

WAM!NYC February 2017 Speed Pitching - Pitching Tips

From an editor at Narratively:

DO know that you definitely have a story before pitching, do some initial legwork so you're ready to answer the editor's questions and are unlikely to find yourself in a situation where you get the assignment and then it turns out that there isn't a story after all.

DO give some details -- not just "this thing happened," but "this thing happened and I would like to write a story about this aspect of it, and how it impacts x, y, and z."

DON'T think you're entitled to an editor's time. This means: don't demand explanations when your pitches are declined. Don't follow up immediately, give them some time to read and consider your pitch (especially if it's evergreen).

From an editor at Vocativ:

DO: Do look to see what other recent stories we have or haven't done on the topic

Be succinct

Mention what sources you've interviewed or are connected with already

Tell me what makes you the right reporter for this, give brief background about yourself

DON'T: Pitch a topic. Would like to know the story — what's new, underreported, surprising or unique about your idea.

Unless it is extremely time sensitive, don't follow-up a few hours after your initial email. I generally will get back to well thought out pitches in a timely way.

From an editor at Rolling Stone:

DO: Be concise/efficient: I want to see that you can fit a lot of information in a relatively small number of words. i.e., It should not take you 800 words to sum up a proposed 1,000-word piece. It should probably take more like 2-5 sentences.

DO: Pitch a story, not a topic: I get lots of pitches that relate to very worthy topics, but there's no story or thesis there. Relatedly, "this thing is bad" is **usually** not enough to make a good piece.

DO: If it's a cold pitch, say (briefly) why you're the one to write this story. Perhaps this is a topic you've covered extensively or have particular knowledge of, or you have access to a particular expert, etc. Send a few links to previous work that's in some way relevant.

DON'T: Be afraid to follow up (after a day if it's a very timely pitch, or maybe a few days to a week for something more evergreen). I try very hard to respond to all pitches, at least briefly, but if for whatever reason you don't hear back — especially after trying twice — assume it's a no and take the pitch elsewhere.

DON'T: Drop off entirely if your idea is rejected the first time, or even the first several times. Remember that there are tons of reasons why a pitch might get rejected, beyond it being a bad idea: editorial schedules, resources, maybe it's too similar to another story that editor has going already, etc. In my experience, this happens much more often with women; they'll pitch me once, I'll politely decline, and then I'll never hear from them again. There are some white dudes who have sent me literally dozens of pitches over months and months (sometimes years), despite the fact that I've never taken a single one. That might be extreme and obnoxious, but we could probably all stand to harness at least a little bit of that confidence!

DON'T: Be rude. You might think that goes without saying, but...