

Process: Definition

Pressure-testing the pitch.

SESSION 09
09.23.26

Workhorse Collective

ART 418 · Fall 2026

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Meets Mon + Wed, 1:30 to 2:50
Today Session 09 · 09.23.2026

The pitches are back. The ideas are real, and most of them still need to say why they matter.

Written notes are on Blackboard, one for each of you.

What worked	Most of you picked a problem people actually have, and several of you have lived it. The audiences were specific, and some of the brand instincts are already strong enough to design from.
The recurring note	The story. Many pitches listed features and numbers and never said why the problem matters, to whom, and why you are the one to take it on.
If you were asked to re-record	Re-record the full pitch and upload it to the same Blackboard assignment by Monday, September 28, at 1:30 PM. Your grade improves once you do.
If you did not hand one in	The same deadline applies, minus a letter grade. Talk to me after class.

From the pitch to the brief, in one week.

MON 09.21 · THE PITCH

Recorded. What you believe the product is and who it is for.

WED 09.23 · DEFINITION

Today. Test the pitch: what it offers, what it does for them, why they would care.

MON 09.28 · STORYTELLING

The story a brand tells, and the archetypes.

WED 09.30 · THE BRIEF

The framework built for real, then the creative brief, written in class.

Definition turns the pitch into one document the whole project answers to: the creative brief.

Discovery asked what the problem is. Definition writes down what we are making, for whom, and how.

The brief	The one document. Every later decision (the direction, the rules, the brand book, the landing page) gets checked against it.
What it absorbs	Your audience, your problem statement, your pitch, and the written feedback on the pitch.
What changes now	The pitch was an argument. The brief is a working document: specific, sourced, every guess marked with a question mark.
When	Tightened this week, finished in class on Wednesday, September 30.

Definition is more than brand. Beside the brief, product teams document what gets built and how it holds together.

Separate documents, each one checked against the brief. In this course you meet them

ideas.	THE QUESTION IT ANSWERS	HOW IT IS DOCUMENTED
Information architecture	What are the pages or screens, what is on each, and how does someone move between them?	A site map or screen list, and the one path your audience takes to the action you want.
Content strategy	What content does the product need, who writes it, and who keeps it up to date?	A content inventory: what each page needs, who writes it, and who keeps it current.
Technology selection	What is it built on, and why that instead of the alternatives?	A short technology note: the platform, the tools, what they cost, and why you chose them.
Scope and constraints	What is in, what is out, and what must be true by December?	In the brief itself, section 13, written against the milestone dates.

The product requirements document, or PRD, is where those parts live. The brief says why and for whom; the PRD says what gets built.

	THE CREATIVE BRIEF	THE PRD
Answers	Who is this for, what is the problem, and what should the work make them think, feel and do?	What does the product do, for which user, and how will we know it works?
Written for	The people making the brand and the communication	The people building the product, including an AI coding tool
Holds	Audience, insight, proposition, position, tone, channels	Requirements, user flows, site map, content inventory, technology, what is out of scope
In this course	Finished in class on September 30	Introduced today as a concept. Product teams write one; this course does not assign it.

What a PRD usually holds. A first draft marks every guess with a question mark.

1 • Problem and user	One paragraph, pointing back to the brief. Do not rewrite the brief here.
2 • Goals and measures	What the product has to do, and the number that shows it is working.
3 • Requirements	What the user can do, written as "A [user] can [action] so that [benefit]." Mark each one must, should or later.
4 • Site map and flow	The pages or screens, and the one path to the action you want.
5 • Content inventory	What each page needs, who writes it, and who keeps it current.
6 • Technology	The platform, the tools, what they cost, and why you chose them.
7 • Out of scope	What this version will not do.
8 • Open questions	Every question mark above, with what would answer it.

Exercise · Test your features and benefits

Three questions, asked in order. Each one gets closer to the person you are talking to.

Feature ALSO CALLED AN ATTRIBUTE	"What does the product offer?" A key characteristic of the product or service. "Air bags in a car. Extra legroom in your seat on a plane. Tacos on the menu."
Benefit	"What's in it for me?" "The advantage a consumer gets from a product." Extra legroom becomes a more comfortable ride. Air bags become safety.
Value	"Why should I care?" "Values, at their core, are emotional. And emotions activate behavior." They are personal, and they differ from one person to the next.

Feinstein's exercise: take a feature, climb to what it does for someone, then to why they care.

PRODUCT	TARGET AUDIENCE	FEATURE What does the product offer?	BENEFIT What's in it for me?	VALUE Why should I care?
Planet Fitness	People who want to get in shape without feeling like a loser	No "lunkheads" allowed	You won't feel intimidated every time you work out.	Feel confident as you get healthier.
Disney Rewards VISA	Moms	Comes with 0% vacation financing	Save money on your trip.	A magical family experience at an affordable price.
Nike running shoes	Weekend athletes	Built-in extra cushioning	Your knees won't hurt when you go running.	Look great. Feel great.

AFTER FEINSTEIN'S TWO TABLES IN DAVIS, CH. 5. REDRAWN; THE WORDING IS HIS.

NOTE THE SECOND COLUMN. EVERY ROW STARTS WITH A NAMED AUDIENCE.

A benefit is not enough on its own. Mountain Dew and Dunkin' both sell energy, and the value is where they part.

FEATURE	Loaded with caffeine.
BENEFIT	It gives you energy. Too general to own: Dunkin' built a brand on "the energy that keeps you going throughout your busy day."
VALUE	Extreme exhilaration, for "young men with a zest for life." Extreme sports and pounding music in the ads. The drink that makes life more fun.

"That's why features are fine, but benefits are better. And values rule." Two brands can share a feature and a benefit. The value is what differentiates them.

An offer the target does not care about is worth nothing to them, even when it is free.

Davis calls his cable company to cancel.

The offer	\$30 off the bill. Then free Showtime, Starz and Encore for a year. Then football, basketball and boxing.
What he valued	"I value paying only for what I'm using, so as not to waste money." He watched two channels and owned no home phone. Nothing on the list touched that.
The lesson	Choose relevant features. Find benefits that match the target's attitudes, behaviors and values. Then ask the question that tests every line in your pitch: "Does the target care about that?"
Parity and difference	People weigh points of parity (how products are the same) against points of differentiation (how they differ). A feature every competitor has is parity. It is not the reason to choose you.

Worked once, on the invented company from the pitch demonstration. One feature, one benefit, then the value.

Mise: a prep-list tool for sous chefs at independent restaurants. Invented†.

FEATURE† What does the product offer?	BENEFIT† What's in it for me?	VALUE† Why should I care?
Two-tap tiles a cook hits when a pan goes out, gloves on	A record of the day made during the day, not pieced together at midnight	Nobody has to be the one who guessed.
Tomorrow's list is already written at close	Eight minutes of correcting instead of forty minutes of writing	You go home when the kitchen closes.
Every list prints	It survives wet hands, a dead battery and a walk-in with no signal	The kitchen runs the way it always has. Nothing new to learn at 5 PM.
A weekly waste report for the owner	The first real number about what gets thrown away	Pride in a kitchen that neither wastes food nor runs out.

† INVENTED FOR THIS DEMONSTRATION, ALONG WITH THE COMPANY. YOUR ROWS COME FROM YOUR OWN RESEARCH AND YOUR OWN AUDIENCE.

Ladder your own pitch.

1. List every feature your pitch named. All of them, one per line.

2. Next to each, write the benefit for the audience you lean toward. One feature, one benefit.

3. Climb to a value for the three strongest. Ask, "Why should I care?"

4. Cross out every line where the answer to "Does the target care about that?" is no. Circle the value no competitor can claim.

Exercise · The Creative Strategy Framework

"I've often left briefing meetings with either too much or irrelevant information, but have never left with all the information."

DOUGLAS DAVIS · CREATIVE STRATEGY AND THE BUSINESS OF DESIGN · CH. 6

The expectation stays the same: **make it pretty by the deadline**. Davis drew the framework on a whiteboard in a strategy course at NYU, to sort that information before designing.

Four columns. Everything you know about the project goes in one of them.

TARGET	FACTS	FEATURE / BENEFIT	MESSAGE OR OBJECTIVE
Defined "in fragments that state demographics, psychographics, and/or behavioral terms."	About the brand, or a particular product or service within it. Decide which first.	"A Feature is a physical quality or tangible attribute that defines the product."	A message is what the target should take away from your communications.
Look here for ways to segment: differences in life stage, or why the group would seek the product.	Look beyond the brand's website, good and bad. Blogs and reviews show the gap between what the company says and what customers experience.	Written as a pair: "This Feature enables this corresponding Benefit." The sheet from Exercise 1.	An objective starts with a verb: "Convert, Drive, Engage, Build, Grow, Increase, Decrease, etc. by % among X target."

AFTER DAVIS, "CREATIVE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK: COLUMN BY COLUMN," CH. 6. REDRAWN.

Fill it in three passes: fill the columns, cut them down, then read across.

1 · Quantity	Put all your research in its column. Don't get bogged down in details. "Try to exhaust each individual column of information within 45 to 60 minutes."
2 · Quality	Cut what is irrelevant, and make what is left more specific. Is each target defined by demographics, psychographics and behavior? "Could we build a campaign off each fact?" Is that really the benefit of that feature?
3 · Pull threads	You filled it top to bottom. Now read it left to right. "The value here is the unexpected connections that emerge across categories."
Any order	"Random is the order." Start in whichever column you know most about. It is a working document, and it will change.

A thread is one sentence that crosses all four columns.
One thread is enough to write a brief.

Based on their need or behavior, **this Target** would be interested in a conversation centered around **this Fact**, using **this Feature/Benefit** in the headline and copy to get their attention, to **deliver this Message** or accomplish this Objective.

ON MISE†: SOUS CHEFS WHO WRITE TOMORROW'S LIST AT MIDNIGHT FROM MEMORY · WOULD BE INTERESTED IN A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE HOUR AFTER CLOSE THAT NOBODY PAYS FOR† · USING "THE LIST IS WRITTEN BEFORE YOU ARE" · TO DELIVER: YOU GO HOME WHEN THE KITCHEN CLOSES.

The Mise framework, first pass. Read one row across to find the thread.

Every entry is invented†. Highlighted: the thread on the last slide.

TARGET	FACTS	FEATURE / BENEFIT	MESSAGE OR OBJECTIVE
Sous chefs, 28 to 40, one- or two-location restaurants, write the list after close	Kitchens count what they buy, never what they use	Two-tap tiles enable a record made during service	M: Nobody has to be the one who guessed
Owners who see the food bill and not the bin	The list costs the sous chef an unpaid hour, every night	A list written at close enables an eight-minute correction	M: You go home when the kitchen closes
Line cooks who will touch almost nothing mid-shift	7 in 10 photograph a whiteboard instead	A printed list enables work without a phone	O: Convert 40 pilot kitchens by spring
Culinary students who will run kitchens next	Reviews of inventory apps: "built for the office, not the line"	A weekly waste report enables the first real number	O: Reduce thrown-away prep by 20% among pilot kitchens

† ALL INVENTED FOR THIS DEMONSTRATION. IN YOURS, EVERY FACT HAS A SOURCE, AND EVERY NUMBER HAS A YEAR AND A DENOMINATOR.

Your framework, first pass.

8 min · Quantity. Four columns. Your Feature/Benefit column is already written: it's the sheet from Exercise 1. Fill the other three from your pitch and your research.

3 min · Quality. Cut anything the target would not care about. Mark every fact that has no source with a question mark.

5 min · One thread. Write the sentence across the four columns. Two of you will read yours aloud.

Writing the brief with AI

The course rule has not changed. Use AI on anything, and say what it did.

From the syllabus, AI use.

Use it	On any part of any assignment, with whatever tools you want. Free tiers are enough.
Say what it did	Every checkpoint and milestone names the tools you used and what they did, even when the answer is none. Write the note from your log. Almost nobody wrote one for the pitch.
Own it	You defend everything you turn in as your own decision. An error the machine made that you submitted is your error.
Undisclosed	Turning in AI work without saying so is handled the way plagiarism is.

Use it to think with. Write the final sentence yourself.

Start from your material	Give it your notes, your ladder sheet, your framework. A blank prompt gets you the average of the internet, in a voice that is nobody's.
Ask for pressure	"Argue against this thread." "Which of these facts would a skeptic reject?" "What would my audience not care about?" Questions and objections are worth more than drafts.
Ask for options	Ten headlines, five ways to say the value. Then pick one and rewrite it in your own words.
Check every fact	Open every source it names. If you can't find the number on the page it came from, the number goes.
Read it aloud	If a sentence doesn't sound like something you would say across a table, rewrite it until it does. Feinstein's tip applies here: write like a person, not a professor.
Log it	One line per session: the tool, what you asked, what you kept. That line becomes your AI note.

Some tells of AI-written text. Readers spot them, and a reader who spots them stops trusting the page.

THE TELL	LOOKS LIKE (INVENTED EXAMPLES)	FIX
The big opener	"In today's fast-paced digital landscape..."	Start with the person and the problem.
Buzzwords	Seamless, elevate, empower, unlock, leverage, revolutionize, game-changing	Name what it actually does, in a plain verb.
Coined jargon	Two-word labels nobody in your audience says, like "vibe architecture"	Use the words your audience uses. Ask them.
"Not X, it's Y"	"It's not just an app, it's a movement."	Say what it is, and stop.
Everything in threes	"Fast, simple, and beautiful." Three of those in a row.	Keep the one that's true and prove it.
Confident numbers	"78% of users struggle with..." with no source, year or count	Source it, or cut it, or say "I don't know yet."
Em dashes everywhere	Every sentence broken in two with a long dash	Use a period or a comma.
The slogan close	"Let's reimagine the future of X, together."	End on the ask or the next step.

What went wrong in the pitches, and how to fix it before the brief.

From the Milestone 1 hand-ins, with no names.

WHAT WE SAW	HOW TO FIX IT
Prompts, template questions and the chatbot's reply to you ("To pivot away, you need to...") left in the hand-in	Search the document for "you," "?" and your own prompt before you export. Read the PDF, not the doc.
Statistics with no source, or a link that goes back to the chat	Every number gets a source you opened yourself, a year and what it counts. A link with "chatgpt.com" in it is not a source.
Marketing vocabulary that you would never say out loud	Read it aloud on camera. Where you stumble, rewrite it in your words.
The AI moved the audience away from your own story, toward a safer business case	Go back to your ladder. If the value you circled today is gone from the pitch, put it back.
Reading generated text to the camera	Talk from the slide, not a script. The script can be yours, as notes.
No AI note	Two or three lines, written from your log, on every hand-in.

What the AI note looks like. Two or three lines, specific, written from the log.

AI note[†]: I used ChatGPT, free tier, to list competitors. I checked each one and kept four. I asked Claude to argue against my thread, and I rewrote the message after it found a fact with no source. No numbers or final wording came from AI.

[†] AN INVENTED NOTE, FOR MISE. YOURS NAMES YOUR TOOLS, WHAT YOU ASKED, AND WHAT YOU KEPT.

The real next step: take the feedback on your pitch back into the brief.

1 · Read the note	Open your written feedback on Blackboard. Underline every sentence that asks for something.
2 · File each one	Put each underlined sentence next to the section of the brief it changes. A note about your story goes to sections 2 and 5. A note about sources goes to section 6 or 14.
3 · Rewrite the section	Change the brief, not the pitch. Use today's two sheets: the circled value goes in section 7, the thread goes in the one line at the top.
4 · Bring it Wednesday	The tightened draft, printed or on screen. We finish it in class on September 30.

Next Wednesday the framework becomes the brief. Each column feeds its own sections.

Target	Section 4, who the project is talking to, and section 5, what we know about them.
Facts	Section 2, why we are doing this at all, and section 6, the competition. The question marks you wrote today are the research to finish first.
Feature / Benefit	Section 7, what we are trying to say, and section 8, the position.
Message or Objective	Section 3, what the work has to achieve, and section 12, what they should do and how we will know.
The thread	The brief in one line, at the top. <u>The creative brief template</u> is on the class page.

Before Monday.

Read	Davis, ch. 8, "Finding the Gold." Brown, ch. 3, from "Set the Direction." Mark and Pearson, ch. 1, the archetype argument. About 34 pages, all linked from the class page.
Tighten	The creative brief, with your pitch feedback worked in.
Try it	Ask an AI to argue against your thread. Log what it said and what you changed.
Re-record	If your note asks for it, upload by Monday, September 28, at 1:30 PM.
Monday's class	Brand: Storytelling. The story a brand tells and who it is for. The values you circled today are where that story starts.

**Features are fine,
but benefits are better.
And values rule.**

Neil Feinstein, in Davis, ch. 5. Every line of your pitch should answer the question, "Does the target care about that?"