

HONING YOUR PITCH

©Winnie 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 personal experience of what works and doesn’t work for me.

Elements of The Pitch

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 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.

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.

HONING YOUR PITCH

©Winnie Griggs

THREE BOYS AND A BABY is a proposal for a 60,000 word book set in a small Kansas town and targeted to the Harlequin American line.

In this *Divorce*, *American Style* meets *Yours, Mine and Ours* story, Jackson Tate is both a fireman and a single parent who, after 2 years, is still brooding over his ex-wife's choice to abandon him and their son in favor of pursuing big city career advancement.

Ella Garvey, a tender-hearted pediatrician is also trying to juggle a career she loves with the demands of being a single parent. Her ex-husband left her and their twin boys, not to chase his career but rather another woman.

Jackson and Ella are nodding acquaintances who know each other only through the strong friendship bond their sons share. But when the three boys find an abandoned infant they want to adopt as their own - to the point that they actually run away rather than give her up - the two adults quickly pull together to deal with the situation.

Once the children are found and safely returned home, Ella agrees to serve as temporary foster parent to the infant, providing an excuse for Jackson and his son to spend time in the Garvey household. Before long an easy friendship develops between the adults, one that slowly blossoms into attraction and the potential for something deeper.

But when Jackson's ex-wife expresses a desire to reclaim her family, both Jackson and Ella come up against some difficult choices and feel their fragile gasp on their "happily ever after" begin to slip away.

*Example provided by Laura Marie Altom, best selling and award winning author of twenty-four books and counting. **Three Boys And A Baby** was a May 2008 release.*

* ~ *

LADY'S CHOICE is a 95,000 word historical romance set during 1890 in a fictional NE Texas town and targeted to Dorchester's Leisure Books line.

In this *Marriage of Inconvenience* story, Regina Nash is a spinster-by-choice and photographer-by-trade small town girl who is raising the orphaned son of her step-sister. When she is suddenly faced with the ultimatum of either marry one of three hand-picked suitors sent by her grandfather or lose custody of her nephew she is fit to be tied. Discovering that each of the greenhorn suitors has something to gain monetarily from this sham courtship only raises her ire.

Adam Barr, recently released after serving six years in prison for a crime he didn't commit, is chomping at the bit to find out who framed him and clear his name. But first he has to repay an old debt by escorting the three potential grooms to Texas and refereeing the situation during the two weeks that Reggie has to make her choice.

Reggie has little use for the three gold digging suitors and proceeds to make their lives as miserable as possible - from asking one of them to help her pose a rambunctious prize pig for a picture to appointing another to help with children's activities at the town fair. However, the irritatingly self-assured, inflexibly by-the-book, altogether intriguing Adam Barr is another story - too bad he's not in the running for her hand.

But when Reggie hatches a daring plan to get out of her marry-or-else predicament, it's Adam who is forced to pay the consequences.

*Example provided by Winnie Griggs. **Lady's Choice** was an April 2005 Leisure Books release.*

HONING YOUR PITCH

©Winnie Griggs

OTHER PREP WORK

- Practice makes perfect - and builds confidence!
Don't just read it over - practice saying it out loud.
Make certain the words flow naturally
- Strive to use words that present your work in an active and interesting light.
- It's okay to use index cards

Other discussion points to prepare for

- Think of questions you may get asked:
- Think of questions you may want to ask.

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
- Switch off cell phone, swallow mints or discard gum
- 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.
- Before you leave, assuming time allows, remember the questions you wanted to ask
- DO NOT OVERSTAY YOUR WELCOME.

A few words about appointment etiquette:

- Do NOT ask to pass along a sample of your work now.
- Do make certain you know exactly what she has asked for (partial, complete, etc).
- Don't expect to actually strike a deal at the pitch session, no matter how good a job you do.
- Other items to consider (discussion)

After The Appointment - Next Steps

(And you thought you could breathe now! 😊)

- Timeliness (Balancing speed and polish)
- It's in the mail! Get moving on your next work!