

Drafting an Elevator Pitch

An "elevator pitch" can be one of your most effective tools. It's a short, easily memorized statement that describes yourself, some of your key features as a job seeker, and your goals. You can use it in a spoken or written context to help introduce yourself effectively.

Even though employers are unlikely to ask you for an elevator pitch directly, having one ready will help you in many situations. It can help you draft a cover letter, speak easily to a potential hirer when you network at an event, answer general interview questions such as "tell us about yourself," and so on. In an interview, it will help you seem poised and prepared.

Your elevator pitch should answer three questions:

- Who are you?
- What do you do?
- What do you want?

Example

"Hi, I'm Jonathan Bittmann. I'm a data analyst working toward a specialization in big data. I've spent the last six years working for a cloud development company, where I've developed my skills in programming and served as team leader. While working with some of our big data projects, I became interested in diving into that further and have gone back to school to get a big data specialization. While I'm working on that, I'm looking for a position working with data streaming and big data so I can put my learning to use. I'm very interested in the work your company does, and I think I could bring a lot of expertise and leadership to your organization. Could we meet to discuss the open roles you currently have?"

Let's break it down and see how you can write an elevator pitch of your own.

Who are you?

Start by introducing yourself with your full name and add your preferred name if you have one. This is a good time to offer a handshake if you're in a face-to-face situation. Follow this with a statement about your career title and current situation.

What do you do?

Provide a few key pieces of skill or experience that set you apart and make you an interesting candidate. Don't try to list your whole resume – pick a highlight or two about your recent experience. When you've decided on your points, arrange them in a way that makes sense; you want to tell a story, not just list bullet points. Making a story out of your points quickly engages your reader's or listener's interest.

What do you want?

Finish with an action request. This could be asking for an interview, stating why you're interested in a particular position, or even asking whether your statement covers the question they were asking. The idea is to encourage the other person to engage with you, not just listen to what you've said. This will definitely depend on the context and setting, so think of a few possible endings.

While you are composing your elevator pitch, use natural-sounding language and avoid jargon. You should sound comfortable when you speak it, so remain professional, but use your own phrasing. Additionally, your pitch should be easily understood by many people; this will make it useful in many situations.

After you write your pitch, work on memorizing it. Practice your pitch until you are comfortable and can easily deliver it verbally. Slow down and speak clearly. Being nervous will likely make you speak more quickly, so practice slowing down and enunciating. Find a friend who will help you memorize it and practice speaking it. Maybe you can work together on developing elevator pitches for both of you.

You'll want to be able to use the pitch in many situations, but sometimes it will make sense to tailor it to the context you're in, such as changing what you request or highlighting a slightly different experience. Write the pitch so that it's broadly useful but be ready to tailor it as needed.

An effective and well-rehearsed elevator pitch can be extraordinarily useful in your job search. The payoff for having one ready can be enormous, so it's well worth investing the time to develop one.

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