

How to Write a Pitch

Ok, you've finished your masterpiece, a novel that's taken you months or years or forever to write. Now you need an agent or a publisher to sit up and take notice. How do you get their attention?

The traditional route is through a query letter and a pitch. The query letter is something that must be tailor made to fit the agent's or editor's specific requirements but before you work on that, it's best to have your pitch polished and ready to go. You can lead into your letter with it, you can recite it when people ask what your book is about and you absolutely must have it ready when speaking to an agent or editor because that is how you get their attention.

I read a piece of advice by Jon Land that I've taken to heart and I'm sure it will help you create your pitch. I use the MacDonald Rule.

Jon Land: What's the MacDonald Rule? Well, when asked once by a young writer what a story is, John D. MacDonald replied, "Stuff happens to people you care about." In other words, even though it's only a few lines, a pitch should explain who is trying to do what and why.

What I recommend strongly, and this is something you won't always hear when it comes to pitching, is to make your pitch character driven in the same way your book will be.

Example:

NOT: "A burning skyscraper threatens the lives of thousands, including a pregnant woman trapped on the top floor."

INSTEAD: "A former firefighter, fired for insubordination, races to save the lives of thousands of people in a burning skyscraper, including his pregnant wife."

See what I'm getting at here? Let's try another.

NOT: "High-school students turned zombies seek vengeance on the town officials who closed their school for budget reasons."

INSTEAD: "A high-school prom queen and the bad boy she secretly loves lead their friends-turned-zombies in a battle to get their school reopened."

And one more:

NOT: "A man falsely imprisoned on death row will die at dawn if the governor doesn't pardon him."

INSTEAD: "An intrepid reporter has only 24 hours to save the innocent man she's fallen in love with from execution."

In each case, we know who the hero is and what their quest is. You have not only told the agent what your book is about, you have engaged him or her emotionally in the action. Do that, and your pitch will be a winner.

Ok, this is me again. Try it. It's challenging (as brevity often is) but fun once you get started. Good luck in your writing endeavors!