

How To Make A Great Pitch Deck: A Producer's Perspective

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Hello! First let's chat about the title of this guide and what that means:

I've looked at literally thousands of pitch decks, and we've made quite a few, and usually a week doesn't go by when a pitch deck isn't somehow incorporated in the day-to-day work, however I am by no means a graphic designer. This guide doesn't really go in-depth on things like how to *technically* design a deck or *treatment composition*. This guide is more so informational on how to make a deck that is enticing from a *production* perspective and one that can adequately serve you in the process of trying to get your film made.

There are a few major points I'd like to get through first, and then we can talk in detail about your deck's style and format, some general thoughts on design, and sections you should be putting in your deck.

Major Point №1:

The quality of your deck is important.

It would be dishonest of me to say that if you have a great idea for a film or even a great script, then the quality of your deck would not be so important, or that it wouldn't matter at all. The professionalism behind your deck, and the overall quality of the work, both visually and in terms of what's actually on the page, *do matter* as they can speak for your character as a creative or as a director. Producers are fully aware that making a pitch deck is not in everyone's wheelhouse, however a well-composed presentation can be vital: it can be proof of your effort and hard work. It's not easy making a treatment, but there are a lot of free tools to use, like Canva and ShotDeck, to make something look great; you also don't need to go over-the-top, a deck can be really minimalistic and still look fantastic.

Major Point №2:

The aesthetic of your deck is important.

A pitch deck is there to, first and foremost, help you *pitch* your project of course. However, as a deck is visual, it is also a useful tool to present some of the tone and aesthetic of the film you're trying to make. If anything, it can be easier to sell the vibe of your film through a presentation than through a script, so you should always try to at least craft your treatments in coherence with the story that you're trying to make. A pitch deck about a slasher should look different from a pitch deck about an elevated horror, which should look different from a pitch deck about a comedy.

I will also add, one of the most valuable things when trying to get a film off the ground is your personal voice and the tone that *only you* can craft, so you should aim to show as much of that as possible in the identity of your deck as well. One of the most important things when going over a treatment is to get an idea of what the film will *feel like*, so make sure to present that as accurately as possible.

Major Point №3:

The length of your deck doesn't really matter (most of the time).

You should *aim* to keep decks probably between 20 and 30 slides, however I don't think this is a set rule because some of the best treatments I've ever seen have been 60 slides, or sometimes even 100. If you go over that relative number of 20-30, it's not an issue, as long as your additional slides are essential in presenting everything you need to present about the story and/or visually aiding the tone and voice of the film. However, be mindful not to have tens and tens of pages full of text, as it can get tiring reading in that case.

Major Point №4:

Do not use AI-generated images.

Personally, I am not at all a fan of AI being used in decks, but I will also never put aside a project solely because of that; however, you absolutely shouldn't use AI in decks because there are a lot of producers who *will* put a project aside solely because of that. It's not a good look because a) it shows that you're pro using AI in a world where that's very very divisive and b) (which is in my opinion more important) it speaks to the effort you've put in making your treatment.

Major Point №5:

You should want to make a deck for yourself first.

Pitch decks are incredibly helpful to you as a director and you shouldn't make them solely for the purpose of getting your film made. They are very useful tools for organising your thoughts, understanding your approach, summarising the progress of the project, and finding the visual aesthetic of your film. And, if you make them for yourself, then everything included, as well as the look of the deck, will be genuine, so that will in turn actually serve you best when showing other people your work.

Now that we've covered these few important points, let's go over some **style suggestions and recommendations** I have, inspired by common mistakes we often see.

№1: Most important, more important than *anything*: make your deck readable.

I know first-hand how annoyingly difficult it is to find that beautiful font that perfectly speaks of the tone of your film, but no matter how perfect that font may be or how cool it may look on the page, it must be, first and foremost, *readable*. It sounds obvious, but you would be surprised how often we see decks that are such a deep strain on your eyes. Make sure the font is easy to get through, make sure you're not putting too much information on the page in massive paragraphs, and make sure that the background color and the text color go hand-in-hand.

№2: Keep it clean, polished, and well-formatted.

It's not *that* big a deal whether your text is centered in the page, whether the images are well-placed, whether text is formatted properly, etc., however this goes hand-in-hand with everything I mentioned so far: a clean deck is both a more accurate representation of the tone of your film, *and* it also speaks of the effort you put into preparing the project. Producers will never put aside a project because the text doesn't align with the edges of the page, however it's important to understand the principle: all these details work either for or against the clarity of your vision and abilities.

№3: Pick a color scheme.

Again, the color scheme should reflect the tone of the film itself, pick one and stick to it - this will make the overall cohesiveness of the treatment way better.

№4: Balance text and images.

A deck shouldn't be all text - and really, not every slide should have text. Allow your reader some breathing time by adding slides that are *only* visual, that aid in understanding what the film will look like. Similarly, if you have text over image in a slide, make sure the text doesn't take over the *entire* slide. You can also put text on a clean background after showing a few images back-to-back - there's no rule saying you should have an image on every slide either.

Also make sure not to put too much writing in your deck overall; I mentioned this briefly, but even if you have information and updates on virtually every section of your project, may that be creative or logistical, keep things short and concise. If your deck has 80 pages of information, that information should be relatively straight-forward and easy to get through because 80 pages of detailed notes are simply a lot to read.

№5: Export in high-definition.

An obvious one, but one worth mentioning. Export your project in high-definition so those images really pop. Similarly, pick images that are clean to begin with: no one wants to see pixelation in something that is ultimately a visual aid for a visual project.

Now let's get into the big stuff: **what do you actually include in a pitch deck?**

But first, I'll share two quick thoughts. One, as every project is different, so is every deck, so what you should include in *yours* will always vary (with a few general exceptions).

Two, you *could* include a lot of information in your treatment, about anything really - you could talk about each character, each location, each theme, each member of the team, the music, the aspect ratio, etc.: the question is if you *should*, in *your* particular case. Just because someone else has decided to talk about the locations in their film doesn't mean you have to - maybe their film is a lot more location-dependent

than yours. Figure out what it is that *you* need to speak about to present the identity and logistics of your particular project and add that.

Most treatments are roughly split in two sections, beginning with information on the **story**, and then information on the **logistics** of the production. In that first section, you should always include:

Name of your film. This is obvious.

Your logline. Every project needs a logline: this is non-negotiable in pitch decks.

Then, your **synopsis**. Every project also needs a synopsis, however I *personally* don't think you need to go over the entire story of your film in the synopsis or summarise every plot-point. In my eyes, this is more an extended logline, going over the basic beats of your story, its themes, a little about the characters, and inviting us to ask questions about some things while staying relatively well-informed on some other things. Keep it revealing, yet engaging, the reader should want to turn the next page.

Then, a **creative/director's statement**. I do think this is vital as it's an opportunity for the reader to get to know *you* and understand a little more about your vision, influences, and plans. I think it's really important to be truthful to yourself in this statement and to talk about *why* you want to make this film and what that means to *you*. One of the most valuable pieces of advice I've ever had from people who put money into the indie film sector was - *I don't invest in projects, I invest in people*. This is particularly true for short films because an investor would realistically never get their investment back (at least from recoupment from the short film itself) - what they often really want is to further the career or creative development of the artist, so presenting yourself as you really are in whatever they read is vital.

Now, creatively speaking, there are a few other things you *could* include, but these are no longer non-negotiables, more dependent on the project. Also, my personal thoughts on these are, as anybody's, subjective and based on my own preference.

I do find that talking about the **themes** of the film is incredibly important. If anything, in the art-house world this can be almost *more* important than reading about the story (in

a pitch deck). Expanding on themes allows the reader to get a grasp of what the script is saying, what it stands for, why it's being made. As a producer, I love reading about the themes that the film is trying to develop because that helps me understand what its *true* aim and meaning is. As a director, I love including this because it helps me summarize those same things in my head, for myself.

You could also include a slide about the **tone / genre** of the film. This should be pretty clear to begin with from the overall identity of the deck itself, but if you're trying to navigate a genre-blend, or if you're really determined to make clear that this film will be in *your own voice* (which you should), then sometimes it's great to really punch this point.

You can, and a lot of people do, speak a little bit about the **characters** in the film. Personally, I neither mind nor want this - it does help to get a better idea of the story, but having more information on the characters has similarly almost never swung me one way or another. To be honest, a lot of the time information on the characters is one of the things we tend to remove from our decks, as that information fills up a lot of pages and there are other things that I find more important.

You could also go further in-depth on the story and provide a **beat-by-beat breakdown** or specific information on how the script develops with every act. Similarly, I don't mind this, but I don't think it's particularly necessary either - especially for shorts, in the amount of time it might take to read a detailed breakdown as such, a producer might as well read the script itself.

And there are many other things you could include in this first part of your deck - the creative part, the part focusing on the story - such as information on the world-building, or the inspiration behind the film, or locations you envision for the film, or much more, but all of this is subjective and determined on a project-by-project basis, so again: figure out what is necessary for *your* film and go from there.

After all of this, you should get into the **logistics** and provide further information on the **production status** of your project. A few non-negotiables here would be:

Information on **the writer, director, and producer of the film**. This is absolutely vital as again, those are the people that whoever is reading the pitch deck will either end up collaborating with or investing into (or both), so it's essential they know who those people are of course.

Any **further team** you have attached. This does help get an idea of what the project will end up being (depending on the crew's previous credits and style), and also how ready for production the film is. Keep information here tight, preferably only HoDs: your DP, PD, editor, composer, etc. If you have ACs or construction crew attached that's amazing, but you don't need to do a full bio section for them.

Any **cast** already firmly attached is also a must. If you have casting *proposals*, then it's a bit different. If you have an idea of what a character should look/feel like and any actors that fit that vibe, it's fine to put those actors for reference, however unless you're A24 or unless you already have them attached, don't put Pedro Pascal as a desired casting option for your film. Be realistic in who you can get, based on where you are at in your career and what the project is, and include those people.

A producer friend recently shared with me that he got a pitch which had casting options for each budget-level the project *could* be at: so in an ideal world, with the ideal budget, these are the A-listers they want, if not, then these are some other established names for a more modest budget, and if not, if they have to shoe-string it, here are some actor friends they could attach in that case. We both thought this was a brilliant approach as it gave options in all cases, but remained realistic and showed industry knowledge.

Your **production plans and a general overview / timeline** of where you are with things. When do you want to shoot, any issues you'll be facing, when you expect the film to be ready, etc. This is project-to-project specific again, but make sure you update your reader on where you're actually at with practical development of the film.

You should include your **budget** if you're sending the deck to an investor and you should tell them if you have any of this budget already secured (and if that's the case, how much you already have secured), however I wouldn't include your budget if you're sending the deck to a potential collaborator. At the end of the day, that's

sensitive information, and money tends to cause issues a lot of the time, so be wary of who you're being *entirely* transparent with. Similarly though, don't lie or hide information if/when directly asked.

Although not necessary, it's nice to include some information on **what you plan to do with your film once complete**. This is very different for shorts and features.

For shorts, you should maybe add a few festivals you're aiming for, what those might do for the team and the project, and then your release and marketing strategy for when the film's festival run is complete. At the end of the day, you want to get the film out there, so it's good to have a plan on how you'll actually do that successfully.

For features, it's a little more complicated (as is the production plan by the way, in feature cases that often comes in the form of a few separate documents), but it's good to mention at least some realistic festivals you'd like to aim for. If your feature gets funded, your sales agents, co-producers, distributors, etc., will have their own suggestions regarding this, so don't worry too much about it, only add some information on festivals you personally like and think fit the aesthetic and production level of the film. Similarly, when it comes to features you really shouldn't worry about distribution or marketing plans as that's an entirely different and very long and complicated process which you shouldn't/wouldn't really be handling anyway.

My personal *unpopular* opinion is that I don't like **comps** in pitch decks. I think comparing your film to other films is often a little naive and also usually inaccurate or not useful in the indie system. I also think it goes against a very important thing when it comes to the project itself - it should be of a *unique voice*. It's good to get an idea, yes - showing two different films and saying *my film will be like these two combined* will help your reader get a better understanding of tone - but I think it's a little too easy and you should aim to present the voice of your film otherwise. Your film should be unique anyway, so if it really is X meets Z, then maybe you need to rethink its tone. However, please take this point with a grain of salt, as I'm in the minority here - there are a lot of producers and companies that love comps presented.

A few additional notes:

A lot of people will make and add a **playlist of music or soundscape** to their decks, encouraging the reader to listen to that as they look through the work. I think this is amazing and a beautiful touch, I encourage you to do it as it speaks of the director's vision and dedication.

Sizzle reels are good to include, I enjoy watching them and again, I think they are a great tool to showcase the tone of the film and the dedication of the director, however if you're making a sizzle reel, make sure that it's of the same quality as your pitch deck. These are almost two separate documents, so you should put the same amount of time and effort in both. But I don't work in TV, where sizzle reels are prevalent, so I unfortunately can't confidently give advice on what makes a great one.

It's always great to include a **personal message** for the person / company that you're sending your deck to. This is a lovely touch that shows you've completed the work *for them* and it's something that can definitely help you break through the noise.

When **choosing images**, try to find some shots that are at least *somewhat* unknown, such shots that the reader maybe hasn't seen too much of. I know that *Euphoria* is gorgeous and I've used shots from *Euphoria* in my own pitch decks plenty, however even if it speaks of the identity of your film, producers have seen shots from this show so many times that they sometimes no longer feel like a unique aesthetic. If you could include your own images, pictures you took or created, I think that's a great way to build the deck's identity.

In conclusion:

When it comes to pitch decks, there are a few overall rules I think you should always follow. A lot of these overlap with my initial Major Points (look above), but to summarize:

Make sure your deck is **of quality**, make sure it **represents the tone of the film**, make sure it **includes all necessary information** that a pitch deck should include, and make sure it's **custom to whatever project you're making** (and includes information relevant to that project). Also make sure it's **concise, readable, and easy to get through**.

Pitch decks are incredibly useful tools, not only for collaborators or financiers, but for yourself as well, so try and make them because you *want to*, not because you *have to*. It is this desire that will make the deck great and whatever path you decide to take in creating the treatment, at the end of the day it is there to help you get your film made, both **logistically and creatively**, so take advantage of that.

- Mickey