FOUNDER ACADEMY

Pre-Seed Pitch Deck Template

12 slides · What goes on each one · Pro tips from the field

This template gives you the exact structure early-stage founders use to raise their first check. Each slide includes layout guidance, fill-in prompts, and pro tips from Dave Cotter's Fundraising 101 curriculum.

12	'	&
Slides	Fill-in Prompts	Pro Tips

HOW TO USE THIS TEMPLATE

1 Read each slide's purpose + layout guidance first.

2 Fill in the bracketed prompts with your specific content.

3 Apply the pro tips to sharpen each slide before sending.

Want the full fundraising playbook?

Fundraising 101 !’ https://founderacademy.app/courses/fundraising-101

SLIDE 01

Title

An investor should read this slide and immediately understand what category you're in.

PURPOSE

An investor should read this slide and immediately understand what category you're in.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Company name centered, one-line description below, founder name + date at bottom.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

[Company Name]

[One-line description — crisp, specific, memorable]

[Your Name] · [Date]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Don't clutter this slide. "Acme: The operating system for logistics companies." That's it.
- Tip: No mission statements, no adjectives. Just what you do and what category you're in.

SLIDE 02

The Problem

The most important slide at pre-seed. Convince investors the problem is real, painful, and widespread.

PURPOSE

The most important slide at pre-seed. Convince investors the problem is real, painful, and widespread.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Specific customer story or anecdote at top. Data point showing scale below. Evidence the founding team has genuine exposure to this pain.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

[Specific customer story or anecdote — anonymized is fine]

[Data point: "$X lost annually to this inefficiency"]

[Evidence your team has genuine exposure to this pain]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Investors should feel the problem before you ever show them a solution.
- Tip: Specificity is credibility. "$40K/year in manual reconciliation" beats "accounting is painful."

SLIDE 03

The Solution

What you're building and how it solves the problem. Make the solution feel inevitable.

PURPOSE

What you're building and how it solves the problem. Make the solution feel inevitable.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

One paragraph — plain language, no jargon. Conceptual at pre-seed, not a feature list.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

[What you're building — one sentence]

[How it solves the problem you just described]

[Why the solution feels inevitable given the problem]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: At pre-seed, keep it conceptual. Don't turn this into a feature list — save that for the Product slide.
- Tip: The goal is to make the solution feel like the obvious answer to the pain on Slide 2.

SLIDE 04

Why Now

Separates "interesting" from "fundable." What has changed that makes this the right moment?

PURPOSE

Separates "interesting" from "fundable." What has changed that makes this the right moment?

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Clear articulation of the shift — technical, behavioral, or regulatory. 2-3 supporting data points.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

[What changed recently: technically, behaviorally, or regulatorily?]

[Why the window is open now — not 5 years ago, not 5 years from now]

[Supporting evidence for the shift]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Without a credible "Why Now," the deck reads as a good idea that could have started 5 years ago.
- Tip: Skipping or underinvesting in this slide is the most common structural mistake.

SLIDE 05

Market Size

Show the ceiling. TAM, SAM, SOM — honest about how you arrived at the numbers.

PURPOSE

Show the ceiling. TAM, SAM, SOM — honest about how you arrived at the numbers.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Bottom-up analysis. Three metrics (TAM !’ SAM !’ SOM) with dollar values and math shown.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

TAM: $[X]B — [total addressable market definition]

SAM: [# of buyers] × [$ACV] = $[X]M

SOM: $[X]M — [realistic 2-3 year capture with assumptions]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Bottom-up is more credible. "50,000 logistics companies × $10K/year = $500M SAM" beats "the logistics market is $12 trillion."
- Tip: Define the specific, addressable slice your product will serve in the next 2-3 years.

SLIDE 06

Product

Make it tangible. Show, don't tell. Take the concept from Slide 3 and make the investor see it.

PURPOSE

Make it tangible. Show, don't tell. Take the concept from Slide 3 and make the investor see it.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Large screenshot, mockup, prototype, or workflow diagram center-page. Keep it visual and focused.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

[Screenshot, mockup, prototype, or workflow diagram]

[Key callout: what the user experiences]

[Caption: what this demonstrates about the product]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Even a clean Figma design works at pre-seed. Don't over-engineer with dense feature lists.
- Tip: If nothing is built yet, a diagram showing the user experience is fine. Keep it visual.

SLIDE
07

Traction

Real signals, not polished metrics. Show what proves you're onto something.

PURPOSE

Real signals, not polished metrics. Show what proves you're onto something.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Key signal callouts (3 max) at top. Supporting evidence below.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

[Signal 1: e.g., "50 users on waitlist," LOIs, pilot customers]

[Signal 2: e.g., early revenue, recorded discovery calls]

[Signal 3: e.g., advisor commitments, partnerships, industry validation]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Don't dress up weak signals as proof points — it destroys trust faster than a thin slide.
- Tip: If you have nothing concrete, keep this brief and let your Problem + Team slides carry the weight.

SLIDE 08

Business Model

How you plan to make money. At pre-seed, a well-reasoned hypothesis is acceptable.

PURPOSE

How you plan to make money. At pre-seed, a well-reasoned hypothesis is acceptable.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Pricing model callout box. Who pays !’ What they pay !’ How often. Early unit economics if available.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

Model: [SaaS / Usage-based / Marketplace / etc.]

Price: $[X] per [seat/month/transaction]

[Evidence: "Based on customer conversations suggesting willingness to pay $X-Y"]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: A well-reasoned hypothesis is fine at pre-seed. Leaving this slide out signals you haven't thought past the product.
- Tip: One model at pre-seed. Multiple revenue streams signal you haven't figured out what works.

SLIDE
09

Competition

Show you understand who else is trying to solve this problem and why your approach is different.

PURPOSE

Show you understand who else is trying to solve this problem and why your approach is different.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Simple matrix — competitors across top, differentiators down side. Or a 2×2 positioning chart.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

Competitors: [Competitor A], [Competitor B], [Competitor C]

Non-obvious alternatives: [spreadsheets, manual processes, doing nothing]

Your differentiation: [Why your approach wins]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Never say "no competition." It tells investors there's either no market or you haven't done your homework.
- Tip: Include non-obvious alternatives like spreadsheets and manual processes — that's your real competition.

SLIDE 10

Team

Carries disproportionate weight at pre-seed. Investors are betting on people, not proven businesses.

PURPOSE

Carries disproportionate weight at pre-seed. Investors are betting on people, not proven businesses.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Headshots in a row. Name, title, 1-2 lines each. Highlight domain expertise and co-founder dynamics.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

[Photo] [Name], [Title]

[Relevant domain expertise or startup experience]

[Why this team is specifically drawn to this problem]

Advisors: [Name, Affiliation] — [why they matter]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Make the case that this team has an unfair advantage in solving this specific problem.
- Tip: If you're a solo founder, address it: your plan to build the team + strong advisors already committed.

SLIDE 11

The Ask

Be specific. Amount, structure, and exactly what you'll use it for.

PURPOSE

Be specific. Amount, structure, and exactly what you'll use it for.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Large raise amount centered. Structure (SAFE/note) below. 3-4 milestone bullets with use of funds.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

Raising: $[X] on a [SAFE with $[X]M cap / Convertible Note]

Use of funds: [X]% product · [X]% go-to-market · [X]% operations

Milestone: [What this capital will accomplish — e.g., "50 paying customers"]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Ambiguity on the ask signals indecision. Give one number, not a range.
- Tip: "Raising $500K to build the MVP, get to 50 paying customers, and prove retention before seed."

SLIDE 12

Vision

Where does this go in 5-10 years? End on the big picture that makes them excited to be early.

PURPOSE

Where does this go in 5-10 years? End on the big picture that makes them excited to be early.

LAYOUT GUIDANCE

Big vision statement at top. 3-5 year milestones below. Contact info at bottom.

FILL-IN PROMPTS

Vision: [Where this goes in 5-10 years if everything works]

Year 1: [Milestone]

Year 3: [Milestone]

Contact: [Your Email] · [Calendar link]

PRO TIPS

- Tip: Pre-seed is a belief bet. This is the slide that lingers after you leave the room.
- Tip: Make the vision feel inevitable, not grandiose. Show a company, not a fantasy.

YOU'VE GOT THE FRAMEWORK.

Now learn the psychology behind why it works.

Fundraising 101 covers every slide in depth — what investors are actually looking for, the questions they're silently asking, and how to pre-empt the objections before they surface.

- 17 lessons · Fundraising 101 full curriculum
- The investor psychology behind each slide
- Common pitch mistakes (and how to avoid them)
- How to structure the ask conversation
- Term sheet basics — what to negotiate, what to skip

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https://founderacademy.app/courses/fundraising-101

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