Anatomy of a Pitch

Planning: What is your thesis?

If a reader's first response is "how?" or "why?" your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader. See what you can add to give the reader a better take on your position right from the beginning.

The thesis will inevitably change as you revise and develop your ideas—and that is ok! Start with a tentative thesis and revise as needed.

Need help writing a thesis statement? Here are some tips from the UNC Writing Center.

Title: Capture your audience

Write your title last. If you're struggling to focus your pitch, write down some possible headlines and see if one helps clarify your thinking. Try out these tips for headlines as practice.

Paragraph 1: What is your story?

Good pitches include basic narrative elements: a specific focus, a central question, stakes, a conflict and/or a central character. Ideally, something *happens* in the story.

The first paragraph of your pitch lays out the basics of the story. Keep the focus on the subject of your analysis. Avoid merely announcing the topic; your original and specific "angle" should be clear. In this way you will tell your reader why your take on the issue matters. End with a lede – your best sentence that grabs the reader and reels them in.

When writing a pitch, try to put yourself in the mindset of someone without a vested interest. What would be their entryway into your story? Here's a great example.

If it takes longer than one paragraph to explain your story idea, you haven't thought it out properly. There is *no angle*.

Need help writing a lede? Here are some tips from Purdue.

Paragraph 2: How will you tell it?

If you are ready to pitch, you have already done enough work at least to answer the questions: “Why is this story important?” “How could I best pursue this story in the time that I have?”

Your second paragraph should describe in detail how you’re going to tell the story. What research will you need to do? What have you already completed? If you’re working on a fairly long piece, you’ll probably want to include the narrative structure you intend to use, i.e., a timeline, a debate between opposing sides, etc. If your story is going to be short then you won’t have to go into that much detail.

Do your research! A good pitch knows that it fits into a crowded stream of coverage. Have other outlets covered this story or similar ones? What is different about your story? Will your audience learn anything from this story? Will this story challenge what we thought we knew?

Paragraph 3: Logistics

Please include a paragraph (or bullet points) with any important logistics info.

Anticipated word limit?

Deadline constraints? Does this need to be published before an event date (either a news peg or if you are planning to use in a briefing or training)? Are you going to be away on vacation?

Charts/Graphs? Please give us a heads-up if you plan to create any graphics that could add time to fact-checking.

Costs? Will reporting require any travel or paid access to research materials?