

The 12 Parts of a Perfect Pitch

By Michael Larsen, Literary Agent

A pitch is an oral query letter. Pitching a nonfiction book takes less than thirty seconds. The goal: generate maximum excitement in as few words as possible. Without being self-serving, you must capture the essence of your book, why it will appeal to book buyers, and what's most impressive about your platform, promotion plan, and credentials.

Books are either prose-driven or promotion-driven. Platform and promotion aren't as important for certain kinds of books such as reference books, or for academic presses, or for small, niche, or midsize houses outside of New York.

Half of the twelve parts of a pitch are optional; you may not need them. Here's how to excite agents and editors at Big Apple houses:



1. A sentence with the title (and subtitle, if needed) and up to fifteen words that prove your book is unique and salable
2. The model(s) for your book: one or two books, movies, or authors--"It's *The Tipping Point* meets *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*."
3. (Optional) A novel or narrative nonfiction book, such as a memoir, requires two or three sentences about the time, setting and story
4. The most impressive aspect of your platform: what you're doing to give yourself continuing visibility on the subject, online or off, with potential book buyers, and if the number is impressive, how many of them, and where. Wrong: "I give talks." Right: "I give X talks a year to Y people in major markets."
5. The most impressive one-to-three things you will do to promote your book, online or off, and how many of them, if the number is impressive.
6. The length of your proposal
7. The actual or estimated length of your manuscript



8. (Optional) The names, and if necessary identification, of people who will provide a foreword and cover quotes, if they're impressive
9. (Optional) If you're proposing a series, mention up to three books.
10. (Optional) Information about a self-published edition that will help sell it
11. Your most impressive credentials: your track record; experience in your field; years of research; prizes; contests; awards
12. (Optional) Anything else that will impress agents or editors

Like the overview of your proposal, these elements are the building blocks of your pitch. Arrange them in whatever order will give them the most impact. *How to Write a Book Proposal* discusses platform and promotion.

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