

IE 101 | Innovation and Entrepreneurship 101

Author: Ikhtlaq Sidhu

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Case Study: Airbnb Pitch Deck as Entrepreneurial Narrative

A compact story that made a new marketplace understandable

The early Airbnb pitch deck is useful in IE 101 because it shows how a venture can be explained without excess language. The deck moves from a plain problem to a plain solution, then adds validation, market size, product behavior, business model, adoption plan, competition, and advantages. For students, the lesson is not that every project needs to look like Airbnb. The lesson is that a project story becomes stronger when each slide answers one obvious stakeholder question.

Story Spine

The Airbnb narrative can be read as a sequence of claims:

Problem: travel is expensive, generic, and disconnected from local life.

Solution: people with spare space can host travelers through a web platform.

Validation: related platforms and local listings already show demand.

Market: the team translates broad travel activity into a reachable budget-travel segment.

Product: search, review listings, and book.

Business model: take a commission on transactions.

Adoption: use events, partnerships, and existing listing channels to seed supply and demand.

Competition: make the alternative set visible, then show the intended difference.

Why It Works as a Teaching Case

The deck is short enough for students to reverse-engineer. It also exposes the relationship between story and evidence: the claim is simple, but each following slide must make the claim more believable. The strongest feature is the order. It does not begin with technology. It begins with a human situation, then shows how the marketplace could work.

Case Questions

Rewrite the Airbnb story using NABC. What is the Need? What is the Approach? What Benefits are claimed? What Competition matters?

Which assumptions were still unproven at the time of the deck?

What would be the low-tech demo for Airbnb before a full platform existed?

How would the same deck change if the project were a non-revenue campus service, corporate innovation project, or research translation project?

Assignment: Remake the Narrative

Create a 10- to 12-slide version of your project story using the Airbnb deck as a structural reference. Keep each slide to one job: problem, solution, validation, market or mission size, product behavior, execution model, adoption path, alternatives, advantage, and next ask. Use only evidence the team has or can collect this week.

Example: For a research translation project, replace market size with mission size: who benefits, how many contexts might use it, and what measurable improvement would justify adoption.

Example: A student team building a campus equipment-sharing app might begin with one sentence: borrow specialized tools from nearby labs instead of buying or waiting. That sentence is not the whole story, but it gives listeners a hook.

WEEKLY EVIDENCE CHECK: Before moving on, the team should be able to answer four questions: What is clearer now? What has been proven? What has been built or tested? What evidence changed the plan?