

Presentation & Pitch Deck Design - Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a deck you actually build. Work through it in order, and by the end you will have a finished story spine, a defined visual system, and a complete 12-to-15-slide pitch with an appendix and two delivery versions. Each section maps to a course module, so do the lessons first, then bring your real pitch here.

The Argument Before the Slides: Story and Structure

Lock your narrative spine and define what every slide must prove before you open a design tool.

Exercise: Choose and outline your story spine

Pick one spine for your deck - Duarte's contrast model, Kawasaki's 10/20/30, or the Sequoia sequence - and outline your actual pitch against it. Write the headline takeaway for each slide before designing anything. Aim for 12 to 15 main slides.

- Which spine did you choose, and why does it fit your audience (investor, conference, internal)?

- Write your one-sentence company purpose - what you do, in a single declarative line under 12 words.

- List your 12 to 15 slide headlines as takeaways (conclusions with a number where possible), not labels.

- Mark where your 'what is' (problem) turns into 'what could be' (vision) - the contrast pivot of your deck.

Worksheet: Headline-as-takeaway conversion sheet

For each slide, write the boring label, then the so-what question, then rewrite it as a takeaway headline. Fill one row per slide. If you cannot answer 'so what', the slide may not earn its place.

Slide number

Boring label (topic)

So what? (what this slide proves)

Takeaway headline (conclusion + number)

Evidence / visual that supports the headline

Checklist: Structure is sound before you design

- I chose one named story spine and committed to its order
- Every slide has a headline written as a takeaway, not a category label
- Reading only the headlines top to bottom tells my full argument
- My company purpose fits in one sentence under 12 words
- The main deck is 12 to 15 slides; extra detail is flagged for the appendix
- I can name the single point each slide must prove

The Visual System: Type, Color, Grid, and Master Slide

Define the reusable system - type scale, two-color palette, grid, and master slides - that keeps a long deck consistent.

Worksheet: Define your deck's visual system

Decide and record your system once, then never deviate. Fill in exact values - hex codes and point sizes - so you can build masters and swatches from this sheet.

Headline typeface and weight

Body typeface and weight

Type scale: divider / headline / body / caption (pt)

Accent color (hex)

Text color (hex, e.g. dark grey #1A1A1A)

Background color (hex)

Secondary grey(s) (hex)

Slide size (16:9, 1920x1080) and margin %

Exercise: Build your master slides

In your tool's master or theme view (PowerPoint Slide Master, Keynote Edit Master Slides, Google Slides Theme, or Pitch), build the layouts every slide will inherit before you make real content slides.

- Create four master layouts: title, section divider, standard content, and full-bleed image - list what each contains.
 - Place the title text box at the identical position and size on every layout so headlines never jump - record the coordinates.
 - Apply your type styles and palette swatches to the masters so new slides start correct.
 - Add guide lines for your margin and a twelve-column grid; note the margin band you will never cross.
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Exercise: The greyscale and contrast test

Stress-test your palette for legibility and for whether your hierarchy survives without color.

- Check every text-on-background pair against WCAG (4.5:1 normal text, 3:1 large) using WebAIM's contrast checker - record any failures.
- View two sample slides in greyscale: does the visual hierarchy still hold without color? Note what breaks.
- Confirm your accent color appears as a spotlight on only one element per slide, never as general decoration.
- Fix any pale-text-on-image slides by adding a solid or semi-transparent panel behind the text.

Checklist: Visual system is locked

- Type scale is four sizes, all at or above readable minimums (body \geq 24pt)
- Only one or two typefaces are used in the entire deck
- Palette is one accent plus neutrals; every value recorded as hex and saved as a swatch
- All text passes WCAG contrast against its background
- Master layouts exist and new slides inherit type, color, and title position
- Slide size is 16:9 with a defined safe margin nothing important crosses

Slides That Argue: Data, Comparison, and Composition

Turn numbers into charts that lead to a conclusion, and compose each slide so the eye lands where you intend.

Worksheet: Chart-as-argument planner

Plan every data slide before building it. For each, finish the sentence 'This chart proves that...' If you cannot, the chart has no job. Use this to choose chart type and what to strip.

Slide / metric

This chart proves that... (the conclusion)

Chart type (line / bar / single big number)

The one element to highlight in accent color

Clutter to remove (gridlines / legend / border / decimals)

Direct labels and annotation to add

Exercise: Design your competitive and comparison slides

Build the comparison slides honestly using the right layout pattern. Credibility here earns trust for the whole deck.

- Choose your pattern: 2x2 matrix, feature table, or before/after - and say why it matches your point.
- List only the dimensions customers actually decide on (not flattering vanity features).
- Place competitors honestly; note where a rival genuinely beats you and how you will address it verbally.
- Mark your real advantage with the accent color and keep everything else neutral.

Exercise: Composition pass on three slides

Apply Robin Williams' four principles - contrast, repetition, alignment, proximity - to your three most important slides and direct the eye on purpose.

- On each slide, name the single most important element and confirm it is the biggest or boldest.
- Squint at each slide: does your eye land first on the thing that matters most? If not, what will you change?
- Check alignment to the grid - find anything that is almost-but-not-quite aligned and fix it.
- Identify where you can remove an element to create white space rather than shrinking everything to fit.

Checklist: Every content slide argues clearly

- Each chart has a written 'this proves that...' conclusion in its headline
- Charts are decluttered: no gridlines, borders, legends, or needless decimals
- Only the element the point depends on is colored; the rest is neutral
- Comparison slides are honest and use a layout that matches the logic
- Each slide has one clearly dominant element and real white space
- Edges align to the grid and related items are grouped by proximity

Finishing: Polish, Delivery, and the Two Versions

Run the consistency pass, export a robust file, and split the deck into a stage version, a reading version, and an appendix.

Exercise: Run the consistency and polish pass

Do a deliberate, systematic sweep for the small inconsistencies that read as carelessness. Use your tool's helpers, not just your eye.

- Run Replace Fonts (or equivalent) and remove every typeface not in your system - what strays did you find?

- Advance through the deck watching only the title position; list any slide where the headline jumps.

- Standardise number formatting (thousands separators, currency, decimals, percentages) - note what you fixed.

- View as a grid and read at 50 percent zoom to catch color and alignment inconsistencies; then present once to yourself out loud to find over-full slides.

Worksheet: Export and delivery plan

Decide exactly how this deck will be delivered and de-risk it. Fill in for each delivery situation you expect. Delivery situation (present live / email to read / venue's machine)

Format sent (native .pptx-.key / PDF / both)

Fonts embedded? (yes / using only system fonts)

Image resolution and final file size

Tested on a second computer? (date / result)

Fallback if the native file fails

Exercise: Split into stage, reading, and appendix

Produce the three deliverables from one system. Build the sparse stage deck first, then derive the others.

- Confirm your stage deck is sparse: big visuals, few words, relies on your voice - list any slide too dense to present.

- Create the reading version: expand headlines and add one or two lines of context per slide so it stands alone.

- Move every detailed or cut slide into an appendix after the closing slide.

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- Anticipate your top five likely questions and confirm each has a ready appendix slide you can jump to.
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Checklist: Deck is delivery-ready

- No rogue fonts; titles never jump; numbers formatted consistently
- Spelling and grammar checked across every slide
- Fonts embedded (or only system fonts used) and a PDF fallback exported
- Exported file tested on a different computer for fonts, color, and layout
- Stage version is sparse; reading version stands alone; appendix holds the detail
- Top five anticipated questions each have a ready appendix slide

Your Action Plan

1. Choose one story spine (Duarte, Kawasaki 10/20/30, or Sequoia) and outline your 12 to 15 slide headlines as takeaways.
2. Run the headline-as-takeaway conversion sheet so reading only the headlines tells your whole argument.
3. Define your visual system on the worksheet: two typefaces max, a four-size type scale, and one accent plus neutrals with exact hex values.
4. Build master layouts (title, divider, content, full-bleed) and apply your type styles and swatches so every new slide inherits them.
5. Check all text against WCAG contrast and confirm your hierarchy survives a greyscale view.
6. Plan each data slide with the chart-as-argument planner, then build decluttered charts that highlight one element in your accent.
7. Design honest comparison slides and run a composition pass (contrast, repetition, alignment, proximity) on your key slides.
8. Run the consistency and polish pass: Replace Fonts, title-position sweep, number formatting, 50 percent zoom, and a read-aloud rehearsal.
9. Export defensively - embed fonts, make a PDF fallback, compress images - and test the file on a second computer.
10. Split the deck into a sparse stage version, a stand-alone reading version, and an appendix covering your top five expected questions.

