6, you'll have a complete five-minute pitch, rehearsed and ready to deliver.

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CHAPTER 1 OF 6 · DAY 1 · 25 MIN

Finding the One Idea Your Audience Must Remember

> **Outcome:** "I can state the single idea my presentation must leave behind, in one sentence."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Set a timer for ten minutes and freewrite everything you currently think the presentation needs to cover. Don't edit or organize — just get it all out of your head and onto the page.

The minimum you need to know

A five-minute pitch can carry exactly one idea to memory — everything else is support for that idea. The test: if your audience remembers nothing else, what's the one thing that changes their decision? That's your thesis. Everything that doesn't serve that one sentence becomes a candidate for cutting in Chapter 3.

Worked example

From a freewrite for an internal onboarding-tool pitch — covering features, cost, pilot teams, current pain points, comparison tools, and a rollout timeline — the presenter circles one sentence that captures the core ask: *"I want us to pilot a self-serve onboarding checklist that cuts ramp-up time from three weeks to one."* Everything else becomes supporting material to sort through in Chapter 3.

Checklist

- ☐ Freewrite done without editing, full ten minutes
- ☐ One sentence circled or written out separately
- ☐ Sentence answers: "what changes if the audience does what I ask?"
- ☐ Sentence passes the test: would a stranger understand the ask from this alone?
- ☐ Removed jargon or internal-only terms from the sentence
- ☐ Read the sentence aloud — does it fit in one breath?

Exercises

1. Do the ten-minute freewrite for your own real pitch topic.
2. Circle or extract your one-sentence thesis.
3. Say it aloud to someone else and ask them to repeat it back — if they can't, revise it.

CHAPTER 2 OF 6 · DAY 2 · 30 MIN

The Open-Body-Close Structure That Never Fails

> **Outcome:** "I can structure any 5-minute pitch into an open, body, and close a listener can follow without slides."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Before writing a single slide, write down one sentence: the single thing you want your audience to remember or do after you stop talking. If you can't compress it to one sentence, your pitch doesn't have a center yet — and no amount of slide design will fix that.

The minimum you need to know

A 5-minute pitch has exactly three parts. **Open** (30–45 seconds): state the problem and your one-sentence thesis — what you want, and why it matters to them. **Body** (3–3.5 minutes): no more than three supporting points, each explained in one breath before moving on. **Close** (30–45 seconds): repeat the thesis in different words, and end with one concrete next step — not a vague "thoughts?"

Worked example: pitching a new onboarding tool internally

Open: "New hires take three weeks to become productive today. I want us to pilot a self-serve onboarding checklist that cuts that to one week." **Body:** Point 1 — the current process relies on one person's memory, which doesn't scale. Point 2 — a checklist tool costs nothing to trial and takes a day to set up. Point 3 — two other teams have already asked for something like this. **Close:** "A one-week onboarding time is within reach with almost no cost. I'd like approval to run a two-week pilot with the next new hire — can I get a yes today?"

Checklist

- ☐ One-sentence thesis written down before any slides
- ☐ Open states the problem and thesis in under 45 seconds
- ☐ Body has exactly 2–3 points, not 5 or 6
- ☐ Each body point explained in roughly one breath, not a paragraph
- ☐ Close repeats the thesis in different words
- ☐ Close ends in one specific, answerable ask — not "any questions?"
- ☐ Whole thing read aloud once, timed, before moving to slides

Exercises

1. Write your own one-sentence thesis for a real pitch you need to give soon.
2. Draft the open, body (max 3 points), and close using the structure above — on paper, no slides yet.
3. Read it aloud with a timer. If it runs over 5 minutes, cut a body point entirely rather than trimming all three.

CHAPTER 3 OF 6 · DAY 3 · 25 MIN

Cutting Your Content Down to Five Minutes

> **Outcome:** "I can cut a full-length explanation down to a 5-minute pitch without losing what matters."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Take your freewrite from Chapter 1, and for every point in it, write "keep," "cut," or "maybe" in the margin based on whether it directly supports your one-sentence thesis.

The minimum you need to know

Five minutes is roughly 650–750 spoken words, and almost every first draft is two to three times too long. Cutting works best in this order: remove whole points that don't support the thesis before trimming sentences within the points you're keeping — trimming without cutting whole points first just makes everything shallower instead of shorter.

Worked example

The onboarding-pitch freewrite had seven points. Marked "cut": a competitor comparison table (interesting, but not needed to get a yes), a full cost breakdown (fine as a follow-up, not part of a 5-minute ask), and a long history of the current process's problems (one sentence is enough). Marked "keep": the three points already used in Chapter 2's Body, since those directly support the thesis. Result: a lean 3-point body instead of a sprawling 7-point one.

Checklist

- ☐ Every point in the freewrite marked keep / cut / maybe
- ☐ Cuts start at the whole-point level, not sentence-trimming first
- ☐ Remaining points checked once more against the one-sentence thesis
- ☐ Read aloud with a timer — under 5 minutes on the first attempt after cutting
- ☐ "Maybe" points parked for a follow-up document, not squeezed back in

Exercises

1. Mark your own freewrite keep / cut / maybe.
2. Remove the "cut" points entirely and read the rest aloud, timed.
3. If still over 5 minutes, cut one more "keep" point rather than trimming every sentence a little.

CHAPTER 4 OF 6 · DAY 4 · 30 MIN

Slides That Support You Instead of Replacing You

> **Outcome:** "I can build slides that reinforce my pitch instead of duplicating or distracting from it."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Count how many slides you think you need. For a 5-minute pitch, a strong starting number is one slide per 45–60 seconds of speaking time — so about 5 to 6 slides total.

The minimum you need to know

A slide's job is to show what words alone can't do well — a number, a photo, a short label — not to repeat your sentences on screen. If a slide has more than about six words plus one visual, it's competing with you for attention instead of supporting you.

Worked example

Instead of a bullet-point slide listing "Point 1, Point 2, Point 3," the onboarding-pitch deck uses: Slide 1 — the thesis sentence, large text only. Slide 2 — a single number: "3 weeks → 1 week." Slide 3 — a simple diagram of the current process with one broken step highlighted. Slide 4 — a photo of a checklist mockup. Slide 5 — the ask, restated, with a clear yes/no decision framed on screen.

Checklist

- ☐ One slide per roughly 45–60 seconds of speaking time
- ☐ No slide has more than about 6 words plus one visual
- ☐ Numbers and images used instead of restating spoken sentences
- ☐ Thesis appears visually at least once (opening or closing slide)
- ☐ Final slide states the concrete ask, not "questions?"
- ☐ Deck reviewed slide-by-slide: does removing this slide lose something the words alone don't cover?

Exercises

1. Sketch one slide per body point from your outline (max 6 words + one visual per slide).
2. Add an opening slide with just your thesis, and a closing slide with your concrete ask.
3. Present without the slides once, then with them — check the slides added value rather than just repeated your words.

CHAPTER 5 OF 6 · DAY 5–6 · 35 MIN

Rehearsing Without Memorizing Word-for-Word

> **Outcome:** "I can deliver my pitch fluently from memory of the structure, not from memorized text."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Write your open-body-close structure as a short bullet outline — thesis, three point labels, ask — on a single index card. No full sentences.

The minimum you need to know

Memorizing a script word-for-word is fragile — one dropped line and the whole thing stalls. Memorizing structure (the labels, not the sentences) is resilient: you can reconstruct any sentence live as long as you know what comes next. Rehearse by saying the pitch a little differently each time from the same outline card, not by repeating identical wording.

Worked example

The index card for the onboarding pitch reads: "Thesis → Pain (3 weeks) → Point 1 (relies on memory) → Point 2 (cheap to trial) → Point 3 (2 teams want it) → Ask (pilot approval today)." Three rehearsals produce three slightly different deliveries, each hitting the same six beats — proof the presenter is working from structure, not a script.

Checklist

- ☐ Structure written as short labels on one card, not full sentences
- ☐ Rehearsed at least 3 times, saying it somewhat differently each time
- ☐ Each rehearsal timed and kept under 5 minutes
- ☐ Recorded once (phone audio is enough) and played back to check pacing
- ☐ Checked that dropping into any point mid-pitch is possible without restarting
- ☐ Card kept as a visible backup for the real presentation — not a memorized script

Exercises

1. Build your own six-beat index card from your body outline.
2. Rehearse three times aloud, timed, allowing the wording to vary each time.
3. Record one rehearsal and listen back — note one specific thing to adjust (pace, a weak transition, a point that needs trimming).

CHAPTER 6 OF 6 · DAY 7 · 25 MIN

Handling Nerves and Questions on the Day

> **Outcome:** "I can deliver the pitch under real pressure and handle audience questions without losing the thread."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Write down the one question you're most afraid someone will ask, and one honest, short answer to it — even if the answer is "I don't have that number yet, I'll follow up."

The minimum you need to know

Nerves on the day are mostly about uncertainty, and uncertainty shrinks when specific unknowns get named in advance. Prepare for questions the same way you built the pitch: identify the two or three most likely questions, and for each, prepare a one- or two-sentence answer — not a full rehearsed speech, just the same structural approach as the pitch itself.

Worked example

For the onboarding pitch, the presenter expects: "What does this cost?" — answer: "Trial costs nothing beyond setup time; full pricing depends on scale, which I can bring back after the pilot." And "What if the pilot fails?" — answer: "Then we've lost two weeks and learned exactly what needs to change before trying company-wide — much cheaper than rolling it out untested." Both answers are one sentence, direct, and don't pretend to certainty they don't have.

Checklist

- ☐ Top 2–3 likely questions identified in advance
- ☐ One short, honest answer prepared for each — not a full rehearsed script
- ☐ "I don't know yet, I'll follow up" accepted as a valid answer where true
- ☐ One breathing or pause technique chosen for right before starting
- ☐ Opening line rehearsed separately — the first 10 seconds are the most nerve-prone
- ☐ Reminder set: the goal is the one-sentence thesis landing, not a flawless performance

Exercises

1. Write your top 2–3 anticipated questions and a one-sentence answer for each.
2. Practice your opening line five times in a row until it feels automatic.
3. Do one full run-through under mild pressure (in front of one other person, or recorded and reviewed immediately) and note what nerves actually showed up versus what you expected.

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