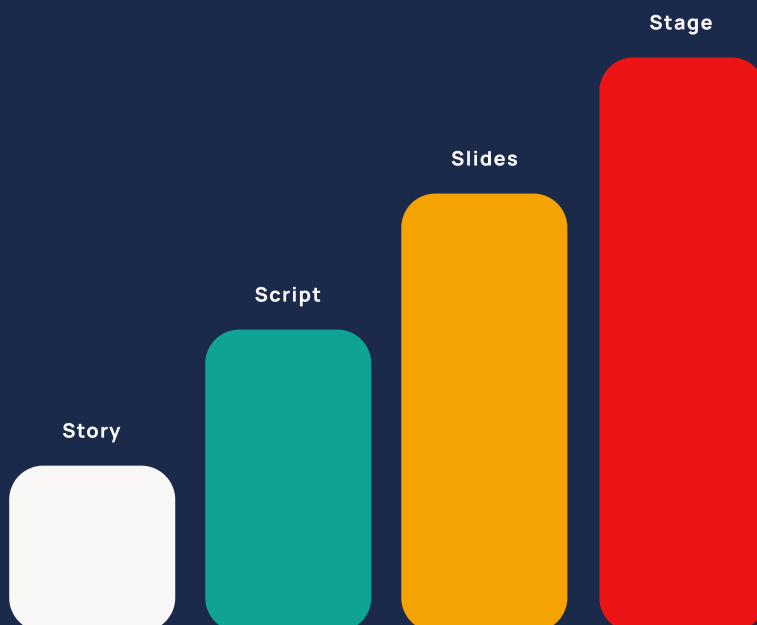




■ STUDENT GUIDE

Preparing your best **pitch deck**

From the story only you can tell, to slides that support it, to the moment you stand up and pitch.



By Bruce Rowe

Co-founder and CEO, FRED · fredstudents.com

How to use this guide

A great pitch deck starts as a great story. This guide takes you from your story to your slides to the stage, in five parts. Each part gives you questions to answer and AI prompts that test your answers.

1 Story before slides

Write and say your pitch before you design a single slide. The slides come last.

2 Evidence on every slide

Every claim should point to something you heard, saw or tested. Your evidence log from **From idea to evidence** is your raw material.

3 Practise out loud

A pitch lives in the room, not in the file. Rehearse until you can tell it without reading.

THE ONE RULE

Your slides support the story.
They don't tell it **for you**.



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Where this comes from

The evidence-first approach comes from FRED's **From idea to evidence** guide. The story-first method, and the routine of writing, dividing, practising and sharing your pitch, is adapted from storytelling coach **Nir Zavarro**.

Set up your AI pitch coach

Use this at the start of every new chat or project about your pitch. It tells your AI to coach you honestly instead of cheering you on.

0 The pitch coach setup

Use it when: you start a new chat or project about your pitch.

I'm a student founder preparing a pitch for [who you're pitching to, such as competition judges or an investor]. I have [number] minutes. Act as my pitch coach, not my cheerleader.

For everything I share with you:

1. Tell me what a sceptical listener would doubt, and why.
2. Point out any claim that isn't backed by evidence.
3. Cut anything that doesn't help them make a decision.
4. Suggest the one change that would make the biggest difference.

Be direct and specific. Help me improve my pitch in my own words, and don't rewrite it unless I ask. Never invent facts, numbers or quotes.

My idea: [describe it in 3 to 5 sentences]

My evidence so far: [conversations, tests, numbers, quotes]

What I want them to do: [the decision or next step you want]

Use AI well

- **Keep it your voice.** Judges can tell when a pitch was written by AI. Use AI to sharpen your words, not replace them.
- **Never let it invent numbers.** Every figure in your pitch must come from your own evidence, with a source you can name.
- **Feed it your evidence.** Paste in your evidence log, interview notes and test results, so its advice is about your idea.
- **Practise with voice mode.** Most AI apps let you talk out loud. Pitch to it, then ask it to grill you.

WHEN YOUR AI GOES EASY ON YOU, PUSH BACK

"What would make a judge stop listening?"

"Which slide could I cut?"

"Where am I being vague?"

"What's the one thing they'll remember?"

"Say that in half the words."

PART 01 OF 05

Story

What's the story only **you** can tell?



Before you open your slides, know your story. People forget slides. They remember stories, especially true ones about real people.

Start with your audience

Who will be in the room, what decision do you want them to make, and what do they need to believe to make it?

Say it in two lines

If you can tell your whole story in two lines, you understand it well enough to pitch it.

Sell the change

People buy the outcome, not the features. Lead with what changes for your customer.

Open with a real moment

A customer you spoke to, the moment you noticed the problem, or a number you've checked yourself.

FROM THE FRED STORY

The strongest pitches don't just explain the idea. They show what you've **learned** from the people you want to serve.

Bruce Rowe, Co-founder and CEO, FRED

Your story in two lines

LINE 1

[Who] struggles with **[problem]**, and it costs them **[time, money or worry]**.

LINE 2

We **[what you do]**, so that **[outcome]**, and **[your strongest evidence]** shows it works.

— Your questions

- 1 Who will be in the room, and what decision do I want them to make?
- 2 What do they need to believe to say yes?
- 3 What's my story in two lines?
- 4 What real moment can I open with?
- 5 Why me, and why now?

— AI prompts: find your story

1.1 Find my story

Use it when: you know your idea but not yet your story.

Interview me, one question at a time, to find the story behind my business idea. Ask about the moment I noticed the problem, the people I've spoken to, what surprised me, and what changed my mind. After 8 questions, tell me the three strongest story moments you heard, and why they work.

My idea: **[idea]**

1.2 Say it in two lines

Use it when: you have notes or a first script.

Here's everything I want to say in my pitch: **[paste notes or script]**. Help me say it in two lines. Line one: the problem and who has it. Line two: what we do, the outcome, and our strongest evidence. Give me three versions. Then tell me what you had to leave out, and whether any of it matters more than what you kept.

1.3 Read the room

Use it when: you know who you are pitching to.

I'm pitching to **[audience]**. List what they care about most, what they'll be sceptical of, and the 5 questions they're most likely to ask about an idea like mine: **[idea]**. Then tell me what they need to believe to say yes, and which of those beliefs my evidence supports: **[evidence]**.

1.4 Find my opening

Use it when: you need a first line that makes people lean in.

Here are moments from my customer conversations and my own experience: **[paste]**. Suggest three ways to open my pitch with a real moment, each under 30 seconds, that leads straight into the problem. Use only what I've given you. Don't invent details.

PART 02 OF 05

Structure

What does each slide need to **prove**?



A pitch deck is a story told in scenes. Each slide has one job: to prove one thing your audience needs to believe before they say yes.

A 12-slide storyboard

SLIDE	ITS ONE JOB	EVIDENCE TO USE
01 Hook	A real moment that makes them lean in	A customer story or quote
02 Problem	Show it's real, frequent and painful	What customers told you
03 Who has it	Show that many people have it	An estimate you can explain
04 Solution	What you do, and the outcome they get	Your one-liner
05 Product	Show it, don't describe it	Your MVP, a mock-up or a demo
06 Evidence	What you tested, and what you learned	Your evidence log
07 Business model	Who pays, how much and how often	Prices people accepted, pre-sales
08 Alternatives	How they solve it today, and why you are better	What customers use now
09 Getting customers	How you will reach your first 100	Channels you've tried
10 Team	Why you're the people to do this	Skills, experience, progress
11 Next steps and ask	What you'll test next, and what you need	A clear, specific ask
12 Close	Back to the opening moment, now resolved	Your two lines

MAKE IT YOURS

Competitions and investors often set their own slide list. Check the brief, then map these jobs onto it. Slide 06 is where most student pitches are weakest, and where yours can be strongest.

— Your questions

- 1 What is the one job of each slide?
- 2 Which slide has no evidence behind it yet?
- 3 Where does my story lose momentum?
- 4 What's my ask, and is it specific?

— AI prompts: build your structure

2.1 Build my storyboard

Use it when: you have a script or detailed notes.

Here's my pitch script: **[paste]**. Turn it into a storyboard of 10 to 12 slides. For each slide, give me the one thing the audience should remember, a headline written as a full sentence, and the evidence that backs it up from what I've given you. Flag any slide where I have no evidence yet.

2.2 Find the gaps

Use it when: you have a storyboard.

Act as a pitch competition judge reviewing this storyboard: **[paste]**. Which slide is weakest, and why? What's missing that you'd expect to see? Which slide could I cut without losing anything? Be strict.

2.3 Be honest about alternatives

Use it when: you prepare your alternatives slide.

My customers currently solve this problem by: **[what they do today]**. My solution: **[solution]**. Compare the two honestly from the customer's point of view, including cost, effort and habit. Tell me where today's option is actually better, and how to talk about alternatives without dismissing them.

2.4 Sharpen my ask

Use it when: you write your final slide.

Here's what I'm asking for at the end of my pitch: **[your ask]**. Make it specific: what exactly, how much, by when, and what it will let me prove next. Give me two versions, one for judges and one for a potential partner or customer.

PART 03 OF 05

Script

How would you say it out **loud**?



Write your pitch the way you'll say it, before you design anything. Then cut it into cards, one idea per card.

Write, divide, practise, share

NOW

Write

Draft your pitch the way you will say it out loud, not as slide text.

NOW

Divide

Split it into cards, one idea per card. Each card becomes a slide.

PART 05

Practise

Rehearse against a timer until you can tell it without reading.

PART 05

Share

Send a version people can open after the pitch, and see who engages.

Adapted from the story-first pitching method of storytelling coach Nir Zavarov.

Know your word count

Most people speak about 130 to 150 words a minute. A three-minute pitch is roughly **400 words**. Write to the clock, not to the slides.

Write like you talk

Short sentences. Plain words. Real numbers and real quotes. If a 16-year-old wouldn't follow a sentence, rewrite it.

A three-minute plan

Hook	20 sec
Problem and who has it	35 sec
Solution and product	40 sec
Evidence	35 sec
Model, next steps and ask	30 sec
Close	20 sec
Total	180 sec

A suggested split. Adjust it to the brief you're given.

Your questions

- 1 Can I say my whole pitch in the time I have?
- 2 Does each card carry only one idea?
- 3 Would a 16-year-old understand every sentence?
- 4 Where have I made a claim without proof?

AI prompts: tighten your script

3.1 Fit it to the clock

Use it when: your script runs long.

Here's my pitch script: **[paste]**. I have **[number]** minutes, and most people speak about 130 to 150 words a minute. Cut it to fit. Keep every piece of evidence, every real quote and the ask. Remove repetition, jargon and anything the audience doesn't need to make a decision. Show me what you cut and why.

3.2 Divide it into cards

Use it when: your script fits the time.

Split my script into cards, one idea per card, in the order I'll say them, and mark where each new slide should start. If a card holds two ideas, split it. If two cards say the same thing, merge them.

My script: **[paste]**

3.3 Make it sound like me

Use it when: your script reads well but sounds stiff.

Here's my script: **[paste]**. Rewrite any sentence that sounds written rather than spoken, so it's easy to say out loud. Keep my words and my voice wherever you can. Highlight any sentence a 16-year-old wouldn't understand.

3.4 Prove every claim

Use it when: before you design any slides.

Go through my script line by line: **[paste]**. Label each claim as backed by evidence I've given you, a reasonable assumption, or unsupported. For each unsupported claim, suggest how I could back it up this week, or a more honest way to say it.

SAY IT, THEN FIX IT

Read your script out loud after every edit. If you stumble over a sentence, your audience will stumble too.

PART 04 OF 05

Slides

Do your slides support the **story**?



If people are reading your slides, they're not listening to you. Design slides that support what you say, not slides that say it for you.

One idea per slide

Match your cards. If a slide needs two headlines, it needs to be two slides.

Headlines that say something

Write the takeaway as a sentence. Not "Problem", but what the problem is.

Fewer words, bigger pictures

A photo of a real customer (with permission), your product, or one simple chart.

Make evidence visible

Real quotes and real numbers, with where they came from.

Readable from the back

Text of 24 point or more, strong contrast, nothing crammed into corners.

One consistent look

Two fonts, a few colours, and the same layout for the same kind of slide.

Before and after

BEFORE

Market opportunity

- Large addressable market
- Growing student population
- Underserved segment
- High demand for affordable food

AFTER

1 in 3 students we asked skip a meal to save money

"I just wait until I get home." **Second-year student**

Source: 45 conversations on campus

An illustrative example, not real data.

— Your slide check

☐ Each slide carries one idea

☐ Each headline is a full sentence

☐ No slide needs to be read out

☐ Every number has a source

☐ Text is readable from the back of the room

☐ Every photo of a person has their permission

— AI prompts: design better slides

4.1 Turn labels into headlines

Use it when: your slide titles are single words.

Here are my slide titles and what each slide shows: **[paste]**. Rewrite each title as a one-sentence headline that states the takeaway, using only facts I've given you. Keep each one under 12 words.

4.2 Show, don't tell

Use it when: your slides have too much text.

For each of these slides, suggest a visual that could replace most of the text: a photo, a simple chart, a quote, or a before and after. Tell me exactly what to cut.
My slides: **[paste the text of each slide]**

4.3 Pick the right chart

Use it when: you have numbers to show.

Here's my data: **[paste the numbers and what they mean]**. What's the one point it makes for my pitch? Suggest the simplest chart to show it, what to label, and what to leave out. If the data doesn't support the point I want to make, tell me.

4.4 Review my deck like a judge

Use it when: your deck is drafted. You can also attach it as a PDF.

Here's the text of every slide in my deck, in order: **[paste, or attach the PDF]**. Act as a judge seeing it for the first time. Where did you get lost? Which slide has too many words? Which claim didn't you believe? What will you remember tomorrow?

CHANGE, THEN REHEARSE

Make changes one slide at a time, then rehearse again. A slide that reads well can still be hard to talk to.

PART 05 OF 05

Stage

Are you ready for the room?



A pitch lives in the room, not in the file. Practise until you can tell your story without reading it, and prepare for the questions before they're asked.

— Practise and share

1 Practise with a timer

Rehearse out loud and time every run. Then hide your notes and see what you remember.

2 Record yourself

Listen back once, and fix one thing at a time.

3 Pitch to real people

Someone who knows nothing about your idea, and someone who will be honest with you.

4 Prepare for questions

List the 10 hardest questions and answer each one with evidence.

5 Share it afterwards

Send a short version people can open later, and follow up within two days.

Adapted from the story-first pitching method of storytelling coach Nir Zavarov.

IN THE Q&A

"We don't know yet, and here's how we'll find out" is a strong answer to a hard question. Guessing is not.

— Your practice log

RUN	TIME	WHAT WORKED	WHAT TO FIX NEXT

— Your questions

- 1 Can I tell my story without looking at my slides?
- 2 What are the 10 hardest questions, and my answers backed by evidence?
- 3 What will I send afterwards, and to whom?

— AI prompts: get ready for the room

5.1 Grill me

Use it when: you know your pitch. Try it in your AI's voice mode.

Act as a tough panel of **[judges or investors]** who've just heard my pitch: **[paste script]**. Ask me the 10 hardest questions, one at a time, and wait for my answer each time. After each answer, tell me if it was convincing, and how to make it stronger using evidence I already have.

5.2 Review my rehearsal

Use it when: you've recorded and transcribed a practice run.

Here's a transcript of me rehearsing my pitch: **[paste]**. It took **[time]**. Tell me where I rambled, where I used filler words, which sentences were hard to follow, and where going off script worked better than my script. Give me the three most important fixes.

5.3 Write my follow-up

Use it when: within two days of pitching.

I pitched to **[who]** about **[idea]**. They asked about **[their questions]** and were most interested in **[what]**. Write a follow-up message under 120 words that thanks them, answers their main question with evidence, and suggests one clear next step. Keep it in my voice and don't overstate anything.

PRACTISE OUT LOUD

Use voice mode for prompt 5.1. Answering out loud is much closer to the real room than typing.

Pitch-day checklist

Tick these off the day before. On the day, your only job is to tell the story.



Deck saved as a PDF, on your laptop and in the cloud



Tested on the screen you will use, if you can



A final timed run, under the limit



Your first line, known by heart



Answers ready for your 10 hardest questions



Your follow-up message drafted

Your pitch on a page

MY STORY IN TWO LINES

MY THREE STRONGEST PIECES OF EVIDENCE

MY ASK

Tell the story.
Show the evidence.
Make the ask.

fredstudents.com · Story-first method adapted from Nir Zavaró.

