

5 Steps to Writing a Killer Elevator Pitch for Your Book

by JENNIE NASH



You may think that elevator pitches are only for high-tech startups, job hunters, or Hollywood screenwriters, but being able to succinctly summarize your book in a very short space is a skill that every writer must master.

The elevator pitch is a powerful marketing tool that you can put to use when enticing readers, reaching out to potential marketing partners, and when you have a brief audience with an agent or editor. If you have written a strong elevator pitch, you will find that it's much easier to answer when people ask, "So what's your book about?"

Here are five simple steps to help you develop a killer pitch. Each includes three examples that build upon each step, so you can see how a pitch is crafted from beginning to end.



Step 1: What's your book about?

Write down what your book is about in no more than 50 words. Don't try to be clever or witty, just write down the facts or the bare bones.

- If it's fiction or memoir, try to capture the plot, what happens, what the story is.
- If it's nonfiction (business, self-help, inspiration, how-to), try to capture what the reader will learn and what your main point is.

Examples:

- **Fiction:** It's a story about a woman who becomes part of the first father–daughter pair in the Senate, except she's on one side and he's on the other, and they don't agree on anything.
- **Memoir:** It's the story of how I spent four years searching for my mother's murderer when law enforcement officials gave up.
- **Self-Help:** It's a book about what to do when you have to let go of a dream that didn't come true — like having a baby, closing a business, or walking away from a marriage.

Step 2: What's the context?

Readers want a sense of what world or philosophical mindset they will be immersed in. They're going to spend a lot of time with you in your book, so give them a sense of what to expect.

- If it's fiction or memoir, say something about the world of the story — the time period, the universe, or the location. For memoir, even if you wrote your initial sketch in first person, switch now to third person. It may feel awkward to write about yourself in this way, but it's standard procedure for memoir. There may be times when you want to use a first-person format (i.e., when speaking to people in person), but third person is the norm.
- If it's nonfiction, consider the cultural and philosophical context of the issue or the problem you are helping your reader solve. Imagine giving your topic a frame.

Examples:

- **Fiction:** Set in a future when partisan politics has reached its extreme expression, this story is about a woman who becomes part of the first father–daughter pair in the Senate — except she's on one side and he's on the other, and they don't agree on anything.
- **Memoir:** It's the story of how an Orange County housewife spent four years searching for her mother's murderer when law enforcement officials in both Mexico and the US gave up.



- **Self-Help:** In our “never, ever give up” culture, quitting can feel like failure. This is a guidebook about what to do when you have to let go of a dream that didn’t come true — like having a baby, closing a business, or walking away from a marriage.

Step 3: Why should your reader care?

Readers read in order to get something very specific. They are not randomly attracted to the books they choose to spend their time on: They know what they want. They want to be educated or entertained, inspired or challenged. When describing your book, you want to tell them very clearly why they should care.

- If it’s fiction or memoir, add a line or two about what they might feel after reading your book, or the impact it might have on them. You can consider comparing your book to others in the genre, or describing it as a mash-up of two existing books.
- If it’s nonfiction, explain what they will learn from your book. What’s the takeaway? What’s the point?

Examples:

- **Fiction:** Set in a future when partisan politics has reached its extreme expression, this story is about a woman who becomes part of the first father–daughter pair in the Senate — except she’s on one side and he’s on the other, and they don’t agree on anything. It’s a story that proves politics is always personal, and offers hope for a future where what happens in Washington is far from business as usual.
- **Memoir:** It’s the story of how an Orange County housewife spent four years searching for her mother’s murderer when law enforcement officials in both Mexico and the US gave up. Many people dream of solving an unsolvable case and cracking a code no one else could touch; few people actually pull it off.
- **Self-Help:** In our “never, ever give up” culture, quitting can feel like failure and the aftermath can be deep grief. If you have had to give up a dearly held dream — perhaps having a baby, making it to the corner office, dancing on Broadway, or owning a house — this guidebook will help you find your way through the pain.

Step 4: Make it snappy.

Polish your description to a high shine by adding texture, details and rhythm. Allow your unique voice to shine through so that readers will get a sense of your style, and let your elevator speech “breathe” so that readers get a real sense for what you are offering. Read your description out loud to hear how it sounds, and revise until it’s perfect.

Examples:



- **Fiction:** In a not-so-distant future, Washington is gridlocked because neither party will budge an inch on anything — from what to serve in the Senate dining room to who will protect the people from agricultural toxins. When the daughter of a long-time conservative Senator is appointed Senator of the nation’s most liberal state, the hopes of a nation are resting on the father–daughter duo to make peace — and progress. Politics is about to get very personal.
- **Memoir:** When law enforcement officials in both Mexico and the US failed to solve the brutal murder of her mother, Lauri Taylor, an Orange County housewife, vowed to do whatever it took to solve the crime. She spent four years in a relentless quest for the truth, and against all odds, cracked the code of her mother’s case. Many people dream of solving a high-profile crime, but few people have the guts, stamina, and skills to actually pull it off. This story combines a true crime page-turner with a poignant mother–daughter saga.
- **Self-Help:** In our “never, ever give up” culture, walking away from a dream can feel like utter failure. Whether you want to have a baby, buy a house, make it to the corner office, or dance on Broadway, the mantra is to keep trying — even if the price is your health, your bank account, your relationships, and your sanity. In this guidebook to letting go, Tracey Cleantis shows you how to compassionately give up on your dream, grieve the loss, and find your next happy.

Step 5: Add relevant accolades.

Are you an award-winning writer? A respected leader in your field? Was your last book a *New York Times* bestseller? Is this book the next installment of a beloved series? Did someone famous give you a killer blurb? Add in this kind of accolade. If you don’t have anything that qualifies as awesome and relevant, don’t add anything — and don’t worry. The most important thing to readers is the book itself. Here are the final elevator pitches.

Debut novel that is still a work in progress:

In a not-so-distant future, Washington is gridlocked because neither party will budge an inch on anything from what to serve in the Senate dining room to who will protect the people from agricultural toxins. When the daughter of a long-time conservative Senator is appointed Senator of the nation’s most liberal state, the hopes of a nation are resting on the father–daughter duo to make peace — and progress. In this story from longtime Washington insider Jane Doe, politics is about to get very personal.

The memoir *The Accidental Truth* by Lauri Taylor, published by Select Books, May 2015:

When law enforcement officials in both Mexico and the US failed to solve the brutal murder of her mother, Lauri Taylor, an Orange County housewife, vowed to do whatever it took to solve the crime. She spent four years in a relentless quest for the truth, and against all odds, cracked the code of her mother’s case. Many people dream of solving a high-profile crime, but few people have the guts, stamina, and skills to actually pull it off. This story combines a true crime page-turner with a poignant mother–daughter saga. “A moving, deeply



felt tale.” — Dr. Daniel Amen, New York Times bestselling author of *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*, and *The Daniel Plan*

The self-help book *The Next Happy* by Tracey Cleantis, published by Hazeldon, March 2015:

In our “never, ever give up” culture, walking away from a dream can feel like utter failure. Whether you want to have a baby, buy a house, make it to the corner office, or dance on Broadway, the mantra is to keep trying — even if the price is your health, your bank account, your relationships, and your sanity. In this guidebook to letting go, Tracey Cleantis shows you how to compassionately give up on your dream, grieve the loss, and find your next happy. “A bold, brave and incredibly relevant book.” — Lee Woodruff, New York Times bestselling author of Perfectly Imperfect: A Life in Progress

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