

How to Be a Pitch-Perfect, Network-Savvy, Send-it-to-me Star

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Presenters: Pam McCutcheon and Ron Heimbecher

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Everybody wants to know how to brainwash agents and editors into signing a contract. Unfortunately, brainwashing is both tricky and illegal, so, as professional writers, we have to learn to catch agents' and editors' attention without getting arrested (or getting annoying). Luckily, pitching is both simple and legal, when you know how. Pam McCutcheon and Ron Heimbecher presented pitching do's and don'ts and provided a list of essential items to know before you pitch. Remember, the goal is to be able to write "solicited material" on your submission, not to hide the agent or editor in your basement until they give in!

DO:

- Be professional (arrive early, dress for a job interview, be polite!)
- Be patient. Nobody offers a contract before reading the book.
- Know your story. Why is it right for the agent or editor? Who is your intended audience?
- Know the agent—is the agent looking for your type of book? The Internet knows.
- Know yourself. Be able to rattle off contest wins, publishing credentials (unpaid is okay, but self-publishing isn't), and reasons you're the perfect person to write this book.
- Practice! Pitch to anyone who holds still long enough for a log line.
- If asked for pages, say "thank you" and "how do you want them?" Get a business card!

DON'T:

- Don't pitch an unfinished novel (you must be able to complete any edits within six weeks).
- Don't read your synopsis—it's too long!
- Don't say "my mother loved it" unless Mom's name is Oprah.
- Don't say "It's the next Da Vinci Code." Say, "Readers of The Da Vinci Code will like it."
- Don't shove your work at the agent or editor. Send requested pages later, as requested.
- Don't ask basic questions, like how to format your manuscript. Ask us at PPW.
- Don't argue—say "thank you" even if the agent or editor doesn't want it.

If you don't get a great pitch appointment (or the agent or editor is not right for you), cancel or trade the appointment. Or find the agent or editor in the hallway, during a meal, or at the bar and ask if you may pitch or send pages. Don't corner anyone--rudeness can only stifle the brilliance of your book.

Know the following information before your pitch appointment:

- Log line: a 25-word description of your book (main character, their overarching

goal, and what's stopping the character from reaching that goal).

- Setting.
- The main character's goals, motivations, and conflicts.
- The ending (yes, you really should give away the ending if asked).
- Why you wrote the book.
- Questions you want to ask the agent.
- Genre, audience, approximate word count, target market, and how your story is fresh and new.
- Nonfiction books require more information about the book's intended market, including why you're the right person to write the book and your built-in audience.

Remember, with practice, even you can pitch without stuttering, whimpering, or passing out.

Good luck!

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