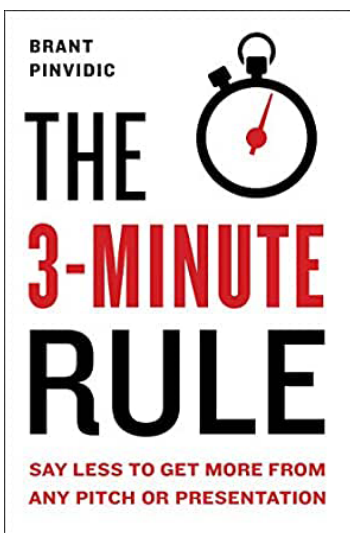


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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Brant Pinvidic

*Brant Pinvidic is a writer and presentations coach, widely recognized as one of the great creative sales leaders in Hollywood.*

# The Three-Minute Rule

## THE SUMMARY

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### Introduction

Every time you make a pitch, presentation, or proposal to try to influence anyone to do anything, your audience's first impression will be fully formed in less than three minutes. That yes or no is already in their heads. It's not your fault. That's just how people are.

People today focus more intensely and efficiently. The proliferation of technology and the ability to get unlimited information instantly have created hyper-savvy consumers. They have zero tolerance for long-winded explanations, exhaustive chatter, or linguistic sales tactics. Audiences today simply want information. They want it quick, clear, and concise.

Everything of value about your company, idea, product, or service can and must be conveyed clearly, concisely, and accurately in three minutes or less. In the first three minutes, you need to vividly illustrate the most valuable elements of your proposal, capture and maintain your audience's attention, and—most important—create engagement.

I'm not talking about an "elevator pitch." Serious meetings, real business, and effective communication take longer and require more fine-tuning than blurting out a few catchy phrases in an elevator.

This is about delivering your most valuable information in the most compelling way to ensure further engagement. Three minutes is not just a time frame to

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condense your information; it's based on the science of **approach motivation**, the study of why consumers are driven to engage. The science says, if you can maintain their focus, you can create their desire. You need three minutes.

Simplicity is power. Clarity is compelling. Information is value. The key is to separate everything you *want* to say from just what needs to be said. This book will show you *exactly* how to do that.

But my methods don't just work for Hollywood: Over the last five years, I've dedicated my life to helping people like you by teaching the art of pitching, presenting, and selling, no matter what they're trying to sell.

It's easier than you fear and takes less work than you're doing now. You will be saying less, and I promise you, you'll be getting much, much more.

## Chapter 1 - The 3-Minute Rule

Success in life and business is dictated by your ability to convey your information to others so they understand it the way you do. The 3-Minute Rule will guide you step by step to take your most compelling and valuable information and weave it into an engaging story that will lead your audience where you want them to go.

Within the first three minutes of any presentation or pitch, the audience will process the basic elements of your offering, start to place value on that offering, and determine their likelihood to continue further with meaningful engagement. That's why it's so important to control that narrative and guide the audience through each facet of a presentation.

Always be aware: It's not just who you pitch to, it's who they have to pitch to, that matters. No matter how much beautifully crafted material you are able to lay out directly, and regardless of how long you immerse someone in the depths of your proposal, they are going to have to summarize and relay your pitch to someone else.

The two most important factors to consider when building any presentation or proposal are **knowledge** and **rationalization**: What knowledge does my audience already possess? How will they rationalize the decision to "buy in" to my proposal?

Everything you ever decide or have to do must be rationalized in your head to yourself. "*Why did you buy that car?*" Your mind naturally places the most valuable factors in that decision up front and in a specific order. These are **statements of value**. They represent what's important to you, and your brain naturally organizes them in order to build your story. That is the **rationalization story**.

If you are attempting to convince anyone of anything, that rationalization story is what they will use to make their decision. Even if you spend three hours pitching every single detail, they will ultimately rationalize their decision using a simple story and collection of statements, guaranteed to be less than three minutes long.

## Chapter 2 - The Bullets

Just over a decade ago, I was blindly struggling as a TV development executive at an emerging production company. My job was to take the germ of any idea and somehow get it on TV. I had to not only create and develop the premise for the show but also convince the network executives to buy it, pay to make it, and then put it on their channel.

The network pitch room is a cold, ruthless, unforgiving setting with a very difficult audience. Meetings start with smiles

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that last about ten seconds. If you've ever watched Shark Tank, that no-nonsense attitude and curt style was patterned after a TV network pitch.

Before I had my epiphany and discovered the very core of what later became the 3-Minute Rule, I was trying too hard. I was trying to sell instead of conveying information. I wasn't letting the ideas do the work. I wasn't telling a story.

I started with a completely clean slate. I asked my team to write down every statement that described our proposed show on individual Post-it notes in blue Sharpie and then stick them on the wall. At the end of the exercise we had at least a hundred on the wall. Each Post-it could only fit a word or two because we needed them large enough to read from across the room.

Our goal was to arrange these bullet points in an order that made sense and that anyone could follow. The wall was filled with everything I *wanted* to say, but I had to find just what *needed* to be said.

One by one, I began to eliminate the words that weren't necessary to the core concept of the show. Eventually I found myself with just seven Post-it notes in the far corner of the wall.

It was like cracking a code, or seeing the solution to a puzzle appear. For the first time, I saw *how* to explain this idea appear before me with perfect clarity. I had cut right to the heart of what was important.

## Chapter 3 - WHAC Your Story

As I worked with more and more companies, I started to notice a distinct pattern emerging. Each and every time we started down the road to create or restructure a pitch or presentation, we started with the bullet point exercise, and then we'd categorize each of the bullet points. The more we stripped it down to the basics, the stronger the foundation to build the presentation.

I found that this process revolved around four specific questions—the four pillars of the rationalization story we would be building for their audience. Our bullet points would then be grouped into one of these four categories depending on which question they best answered.

1. What is it?
2. How does it work?
3. Are you sure?
4. Can you do it?

By using these four questions to filter your information, you can unlock a powerful storytelling technique that will help you lead your audience to the conclusion you want, every time. I call this the **WHAC** method.

You can use WHAC to refine the precise order of your information and later we'll use it to identify the **level of importance** for each element of your presentation.

When building the ideal 3-Minute pitch or presentation, you need to lead your audience through the information and build the story. You allow your audience to form a core understanding of the value of the proposition. Effectively, you want them to see your proposal the way you see your proposal.

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Many people start out wanting to use facts, figures, logic and reason to explain their value proposition, but these require **context** to be effective and credible. Context requires a **foundation of understanding**. A foundation of understanding relies on a **solid premise**. To build an effective story, we must begin with a solid premise.

This is the format of the 3-Minute pitch:

**Conceptualize**—*What* is it and *how* does it work? (00:00-1:30)

**Contextualize**—*Are you sure?* Is this true, is it real? (1:30-2:30)

**Actualize**—*Can you do it?* Could this actually happen? (2:30-3:00)

## Chapter 4 - The Statements of Value

Most of the advice you'll find out there on making an effective pitch focuses on how to present, how to speak in public, how to overcome your nerves. The truth is that none of those things matter very much. All the audience really wants is information. **Story trumps style.**

That's why the 3-Minute Rule and the WHAC method are so effective. People want to know what it is you are offering, how it works, why it's good, and how they get it. If you get that out quickly and concisely, you'll have an engaged audience looking for more.

Simplicity is powerful. I often joke, "Simple is the new sexy." People want the most relevant information quickly and concisely. The most important step is to strip everything you think you need to say down to its simplest, most direct form. The process of conveying everything of value about your offering clearly, concisely, and accurately in three minutes or less begins with a fundamental question: **How can you compress everything you think you need to say into only what needs to be said?**

I urge you to abandon all preconceptions about language, tactics, phrasing, or technique, and focus only on the value of the information and the process of translating that information in a way the audience will understand.

Your Post-it covered wall filled with bullet points represents your **statements of value** (which are the simple, clean, and clear expansions of your bullet points—"Personal Trainer" = "I am a certified personal trainer.")

Next, write out these simple phrases. Don't skip ahead on this step because it seems too basic. As you go through this process, you'll hear in your mind a story developing. It's important to *stay brief!* Right now, you just want to build the foundation.

What you might notice is that the thirty bullet points just blossomed into forty or more statements. That's good. Your simplified bullet points often yield other ideas you didn't think of or skipped over. In those forty or so statements lives the most powerful three-minute version of your pitch.

Now we just need to choose what to say first, what to say later, and tie them all together so the audience understands it like you do. That's the easy part.

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## Chapter 5 - There's More to Your Story

You are probably looking at a collection of more than forty statements of value and thinking, "I thought this was supposed to be a 3-Minute pitch?" I get that a lot.

Remember, it's not just about getting it down to three minutes; it's about finding the *best* three minutes. It's most likely in your pitch and presentation you'll get a chance to say and explain every single one of your statements, because your first three minutes are going to have your audience eager and excited to engage further.

I've got a great way of going one step deeper to help you uncover something new. Something waiting to be uncovered. Look at each of your statements and force yourself to explain why you think it's valuable. Ask "I don't get it" questions: "Why would we want to do that?" "What does that mean?" "How are you going to do that?" "Why is that different?" "How does that work?" This will help you put the information in order and to come up with more simple and clean statements.

Keep asking questions and pushing yourself. The detective work here is important. Isn't this fun? You started with thirty bullet points. You expanded to forty statements of value, and now you interrogated and questioned yourself into even more. You may be looking at sixty or more statements.

The more gold there is sitting in front of you, the more powerful your three minutes can be. Now, out of everything you have in front of you, I'm going to show you how to filter this down to the actual twenty-five statements that are going to make up your three-minute pitch.

This filter will help you decide if something is informing your audience or trying to engage them. Very important rule: You can't engage with your audience until you've informed them. They must conceptualize before they contextualize; they must contextualize before they actualize. Now we start having some fun.

## Chapter 6 - Information and Engagement

"Confused people don't buy anything." When you simplify the process for people, those who might have been confused are not confused any longer, and those who instantly understood it feel confirmed in their assumptions.

Without question the number one mistake I see is combining **information** with **engagement**. It is a very easy mistake to make, and it makes pitching and presenting so much harder and less effective than it should be.

Your goal in your 3-Minute pitch is to *inform*, then *engage*.

Think of it as a jigsaw puzzle. You have all the pieces, now let's fit them together to make a perfect picture. The first thing you do is dump the box and make sure all the pieces are on the table. The next step (unless you are one of those strange people) is to separate the pieces and find all the corner and the edge pieces. Then you build the framework of the puzzle. Once that is done, you fill in all the middle pieces—the heart of the puzzle. And voila, the picture is complete.

That's exactly what we are going to do. We are going to take your statements of value and separate them into edge pieces and middle pieces. These are what I call the engagement and information buckets.

Since an audience conceptualizes, contextualizes, and actualizes the information, it's important to feed an audience the information in that basic order. So the key is to identify the statements that inform the audience and the ones

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that will engage the audience. Once you inform your audience of the basic concept, getting them interested in and understanding how it works, all the other details become engagement points.

You will want to build your story and your 3-Minute pitch by deciding what gets said first, second, and not at all. Go through your statement of value and decide what someone would need to know “before” or “after” this statement. If a statement needs a lot of “before” to be relevant, this is a clear indication that it is an “engagement statement.”

If you make a presentation but your audience doesn’t seem to get it in the end, you may be mixing engagement ideas in your pitch where information is needed, eroding the overall effect.

## Chapter 7 - Your Core 3 Minutes

It’s time to pull some of your value statements out and put them aside. It’s not that they aren’t valuable or important; they are just statements that can only be at their maximum value after your three minutes. Your first three minutes isn’t about everything you have to say; it’s about saying only what needs to be said.

Your goal is to get down to the twenty-five statements that are clearly the most informative. In each of the WHAC categories, you have statements that are going to be effective only after your audience clearly understands and has all the necessary context. You have to be prepared to save some of your favorite statements for after your three minutes.

There is a reason the “director’s cut” on 99.9 percent of all movies is just a longer, less enjoyable version. There is also a reason very few directors get to show that version. It’s because directors (me included) get so close to our creations that we lose our objectivity. We become precious about our information. We want to be passionate about your information, but not precious.

A great director knows how to use just enough scenes to connect a story and let the audience fill in the rest. A great director knows and trusts that the audience will put the pieces together. It’s important to respect your audience and the knowledge they possess.

Simplifying your message does not mean spoon-feeding every thought and detail to your audience. “Simplified” does not mean dumbed down, it’s actually just the opposite. Telling your audience things they already know is a very bad habit. It subtly shows a lack of respect for their time and their intellect.

As your final exercise to help lock in your twenty-five core statements of value, put them through the WHAC filter one more time.

**W**—What is it?—50%—nine statements—1:30

**H**—How does it work?—30%—seven statements—1:00

**A**—Are you sure?—15%—six statements—0:20

**C**—Can you do it?—5%—three statements—0:10

As you look at the WHAC questions, don’t take the descriptions too literally. It’s the themes and the values that are important, not the literal descriptions.



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Many people mistakenly assume that the 3-Minute pitch is just condensing a long-winded explanation into a brisk three minutes. Instead, it's learning how to make three minutes impactful and interesting enough to get your message across in the most effective way. It's about keeping your audience focused long enough for you to create the desire. I've heard hundreds of pitches that made three minutes feel like a painful eternity. Timing is a tool. It's no substitute for content.

## Chapter 8 - The Hook

Your 3-Minute pitch needs a hook. What is a "hook"? It's the one thing or element about an idea or story that makes you go, "Ah, that's cool."

"Cool" is the perfect word for that feeling of acceptance and understanding and approval. Now, whether that's a funny thing, a price thing, a life-saving thing, or an emotional thing doesn't matter. In context, "it's cool" is what you're looking for.

Now that you have a collection of your core statements and you've got them in a specific order, let me show you how to find and use your hook like a world-class Hollywood screenwriter.

The hook has two parts, the **statement** and **what it means**. It needs some context to be effective. To find and use a hook for your story, first identify one or two of your core statements that excite you the most. If the audience understood your offering perfectly and you asked them, "What's the best part?" their answer is probably your hook.

Finding the hook is usually pretty easy. But many people, and unfortunately many sales books and coaches have the misconception that the hook is what you open with. But today, what most people think when they hear a grandiose opening, is "I'm not sure I believe you. Prove it." Then it becomes your job to convince them otherwise. Does that sound like a winning strategy?

This is called the **state-and-prove** method. The idea is that you get someone to desire the outcome first and then use your information to convince them that your statement is true. But why would you want to start with your audience thinking, "That's not possible" and trying to disprove you? There is some science to **approach motivation**—that *desire* can create *focus*.

But there is a much better way: Use focus to create *desire*. If you can capture and maintain your audience's focus, you can actually create and build their desire for your outcome. You can lead your audience to want and desire your offering, as they hear and understand it.

You want to start with the facts, plain and simple, and let them build up to your grand conclusion. You want the audience, after hearing your what and how, to start to form your hook for themselves. So when you finally say it, in their mind, they will say, "That's right." So the hook is something you almost don't need to say.

## Chapter 9 - The Edge

Once you've got your hook, now we want to find your **edge**. Your edge is something your audience wouldn't see coming.

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The edge is something that cuts through the simplicity of your pitch and reminds your audience that you have something special to offer. You can also describe it as the factor that helps push it over the edge. The edge is a cool fact or anecdote that makes someone metaphorically sit up and take notice.

If your hook is something cool, the audience should almost know by the time they hear it that your edge is something cool they hadn't thought of before.

So what story or example best illustrates your hook. Can you find that one anecdote that's just a little different to really drive the point home? What's the "Can you believe it?" item? Your edge is a story that has a little oomph to it, one that you can justifiably end with "Isn't that crazy?"

The temptation will always be to use your hook and your edge early in the pitch because they feel good and have impact. It's important to resist that temptation. There is so much more power in letting the information do the work and then using these pieces to capitalize on the situation. A lot of my clients want to open their pitch with the story that should be their edge. Inform and lead. Don't state and prove.

## Chapter 10 - Use Your Negatives

No idea, pitch opportunity, or presentation is perfect. There is always something that you worry the audience will fixate on, and it will suck the life out of the idea. There's always a problem with your offering.

One of the first and most powerful questions I ask every new client or audience is: "What do you hope the audience doesn't find out?" Because today's audience is overexposed to marketing and inherently skeptical, it is important to look at the other side of the coin. The second you start giving off the "too good to be true" vibe, their Spidey-sense starts tingling. If your pitch or proposal is all positive and upside, your audience will look for issues and problems to balance. What's really scary is that most of the time they'll do that *while* you are presenting.

Have you ever made a presentation or a pitch and the *very* first question is negative—"What about X?" The truth is, if you *can* get "what about" questions, you are going to get them.

So you can use your weakness as a strength by bringing them into the pitch. You can bring up the negative and let your audience look to solve it. Your audience will not like it if you gloss over a negative but will despise you if you try to hide the negative—and they will distrust everything about anything you've said or shown them.

So ask "What do I hope my audience doesn't find out?" and look at your statements of interest and find the ones that could validate why this problem isn't such a problem. Most likely these will be in your "Are you sure?" section of WHAC.

So find your moment and work the negatives into your presentation with "We were surprised to learn," or "I still struggle with," or "What we are trying to avoid," or "The problem we're working through," or "My initial concerns were" whenever appropriate. It's an easy and effective tool. Don't be afraid to really dig in. You almost can't go too far.

## Chapter 11 - Your 3-Minute Pitch

Let me review how to build a pitch from scratch:

Begin with the Post-it notes and whiteboard. Once you have your **bullets**, start to form your **statements**.



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Put them into your buckets—**Information** and **Engagement**.

Do the “**befores**” and “**afters**.”

Filter the core information through the WHAC process to clean it up: **What is it? How does it work? Are you sure? Can you do it?**

Find the **hook**. Find the **edge**. Find the **negative**.

For every movie or TV show that succeeds by breaking the rules, at least one thousand find success by sticking with the pattern. Your story, your 3-Minute pitch, is straight, linear, and clear. When it comes to pitching, one of my favorite rules of thumb is “Don’t try to Tarantino this.”

## Chapter 12 - Opening, Callback, and Ending

Jimmy Fallon has mastered a form of storytelling and interaction called “pre-suasion.” It’s the process of influencing what your audience is thinking before you start pitching or presenting. It’s a classic Hollywood storytelling system that filmmakers and novelists use to give you a certain feeling and understanding before the story begins. It’s important and powerful, and once I discovered it and started to study it, it’s been a core element in every pitch and presentation or story that I deliver.

Why did Bambi’s mom die at the beginning of the film? Disney could have easily told the story of Bambi just getting lost, or not shown Bambi’s mom dying, or done it later in the film. But by opening with that piece, they instantly set your emotions and thoughts exactly where they need to be to get into the story of Bambi. Bambi’s mom had nothing to do with the actual story. If you think of the movie, once his mom dies, Bambi’s journey and the movie begin. It’s pre-suasion.

The reason Jimmy Fallon is so good at it is that comedians do pre-suasion in almost every joke. They set up the scene and your thoughts on it before they deliver the punch line. A lot of comedy is done in little stories so they master the art of pre-suasion.

So start by asking yourself what you’d want your audience to be feeling or thinking *before* you start explaining your pitch. To help you narrow it down, always think of what they would *want* most out of the pitch. You will design an intro that gets your audience to *feel* what **they** want.

The **reason for being** tells the audience how you came to be involved with this idea or proposal. “Now you know why I’m about to tell you *this* story about *this* character.” Bambi’s mom is dead. It subtly tells the audience why they should care. And when done right it opens the audience’s mind to the possibilities ahead.

Identify your reason for being and create the intro that puts your audience in the right place and the right frame of mind. Start with what your audience wants out of your proposal, then look for the story that explains how you discovered how to deliver it to them. That’s how you use an opening.

The **callback** in a pitch is to repeat your reason for being and verify it. It’s a great way to connect your pitch to the opportunity you’re presenting. It tells your audience, “Now you see it, too, don’t you?”

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Let the facts and information do the work—inform your audience and then lead them to the conclusion. Build an opening that says how you came to be. Then build your callback as the part where you knew that was right and gave you that validation. This will take your audience on the journey you went through as you become committed to your project. Your journey is a story. It's a story of your commitment and purpose. Remember: if they can see your business, project, or service the way you do, they'll have to be interested.

What is the **ending** of the 3-Minute pitch? How do you go out with a bang? *You don't*. You don't need an ending. You don't even want one. After all we've put into the pitch, the ending has virtually no consequence.

So just stop talking. You've said enough.

## Chapter 13 - Powerpoint-less

I'm guessing you are probably just as annoyed and put off by PowerPoint as I am. Actually, I'm not sure that's possible. I really hate PowerPoint.

If you've ever seen me present or speak onstage, you know I use simple black-and-white text slides for all my presentations. Making your slides look professional is a good idea—but I use slides to accentuate my information; I'm not looking for them to do the work for me. And I sure don't want them distracting the audience.

While I was discovering the power of the 3-Minute Rule and developing my technique, I was finding that these beautifully designed, elaborate presentations were actually confusing to the message.

I call these my PowerPoint Commandments, and I have ten of them to really bring home the metaphor:

- Your handouts are not your presentation slides.
- Use animation, transitions, and fonts sparingly.
- Slides and bullet points for crucial or key elements only.
- Maximum of 6 single-sentence bullet points per slide.
- Maximum of 10 slides.
- Don't read your slides.
- A picture is worth 1,000 bullet points.
- Don't be afraid of white space.
- Pace yourself.
- People who know what they're talking about don't need powerpoint.

Just take a step back and think for a minute. I'm sure you've been pitched many things in your life by someone using PowerPoint. Imagine if every time you saw someone's PowerPoint presentation it was only ten slides, with simple bullet points and pictures. Honestly, how much better would the world be if we all followed these guidelines?

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## Chapter 14 - "Are You Putting on Red Lipstick?"

"Brant, are you putting on red lipstick?" my mother asked me the other day, not at all suggesting I was cross-dressing. She was referring to a presentation I was showing her that had a lot more graphic sizzle and showmanship than it had clearly presented information.

My mom always says, "The delivery isn't nearly as important as the message itself." In today's world, using a multitude of tricks to close a sale rarely works if you don't have your pitch right. If you do it right, you don't need tricks.

It's one thing to have a personal style and delivery that doesn't help you in a pitch or presentation. It's another thing if it's damaging you.

This final chapter represents my continuing mission to help eradicate this issue every time you pitch and present. I'm ruthless in my pursuit of simplicity and clarity.

You don't want to pull your audience out of the story and remind them they are being sold to. Your pitch is a path of information to follow. It's vital to let that information take the lead. Often, too much emphasis on style and personality muddies the message. Stay out of your own way.

I hear this far too often: "Pitch with passion." I'm not going to argue against that, but I want to be clear that passion is wildly powerful and intoxicating in a presentation, but it's also incredibly dangerous and easily misused. The downside is that the more excited or passionate you appear about your presentation, the more you make the presentation about you. You want to use your passion to accentuate and drive your story, but you don't want to overpower it. You don't want to cross over from passion to promotion, and you want to avoid letting your audience see you passionate or excited about something that doesn't merit such a response.

Clients want me to tell them it's an easy fix. They want to hear the problem is the graphics, or their tie, or their confidence. It's easier to deal with that than their content or business idea. I have to tell them it's the content, not the presentation. It's the message, not the messenger.

When my mom sees me trying to spice up elements of a presentation to overshadow the lack of clarity, she asks, "Are you putting on red lipstick?"

Always look to your information first, and how you deliver it second.