

HOW TO PITCH SUCCESSFULLY

by Julian Friedmann

THE PITCHING BRIEF

These notes are to help you prepare a pitch **in writing beforehand**. This is a very advantageous form of preparation, even if you know the project extremely well, which you should if you are about to write the script.

Pitching involves selecting carefully what to say, and usually selecting as little information as you can make an impact with. Most people think that more information is better than less, because that way they can get everything into their pitch. In fact, a teaser works more effectively, because you raise the interest of the listener who then **wants to know more**. There is a subtle change in the relationship between listener and pitcher, and the pitcher is no longer the supplicant.

Pitching - which is simply the verbal presentation of information about your project - is a skill that can be learned and practiced. There is one relatively easy way of preparing, and that is the 'written' pitch. If you have prepared a couple of short versions of a presentation of your project - whether novel or series episode or film - you will find it easier to make a verbal pitch. You will also have a choice - to offer the one sentence or one paragraph version!

I would like those of you who wish to pitch to prepare three separate versions of your project. In each of the three versions it is more important to make the reader of the document interested in your story **than it is to tell the story**.

In other words, you need to communicate what sort of story it is in such a way that the person reading your document (or listening to you pitch) will want to know more. You actually want them to ask you to tell them more about it. So don't try to get everything into the initial description; keep some of the ammunition for later. (If you don't want to pitch you should still try this out.)

The three versions should be as follows:

1. One page.

In some ways telling the story in up to one page can be more difficult than a shorter version. You have so much more freedom, but avoid being seduced by the luxury of so many words. Nothing should be on this page unless it is immediately understandable and furthers both the telling of the story **and** the interest of the reader. If you only wish to write half a page, that's fine.

It is important that you write the longest version of your pitch documents first, then attempt to find the essence of the story you have described for the shorter versions. Inevitably the process of reducing to just a few words what a story is really about leads to the discovery that the story perhaps is not being told in the best possible way. For

this reason alone pitching is a very useful exercise which writers should do for themselves even if they are not actually going to have to pitch the project at all.

Remember too that it is dangerous to oversell; clarity is essential; because you may know the story inside out, you may not realize that someone who does not will have trouble following your abbreviated description. Get someone else to read your written pitches to make sure that they make sense to someone who does not know the story.

You must always tell the whole story, the beginning, middle and end, in this one page version.

2. One paragraph.

Here you can expand into several sentences, but do not take more than five lines.

3. One-liner.

Describe the kind of programme/film/story/series/novel in one sentence only. For example, 'Jake Gittes, private eye, discovers that a routine divorce case draws him deep into fraud and corruption in the government of Los Angeles'.

It is difficult to convey passion in a written pitch. However, it is very important to do so in a verbal pitch' which is why eye contact is so important. You should **not** have your written pitch in front of you when making your verbal pitch. Eyes down means you are not making contact.

Once you have mastered the aspects of pitching which are easy to learn, you should no longer be nervous about making verbal pitches, and your pitches should become much more effective. Since you never know when you might bump into a useful industry contact (every coffee and lunch break during the workshop for a start), having the ability and confidence to talk professionally about your work will give you an important advantage.

If you write well, don't let yourself down because you don't know how to sell yourself and what you write. Apart from that, pitching is actually both easy and fun!

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