

Honing Your Pitch: Making the Most of Your 10 Minutes (Griggs)

Caveat

This is not the only way to pitch a book, and may not even be the ‘best’ way. It is simply my personal approach based on workshops I’ve attended, how-to articles I’ve read and my personal (and sometimes painful) experience of what works and doesn’t work for me.

Elements of The Pitch

Checklist

The pitch should include:

1. genre/sub-genre and, if appropriate, targeted line
2. approximate word count and whether or not the work is complete
3. setting
4. high concept
5. Heroine: who she is, what she wants, what stands in her way
6. Hero: who he is, what he wants, what stands in his way
7. Romantic conflict: what attracts them to each other/keeps them physically together, what keeps them from committing/holds them emotionally apart.

The key is to be concise - you should be able to pack all of this info into 6-9 well crafted sentences.

Step-by-Step

The first three items on the checklist are:

- genre/sub-genre and, if appropriate, targeted line
- approximate word count, complete or not
- setting

These should be relatively easy for you to cover.

Your opening sentence would read something along the lines of:

“THE LADY AND THE TIGER is a completed, single title Regency-era historical of approx. 105,000 words, set in and around London.

Step 4: High Concept

Two approaches to High Concept:

- ▶ Use of a well-known themes
(You can find a representative list of these on my website at www.winniegriggs.com)
- ▶ Comparing your story to well-known characters, stories or movies combined in unexpected ways

Either approach you use gives the agent/editor an immediate image of what kind of story you will be pitching.

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Step 5: Heroine: who she is, what she wants, what stands in her way

Part 1: Who she is. Don't just give her name - paint a picture

Part 2: What she wants. This is the goal she is working toward. Your description should at least hint at why.

Part 3: What stands in her way. This is, of course, the obstacle that keeps her from achieving her goal.

Step 6: Hero: who he is, what he wants, what stands in his way
(Use the same approach for the hero as listed above for the heroine.)

Step 7: Romantic conflict: what attracts them to each other/keeps them physically together, what keeps them from committing/holds them emotionally apart.

Part 1 - What attracts them to each other/keeps them together physically. They may not be initially attracted to each other, but you must give them some compelling reason to stay in close proximity for an extended period of time, allowing the attraction to develop.

Part 2 - What keeps them from committing/holds them emotionally apart. This explains why, once the attraction builds, they cannot achieve their happily ever after, at least not without significant cost.

LET'S DISCUSS SOME SAMPLES

(Handouts distributed during workshop or shown on screen with an overhead projector)

OTHER PREP WORK

Practice makes perfect - and builds confidence!

Once you've decided what you're going to say - PRACTICE. This means saying it aloud, over and over and OVER, until it comes naturally. Make certain the words flow naturally, that you are not rushing it (my own biggest problem), and that the words you've chosen present your work in an active and interesting light.

If you want to memory joggers, or even your entire pitch, on 3x5 index cards to take in with you, that's fine. Even so, make certain you've practiced saying it aloud so the words will flow easily when the time comes.

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Other discussion points to prepare for

Questions you may get asked:

You'll want to be ready to answer questions the agent or editor may have for you. In addition to discussion about the book being pitched, be prepared to provide information on other writing topics.

Questions you may want to ask.

That's right - it's okay for you to ask questions as well.

Putting your best face forward

The two sides of the coin

- Appearance: Make certain you are neatly and professionally attired.
- Attitude: Make certain your enthusiasm for your work shows through.

THE APPOINTMENT ITSELF

Putting It All Together.

It's your turn up at bat. What do you do:

- Take a deep breath and try to relax
- When you arrive at the table, smile, introduce yourself, shake her/his hand.
- Once the introductions are out of the way, give your pitch.
- Be sure you let your enthusiasm and excitement for your work show through - it'll be contagious!
- After you've delivered the opening pitch, sit back and give the editor/agent an opportunity to ask questions.
- DO NOT OVERSTAY YOUR WELCOME.

Appointment DOs & DON'Ts:

- Don't ask to pass along a sample of your work now.
- Do make certain you know exactly what you've been asked to send.
- Do arrive a few minutes early.
- Don't take up more than your allotted time. .
- Don't fill most of the appointment time talking about off-topic personal matters or rambling on in a disjointed fashion.
- Do take advantage of any extra time to gather information about their house or their take on an industry related topic
- If this is a group appointment, Don't try to dominate the agent or editor's attention.
- Don't expect to actually strike a deal at the pitch session..

After The Appointment - Next Steps

(And you thought you could breathe now! ☺)

- Send a thank you note within a few days.
- If you received a request to submit, include a reminder in your submission cover letter stating where the request took place.
- Timeliness (Balancing speed and polish)
- Once it's in the mail - Get moving on your next work!

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Winnie Griggs has had five historical romances published by Dorchester, and is currently contracted for two upcoming novels to be published by Steeple Hill's Love Inspired Historical line in 2009. Her writing has garnered enthusiastic reviews and numerous awards, among them the Colorado Gold Editor's Choice Award for Romance.

Winnie is active in her local RWA chapter, serving in nearly every board and committee position over the past eleven years, including a three year stint as President. In addition, Winnie has served on RWA's Long Range Planning Committee, has served multiple times on PASIC's contest committee, is a current member of PASIC's 2009 Conference Planning committee and is an active member of Novelists, Inc. and American Christian Fiction Writers.

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Born and bred in New York, Melissa Endlich has worked in the publishing industry for over fifteen years, the past nine at Harlequin/Silhouette. Since 2005 she's been an Editor for Steeple Hill Books, working on inspirational romances. Currently she is overseeing Love Inspired Historical, a brand new line of inspirational historical romances, which launched in February 2008. After so many years in the publishing world, Melissa still considers herself very blessed that she is paid to read books that she would gladly read for free, and considers it a mission to help spread love and faith through inspirational romance fiction.

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From the moment Michelle Grajkowski first opened her doors to the 3 Seas Literary Agency in August of 2000, she has been living her dream. (What could be better than surrounding yourself with great authors and their exciting and imaginative books?)

Since then, she's successfully sold into major publishing houses including Harlequin, NAL, Berkley, Dorchester, Kensington, Avon, Pocket, Random House (both here and in the UK), Knopf, Andrews McMeel, Warner, St. Martin's and HarperCollins.

Currently, she is looking for fantastic authors with a voice of their own. Michelle focuses on romance, women's fiction, Chick-Lit young adult and middle grade fiction.