

PITCHING ADVICE (from The Danish Film Institute, DFI 2010)

Pitching is a fantastic tool to get others interested in an idea.
Please find below some suggestions to how to communicate your idea in ten minutes.

Content

Do not tell the **whole** story in a ten minute pitch.

Drama is life with the dull bits cut out.

Alfred Hitchcock

Use those elements that communicate the idea the best

There are many angles into an idea. It can be a filmic style, a picture, a visual concept or a character. If for instance you have an idea about your characters, you should typically concentrate on the main character, you rarely have time for side characters in ten minutes.

Ideas on an early stage can be presented in many ways, so there is no definite recipe to how to pitch them. This might inspire you:

Introduction: How is the situation of your main character in the beginning of the film – before the story starts
How will you introduce the character so that we identify and feel with him/her?

Point of attack: What happens for your main character, that starts the story?
What new possibilities or challenges does this create?
How will this change his or her situation?

The goal of the main character?
Specific wishes that grow out of the new situation
How do these define the story
Which goal should we hope for for the main character at the end of the film – revealed or not revealed

The 'action'
Now you have set the scene, and you can try to tell more about the story.
Again, do not tell everything.
Tell two or three of the main obstacles that will develop your character the most.

The ending? It is a matter of taste if you tell the ending or not.
Is the story so exiting, that the audience sit on the edge to hear the ending? Then the tempting way would be to have them pay you to write it down.
On the other side, the ending can be so important for the character, that you must tell.

Preparation:
Practise again and again after the pitch is written down. Try it on everyone who will listen
Their reactions will let you know about the weak spots, you have to work on.

Beware of the time. You only have ten minutes. Practise with a clock, even bring the clock.

Beware of the techniques, some do an all oral pitch, others prefer to have picture, or clips or a power point.

Bring laptop, mouse, cables, a.s.o. and rehearse with the technician the day before.

Bring a friend to be in charge of techniques.
And again – practise!

Presentation

Think positively. It is natural to be a little nervous. Everyone is. Butterflies in the stomach is a good thing, important to give a good presentation.
Remember - your idea is being evaluated, not your performance.
No consultant ever said no to a good project because the of who was presenting it was nervous.

Introduce yourself: If the consultant or the audience does not know you, tell very briefly about your background, and only if relevant tell how the idea was conceived.

Do not read aloud from the paper. Support yourself by the notes.
Do not read, it will be stiff and unpersonal.
Know your pitch so well, that you can tell easily and personally.

A trick is to just write the headlines and bulletpoints, then you have to tell in your own words.

Pitch for the commissioning editor/consultant, do as if this is a two way communication.
Use eye contact.
If for a bigger audience, look around and create contact.
Use your sense of timing.

Show passion. No one will be passionate about your idea if you are not. This is the important issue about not seeing just a piece of paper.
Show why this is important to you.
Remember enthusiasm is contagious.!

Have fun!

7 Pitching Tips from Ancient Myth to Modern Media **by Pamela Jaye Smith** fra inktip.com

What's the Perfect Pitch?

According to those who come to me for assistance with writing a pitch, or who attend Pitch Prep workshops where I often serve as a coach and panelist, it's darn hard to write.

Ancient writers did a pretty good job of this sort of thing, though. The Roman poet Virgil's opening three sentences of *The Aeneid* is a perfect pitch for his entire 130 page story. It begins *Cano, arma que virum que...* "I sing of arms and of the hero who..."

Right away we know it's a war story with a hero. An action-adventure genre. What else? Well, it's all included in Virgil's opening sentences, which you'll read at the end of this article.

Whether it's at a Pitch Prep Panel where a writer practices in front of dozens of people, or a one-on-one session where I work with writers to create a logline, pitch, and synopsis, here's what usually happens.

The writer tells their story... sort of... kind of... At the beginning many pitches are unfocused, rambling, and feature side issues rather than the most interesting parts of the stories. Too often writers talk about big themes and small details rather than plot high points and engaging characters.

My job is to help writers fine-tune one of the most difficult parts of the whole process: that distillation of blood-sweat-time-and-tears, pearls-from-my-mouth-to-the-page, brilliantly-crafted, subtly-subtexted, image-infused 119 page masterpiece into something that can be told in just a few sentences or, gods forbid, a logline. Aaaach! The expansive, prolific writer's mind not only boggles, it resists. But resistance is not only futile, it is fatal if you want to promote and sell your work in this marketplace.

There are always exceptions, such as the uncle in the business, the script "accidentally" left in the director's SUV by the parking valet, the chance meeting of the perfect star in the perfect bar and the casual conversation that leads to a sale, but generally speaking, selling your project means going through the hoops of the Hollywood pitch session. Or as some would call it, the Grinder, the Thrasher, the Destroyer of Dreams. But the possible payoff keeps us all pitching, right?

After group critique sessions with the entire panel or one-on-ones with us, writers' pitches are generally much improved. They are focused, they hit the high points, they are well-structured and concise with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Plus, they are much more enticing and provocative - which is what you must have to grab and hold the interest of potential buyers and backers.

Here are some tools to help you craft pitches to get your stories read and then, hopefully, sold.

1. GET OVER YOUR PARANOIA about exposing your ideas.

I understand this one. After having typed FADE OUT on my second screenplay, I took the original to the copy store and actually made the copy person sign a Non-Disclosure

Agreement before I'd hand him the pages. Then I stood there and watched it being copied to be sure no one was reading it to steal my ideas.

I've gotten over that. How?

In part by realizing that there are a number of Mythic Themes that we humans keep telling ourselves over and over, but in different styles for different eras. There are more Themes than just The Hero's Journey, by the way. Both my workbook and seminar CD "Beyond the Hero's Journey" explore a number of them and show you how to align your stories with these ancient and powerful themes.

So what if your storyline in its essence probably really isn't all that original? Your telling of it probably is. Or should be. It'll be a story from the collective unconscious of humanity but it has come down onto the pages through your unique instrument: your history, your attitudes, your culture, your vision, your foibles, your talent, your style.

Don't worry about giving away too much in your pitch. You eventually have to give it all away to get it sold and made. Besides, we've most likely heard it before. But what we haven't heard is your spin on it and we very much want to hear that.

Examples of different styles on the same Mythic Theme? How about the ABOUT FACE theme of sex-changes in these diverse genres, styles, and stories: Some Like it Hot, Tootsie, Mrs. Doubtfire, M. Butterfly, Crying Game, Boys Don't Cry, and Shakespeare in Love.

Keep in mind how we humans love to hear the same story again and again. Just think of your kids, or yourself as a kid, how you had your favourite stories and wore out the book or the video reliving them again and again and again and again.

So put aside your paranoia and bravely regale us with your unique version of our favourite tales.

2. Include the elements of SYMPATHY, DANGER, SALVATION.

We must have Sympathy for or some identification with your characters. Or curiosity about them. Or perhaps the promise of validation of one of our own pet prejudices. It's that "Who cares?" question, the "What's the hook?" question. There must be something engaging at the very beginning for us to buy the ticket and go on this ride with you.

You must put the characters into some kind of Danger: physical or emotional, real or imagined, from within or without, etc. Without danger there is no conflict, with conflict no drama.

There must be some kind of Salvation. This doesn't always mean a happy Hollywood ending, but it does mean a satisfactory ending. Salvation can be a new awareness, a gained skill, a repaired relationship, a goal accomplished, or in the case of tragedies, a vital lesson learned.

Be sure the quality of your SDS elements are compatible, compliment each other, and provide the backbone for the character arc.

Documentaries need these elements, too.

3. VISUALIZE your pitch for the listener or the reader.

Use vivid words; use descriptive adjectives and adverbs. And be sure they apply and aren't superfluous.

Be sure you have a very solid subject-verb-object, this-happens-to-him, that-happens-to-so-and-so structural spine, and then make it come alive for us with your modifiers.

E.g., Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back. That's the spine.

With the modifiers it could become: Rough and tumble ambitious boy from the barrio, bent on reclaiming his family honour meets shy, sheltered beauty from an aristocratic family.

Engage our senses:

Visual - colours, sizes, textures, motion, speed

Auditory - soft, quiet, chaotic, lulling, frenzied

Sensate - queasy like *Scream* or *Clockwork Orange*, sweet and feel-good like *Shakespeare in Love*, adrenalin rush like *Italian Job* or *Fight Club*, maddening like *The Insider* or *Syriana*, inspiring like *Whale Rider* or *Finding Nemo*.

You probably do not want to mention other films in conjunction with your story, but for your own crafting of the description, think of words you'd use to describe them, then borrow those words for your own descriptions.

Those are just some pointers for your story pitch. Here are some pointers for you yourself, whether you're pitching your story on the phone or via email, at one of the many Pitch festivals, at the production company's offices, to potential backers, or to a total stranger who may turn out to have an uncle who runs a studio.

4. NEVER COMPLAIN, NEVER EXPLAIN.

Do not tell us you've never done this before. Why? Generally speaking, humans' first impulse towards weakness goes one of two ways: 1) the Mommy Response or 2) the Pack Response. The Mommy Response gets you mothered, which isn't always a positive thing. The Pack Response gets you pounced on and killed, survival-of-the-fittest by fang, like that great miner/minor scene in *Galaxy Quest*, when the seemingly harmless little creatures maul a hurt one to death. The Pack Response is seldom ever a positive thing for the unfittest.

Do not explain how you came to write the story, unless it's a true story and that's essential to the setup. Your explanation about the internal workings of your creative self eats up valuable story-pitching time.

Do not instruct them how to feel about the story, e.g. "it's inspiring", "it's important" -- they'll be the judge of that.

If they are interested and specifically ask about you, then sure, tell a little about yourself, but not too much. Plato observed that "The unexamined life is not worth living." I've observed that the over-examined life not worth hearing about.

It's about your story, not about you. [Even if your story is about you, it's still about the story.]

5. CONTROL AND FOCUS

Poise and presence. No twitches, leg jiggles, head-nodding-bobbing - yet don't be stiff.

Hand gestures are fine, as long as they are normal for you and not stagy.

Glance naturally from one eye to the other as you talk to the listener, as though talking with a best friend. In the Mystery Schools they teach about "active sight", where you can actually project ideas through your eyes into the eyes of another. Seduction comes to mind. Needless to say, in a pitch meeting you'd be projecting "Love this! Buy this! Make this!"

6. Express ENTHUSIASM.

For the topic and for your story.

For the opportunity to pitch to this particular person or company. You'll have done your research on them so if you mean it, do compliment a particular project or performance to show you know who you're meeting with and what they've done.

Don't be star-struck. Yet do be respectful.

Be congenial. Listen with an open mind to others' ideas, even if you know you'd never ultimately adopt them; there may be some inspiration for you in them. Filmmaking is a very collaborative process and they want to know you are easy to work with and want to be a team player, while still being true to your vision.

7. FOLLOW-UP

In person:

Have a card/one-page with ALL your contact info to leave with them. It's soooooo fatally ridiculous not to be contactable.

Ask for their card/info for future query letters.

By phone:

Ask if you can email or mail your logline and 1-page synopsis and have all your contact info on that one page.

By email:

Be sure there are phone numbers as well as emails so they can contact you.

Good luck!!!

So what was that ancient Roman author Virgil's pitch? Those first three sentences of his 130-page story?

"I sing of arms and of the hero, who driven by fate first came from the coasts of Troy to Italy and the Lavinian shores: he has been much tossed about both on land and on sea by the power of the gods above, on account of the lasting wrath of cruel Juno: and he has suffered also many things in war, until he might build a city and bring his gods to Latium; from whence is the Latin race and the Alban fathers and the walls of lofty Rome. O Muse, relate to me the causes: what offended deity or why the grieving queen of the gods may have compelled a man eminent for piety to endure so many calamities, to undergo so many hardships. Are there such great resentments in heavenly minds?"

The answer to that last sentence is "Oh yes indeed, there are such great resentments in heavenly minds". The Aeneid is the story of what happened after the Trojan War to a bunch of the defeated Trojans.

The Greek poet Homer's *Odyssey* followed the exploits of the Greek hero Odysseus on his ten year journey back home to Ithaca from victory in Troy. Not to be outdone, and in the flush of the glory years of the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus, Virgil decided to create an action-adventure-romance-road story about one of the Trojan heroes and to tie it in with the founding of Rome. A sort of rise-from-the-ashes, triumph-over-adversity tale and a back-at-ya to the Greeks. Myths are the stories we tell ourselves to explain (and often to justify) the world around us and within us; The Aeneid is politically motivated myth-making at it's best. Propaganda, you might even call it.

The Trojan prince Aeneas, his aging father Anchises, his young son, his best buddy Achates, and a bunch of other Trojan warriors leave the smoldering ruins of Troy and set out to find and found their new kingdom, Rome. Along the way they meet up with the requisite obstacles and roadblocks, seductive sidetracks and wise helpers. There were raging tempests, scary monsters, treacherous hosts, jealous rivals, competing gods and goddesses - all sorts of dangers and dramatic conflicts.

One of classical literature's most famous love stories occurs on this journey as Aeneas and his men crash-land on the coast of north Africa and are befriended by Dido, the beautiful proud Queen of Carthage. Aided by Cupid's arrows, she falls madly in love with Aeneas and gives him all sorts of goodies, including herself and a throne. But Fate awaits, and urged on by Mercury, the messenger of the gods, Aeneas takes up his journey again, leaving Dido burning up with a broken heart - literally.

Quite a rousing story of love and glory, a tale of do or die. And how did the author "sell" it to readers and listeners? With that three sentence opening pitch embodying Sympathy for the tragically defeated Trojans, Dangers aplenty from gods and Fate, and ultimate Salvation in the founding of Rome.

So as you can see, pitching your story is a combination of:

- 1) having a great story in the first place,
- 2) being able to condense it down to a few seductive phrases which convey that greatness, and
- 3) presenting yourself as someone who is talented, dedicated, yet easy to work with

There are a lot of books, consultants, and workshops in the marketplace that offer different approaches to pitching. Most of it's good advice and it'd be good for you to have

all those weapons in your arsenal, all those tools in your kit.

Read the books, go to the workshops, work with the consultants who strike a chord with you. Gather as much information as you can, work diligently at the craft of the pitch, find a style that best represents you, your artistry, and the particular story you are pitching and then -

Go for it with passion and dedication!

Be politely unstoppable!!

And gods willing, the poets will sing about you and your stories!!!

Pamela Jaye Smith is a writer, consultant, and award-winning producer-director. She is a regular panelist at the Hollywood Film Festival's Sell Your Story To Hollywood weekend pitch events and was a Pitch Consultant at the Screenwriting EXPO 2004 Pitch Prep Salon.

Pamela is the author of *INNER DRIVES: How to Write and Create Characters Using the Eight Classic Centers of Motivation* and also coming from publishers Michael Wiese Productions in 2008, *THE POWER OF THE DARK SIDE: Create Great Villains, Dangerous Situations, and Dramatic Conflict*.

With 30 years in media on feature films, TV series, documentaries, music videos, commercials, corporate, and military projects, Pamela has pitched fiction and non-fiction projects to major Hollywood studios and production companies, independent producers, heads of corporations, and government officials both U.S. and foreign. She's traveled extensively on the projects themselves, including to Hong Kong, Singapore, and Thailand.

Pamela Jaye is the founder of MYTHWORKS www.mythworks.net

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