

A Survivor's Guide to Pitching: Before, During, and After the Pitch

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What is a pitch?

- 10-15 minutes with an agent, editor, or film producer.
- A chance to explain your book to an industry professional for some informed feedback.
- An opportunity to make a connection that might lead to representation.

A pitch usually includes:

- Your title, genre, and wordcount.
- Your logline (1 sentence)
- Slightly longer explanation (1 paragraph)
- Where your book fits in the marketplace
- Comps (recent books that are comparable to yours in some way)
- Time for questions you may both have for each other

What is a logline?

- One-sentence description (25-35 words) of the core/heart of your story.
 - Main character
 - The goal they are desperate to achieve
 - The main obstacle in their way
 - The consequences if they fail (what's at stake?)
 - General tone of your story
- Loglines, explained:
 - "Loglines—One-Sentence Torture Devices for Writers" <https://rmfw.org/loglines-one-sentence-torture-devices-for-writers/>
 - "How to Pitch Agents at a Writers Conference" <https://janefriedman.com/pitch-agents-writers-conference/>
- Logline generators/templates:
 - "Pitch Factory - Twitter Pitch Logline Generator" <https://carissa-taylor.blogspot.com/2013/02/pitch-factory-twitter-pitch-logline.html>
 - "Writing a Killer Logline" <https://graemeshimmin.com/writing-a-logline-for-a-novel/>.
- One potential logline template:

When *<inciting incident happens>* in *<setting>*, a *<protagonist type of person>* must *<do something>* to *<achieve goal(s)>* or else *<consequences happen>*.



Before the Pitch (preparing):

- Manage your expectations.
- Research the agents and editors (genres, agency size, books sold recently, etc.)
- Make sure your manuscript hits the right wordcount for your genre or audience.
- Have a finished or nearly finished manuscript.
- Practice your pitch out loud, many times, even if you plan to read it.
- Be able to describe your protagonist's goals and stakes.
- Write down your own questions for the agent/editor.
- Don't bring any paper to give them, except a business card (optional).
- Bring a notebook and pen to take notes.

During the Pitch (what to expect and do):

- It's okay to be nervous. Just pretend you're not!
- Start with your logline (short pitch).
- Then add details if they're interested (1 paragraph—think back-cover copy).
- If relevant, tell them why you're the right person to have written this book.
- Mention 3 or 4 comps, or the "X meets Y" mashup tagline.
- Allow time for them to ask questions.
- Have 1 – 3 questions ready to ask them.
- Stay on schedule. Times are firm!
- If they don't ask for pages, thank them for the opportunity.
- If they DO request pages, ask what they want and how to send it to them: # of pages, synopsis, query letter, their email address, any special subject line for your email, etc.

After the Pitch:

- If they DON'T request pages from you:
 - Remember, less than 1% of pitches land a contract!
 - Don't burn bridges by badmouthing them at the conference or on social media.
 - Do a post-mortem: What, if anything, should I do differently next time?
 - Revise your pitch and your query letter, then keep submitting to other agents.
- If they DO request pages from you:
 - Rejoice, but manage your expectations.
 - Take time to revise and prepare your manuscript to send to them.
 - Polish your query letter. Remind them where you met them and that they requested your pages.
 - Send EXACTLY what they requested.
 - Be patient. They may not respond for months.
 - Keep submitting to other agents.
 - Keep writing your next novel.
- Whatever their response is, after the conference:
 - Investigate organizations, resources, or books you heard about.
 - Follow authors, editors, and agents that you liked on social media.
 - If any sessions sparked ideas about your work-in-progress, start revising.



Questions you might ask the agent or editor during your pitch:

- What books have you liked recently in this genre?
- How do you like to work with writers?
- What are some questions you wish I'd asked you?
- What are your thoughts on an author writing in multiple genres?
- Can I pitch other projects to you?
- What percentage do you take?
- Can you think of any additional comps for me?
- How many clients do you have?
- How editorial are you?
- How are you different than other agencies?
- What do you do for your clients?
- Does your agency do much with film, audio, merchandising, or international rights?
- How do you like to communicate with your authors? Frequency? Emails vs phone?
- How many publishers do you submit one manuscript to every month?
- What do you see is the market for this type of book?
- I heard that I shouldn't do <xyz>. What's your opinion on that?
- Do you have any suggestions for how to improve my pitch?
- How much does an author's social media presence, # of followers, etc., factor into your decision whether to represent them?

What if they request a follow-up call?

- Prepare a list of questions (see below).
- Ask for a week or two to respond—use that time to follow up with other agents you've queried.
- Respond by the deadline.
- Questions you might ask the agent on a phone call to discuss possible representation: "Questions to ask an agent on The Call." <https://annzhao.com/blog/questions-to-ask-an-agent-on-the-call>

Keep in touch!

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