



TIPS FOR SPEED PITCHING TO LITERARY AGENTS

Jeanne Veillette Bowerman
Executive Pipeline Media Group

WHY NOT JUST QUERY VIA EMAIL?

- Gives you a chance to meet agent in person.
- Test the chemistry.
- More proactive.
- Surround yourself with other writers.
- Networking.

WHAT IS SPEED PITCHING?

- Get in the line for the agent/editor you wish to pitch. (Don't go to your dream agent first.)
- 3-5 minutes with each agent: Which means, 60 to 90 seconds to pitch and 90 seconds to discuss.
- Agent either requests to read your manuscript/partial or passes.
- **Pay attention to their submission instructions.**
- Bell or announcement that time is up.
- Shake their hand and thank them for their time or interest.
- Get in line for the next agent you wish to pitch.
- Repeat.

MAIN GOALS

Goals:

- Get the agent to *want*, not just ask, to read your submission.
- Get the agent excited to represent *you*, not just the book you're pitching.

How to Achieve Those Goals:

- Pitch your story to highlight interesting characters, plenty of conflict, a compelling theme, and a story hook that will intrigue the agent.
- Show your professionalism and ability to be collaborative without being defensive. Be the kind of person the agent would want to work with for years to come.
- Show your passion for the book. If you can't explain it with passion, the agent/editor cannot be confident they can sell it.

PRE-EVENT PREP

- Study the list agents/editors that will be present.
- Website: Who do they rep, what genre, etc.
- Look up agent/editor on social media. Are you a match?
- Check your own social media accounts ... they *will* be looking.
- Make a list of ten agents in the order of importance.
- Use querytracker.net and manuscriptwishlist.com (or #MSWL on Twitter)
- **Look up submission instructions** so you know what materials you'll need.
- Embrace the unexpected.

AGENT VS. EDITOR

- Know if you're pitching an agent vs. editor.
- If you can access an editor directly, this is a great opportunity.
- Agent: Can represent your overall career.
- Editor: Works for publishers and focused on that one book.
- If an editor is interested in your pitch, use that to go pitch an agent.
- Pitch is the same, but potential questions to ask are different:
 - Agents:
 - Who are your other clients? New genres (other than what is listed on their site) that you are now interested in representing? What publishers do you see this going to?
 - Editors:
 - What type of marketing does your publishing house do? Will this be in print? What's your distribution?

THE BIG DAY

- Large room ... with lots of people ... and lots of nervousness.
- Breathe.
- Lines ... lots of lines ... and lots of people who look lost.
- Breathe.

- *Remember: They want to find a great book and client!*

PITCH BREAKDOWN

In 60 to 90 seconds, try to share the following—think “verbal query letter”:

- Your name
- Title
- Word count
- Genre (YA, mystery, memoir, thriller, etc.)
- Tagline of your book (keep it tight and focused)
- Comparable Titles (similar successful published books, 5 years or less—be realistic)
- Mini synopsis:
 - Protagonist/Antagonist (short description, including wounds)
 - Only refer to supporting characters by relationships to main characters, not by name.
 - Main Action (plot/character’s goal)
 - Emotional Impact (theme and character evolution)
- **About you:** What makes you an expert on what you wrote? Professional clips/experience? Anything that makes you marketable (you won a gold medal, etc.)

TEASER PITCH/LOGLINE

Give the genre, then 2-3 lines giving the basic idea. It primes the listener for the expanded pitch. Think of the info button when watching a TV show/movie.

“After a cyclone transports a lonely Kansas farm girl to a magical land, she sets out on a dangerous journey to find a wizard with the power to send her home.”

Sell Your Story in a Single Sentence: Advice from the Front Lines of Hollywood by Lane Shefter Bishop

EXPANDED PITCH

Tell the story in an organized fashion. Add details, and avoid backstory.

Break it down into 12 beats: (This is just one example ...)

Act 1: 3 segments, Act 2: 6 segments, Act 3: 3 segments.

Heroes, goals, conflict, risk, pivotal elements, turning points, and the end.

Our farm girl, Dorothy, dreams of going over the rainbow. Through a freak cyclone, she and her farmhouse are transported to Munchkinland. There, she learns the only way back to Kansas is to meet the Wizard of Oz, who has the power to get her home. So she sets off on a dangerous journey. Along the way, she meets a Scarecrow, a Tin Woodsman, and a Lion. And they travel with her. However, Dorothy has made an enemy of the Wicked Witch, and she and her three friends ...

(Oz pitches courtesy of Christopher Lockhart.)

JANE FRIEDMAN'S PITCHING ADVICE FOR NONFICTION

Answer the following three questions:

1. **So what:** What is the relevance of your topic and why is it important?
2. **Who cares:** Who is this book going to help? Whose problems will it solve?
3. **Who are you:** Why do *you* have the authority, credibility, and/or platform to be the author of this book?

MORE TIPS ...

Pitches sell you, not just your writing.

- If you don't appear passionate and excited about your own work, no one else will be. You're starting a business relationship, so be professional.
- Dress appropriately (generally just slightly more casual than the person you're pitching). Why? Need to know they could send you to a signing event without being horrified.
- Be respectful, appear open to ideas and suggestions. Be flexible. The person you're pitching to has more experience in the industry, and can help. Ask advice, if time permits.
- They may ask, "What else have you got?"

Practice, but don't sound too rehearsed or robotic.

- Comedy pitches should be funny; thriller pitches should have suspense.
- Watch your audience, if they appear bored, change tactic.
- A conversational pitch makes interruptions easier. Be prepared to start and stop for questions. If you fumble, recover.
- Provide verbal milestones to orient the listener ("at the mid-point" or "in the final scene").

Avoid: Overselling, comparisons, describing every side plot and each character's backstory.

WHAT AGENTS WANT TO HEAR

- Pretend you read your own book the night before and had to stay up to finish—how would you describe it to a friend the next day over breakfast?
- Give info right up front (word count, genre, etc.)
- Passion.
- Be engaging person, despite nerves. You're creating a team.
- Try to incorporate your writing voice into pitch.
- Agents/editors love books!

IF YOU SELF-PUBLISHED

- Most agents will not take something if it's been previously published.
- In your “About Me,” unless you've sold 10K copies, it doesn't really help your cause and might injure your brand.
- Might mention it in humble way so they know you understand the challenges of marketing and the business side.
- If you self-published the first book in a series but others are unpublished, it depends on sales of first book.
- Challenge: Publisher would have to consider potentially re-branding author/book.

THE “DOS”

- Treat pitching like a job interview.
- Write bullet-list of your pitch and practice. Time yourself.
- Show emotion and relatability—passion.
- After lunch, check your teeth for spinach.
- Make friends with the fellow writers you're standing on line with. Share info!
- Firm handshakes.
- If an agent is interested, ask them how to follow up (attachments, subject line, etc.).
- If an agent is not interested, thank them for their time and move on.
- Keep their business cards in a safe place. Use an app or take pictures.
- Take notes right after so you don't forget!
- If there was an agent you didn't get to, send them an email query after.

THE “DON'TS”

- If you haven't finished your book, don't pretend you did. Tell them.
- Don't lie. They will check your credentials (and social).
- Do not guzzle water before you walk into the arena.
- Don't pitch to two agents that are with the same agency.
- Do not bring your manuscript with you. Everything is done via email.
- If an agent is uninterested, don't try to convince them otherwise.
- If someone in front of you goes over their time, don't make a fuss. **Be patient!**
- Ideally, send materials ASAP, while they're excited to read. Do not wait months ...
- Edit but don't overwork your manuscripts. Editors like to do development work with you.

PSYCH YOURSELF UP

- Believe in yourself.
- If something went wrong in one pitch, switch it up for the next.
- While your concept itself could be amazing, if it wasn't something the agent could personally get passionate about, they won't be interested in representing it. That doesn't mean a different agent won't be excited to read your work!
- Don't take it personally. You don't know what's going on in their lives.
- Never quit. "Failure" is simply a learning experience.

WHAT TO BRING

- Business cards
- Index card (phone app) with your bullet-list pitch
- Pen and notepad
- Water bottle
- Do not bring your manuscript

IT'S NOT OVER WHEN IT'S OVER ... POST PITCH EVENT

- Prepare your requested materials per their requirements.
 - PDF pages from your book, have name in the header, page numbers, etc.)
- One shot at a first impression—edit, edit, edit... check format!
- Write a solid submission email.
- Follow anyone you pitched on Twitter.
- Be prepared for no response at all—if they love it, you will know.
- Send follow-up emails to agents AND writers you meet.
- Stay in touch with your new network on social media.

THE “PERFECT” EMAIL

- **SUBJECT LINE: REQUESTED MATERIALS—[INSERT TITLE] [NAME OF CONFERENCE]** *Note: if you forgot to ask, check their website for submission guidelines.
- **BODY OF EMAIL:**
 - 1st Paragraph: *It was a pleasure meeting you at the XX Pitching Event last Saturday, and I'm delighted you're interested in my novel, [INSERT TITLE]. (If there was something personal that happened, jog their memory.)*
 - 2nd Paragraph: Novel Specs (word count, genre, comp titles)
 - 3rd Paragraph: Mini synopsis.
 - 4th Paragraph-A little about me (i.e. why are you the person to write this book)
 - Closing-*Attached is the [first three chapters] you requested, and I will be happy to forward the full manuscript for review. Thank you so much and look forward to hearing from you soon!*

YOU GOT AN OFFER!

- Hold on ... have a conversation. This is a marriage. Don't just leap!
- Ask how they work with their authors.
- How often do they communicate, etc.
- Trust your spidey senses.
- Make sure it's the right agent/editor for you.
- It's OK to wait for a better fit.

IN CASE YOU FORGOT...

Be proud and have fun!

symposium.pipelineartists.com