

NEW TO PITCHING OR PUBLISHING?

PANEL MEMBERS:

Jenn Morson: jennmorson@gmail.com

Rudri Bhatt Patel: rudrip@gmail.com

Jen Simon: jensimon523@gmail.com

Sharon Van Epps: sharonvanepps@gmail.com

Where do I start?

If you are new to pitching, the easiest way to start is to make a list of all the topics you are interested in writing about. The pieces where you have a personal stake naturally will resonate the most with readers. This doesn't mean you can't write about subjects that are unfamiliar or new to you, but start with what you know first.

The key to landing a byline in a publication is to pitch. Before you begin crafting a pitch, study the publication and determine what type of stories they run. This applies for both reported pieces and personal essays. For a reported piece, brainstorm on areas of interest to you. Attempt to find a timely peg and mention the sources you would contact in support of your piece. Include all of this information in your pitch.

For personal essays, most publications want a completed piece rather than just a pitch. Determine what areas resonate with you, write the essay with a clear narrative arc and be certain to have a compelling beginning and ending. It's important to make personal account into a universal experience. And always read the publication for submission guidelines and word count.

Pointers on crafting a pitch

Your pitch needs to answer the '3 Ys' - Why now, Why you, and Why them.

If you're pitching a topical essay or article, provide a news link or specify the "hook". Maybe it's about Mental Health Awareness Month. Maybe a celebrity has said something you can relate to. Maybe a new law has been passed. There needs to be a reason for them to publish the piece and the more topical it is, the more urgent it is.

Topical stories are important because editors can take advantage of the current news cycle. They can also link them to relevant articles in their publication. Editors always need to be thinking about clicks and links – they want as many people as possible to see it.

"Evergreen" pieces are articles or essays that are relevant or readable year-round. They're important because they allow the editor to plan what they will publish.

Other things to consider about the pitch:

There are two main kinds of pieces – personal essays and articles. An article involves research and interviews. You craft the story, but it's an objective one. A personal essay is subjective - it has an arc, you share a story, and, often, you learn a lesson. It's very hard to sell a personal

essay from just a pitch for two reasons. Even if the editor knows you, an essay is highly dependent on your voice and the essay may not go in the direction the editor is expecting.

There is now a new kind of piece that blurs the line between the two. I (Jen Simon) wrote a hybrid article/ personal essay for Babble about the use of opioids after c-sections. I wrote about my own opioid abuse, but also used statistics and interviewed other moms, and a doctor who is using a non-opioid based pain reliever.

Most pitches contain the following:

1. A compelling lede;
2. A character in your piece (a story);
3. Identifying your sources;
4. Why you are the right person to write this piece; and
5. Your bio and relevant clips. If you don't have clips, emphasize why are you have a particular background that makes you right for the piece (i.e. personal experience, education, etc.).

Editors don't have time to sift through several paragraphs. At most, a pitch should be 2 - 3 paragraphs.

REMEMBER!

Credentials help, but the story is what matters. A friend of mine (Jen Simon) has been a professional writer for 15 years, but just two weeks ago made her debut in the NYT. And, as you know, one of Sharon's first published pieces was for the NYT. You need to find the right story for the right editor at the right time.

Where do you send your pitch?

Most publications (in their masthead or Twitter) will list the editor information. Editors get hundreds of emails. Make certain in the subject line you list the following: Freelance Pitch: _____ . In the blank list the title of your piece. If it is a timely piece, write TIMELY Freelance Pitch in the subject of the email.

There are two ways to approach editors – one, by their first name, as if they're your equal. Or two, by their last name, like you're applying for a job.

Make sure you're using a gmail account. Using an AOL or a Hotmail account signals that you're out-of-touch. And you need to ensure your handle is appropriate. If your address is sugarbaby3000, you don't look like a professional writer. Simply a variation of your name is the best way to go. You want to use your name for all your social media channels. If you have a blog, add your name to it. If you're looking to be published other places, you need to be the one who is known, not your blog.

Acceptance - what now?

Congratulations! Thank the editor for the opportunity. Nail the specifics. Word count? The due date of the piece and any other material necessary for your reported work or personal essay. As

a part of your correspondence re: acceptance, determine deadlines, rates and how soon payment will come after your piece is filed.

Rejection - what now?

Don't despair. Try again! Target other publications.

No Response - what now?

If it is a timely piece, send a follow-up email within three - four days. Otherwise, follow-up after seven days. Sometimes editors pay attention to a follow-up email because they missed the original pitch. If you receive no response to a follow-up, then start targeting other publications. In some instances, you can do third and final follow-up, especially if it is a byline that is important to you. But remember, there is a fine line between follow-up and stalking!

Pitches from Jenn Morson

Example of a successful timely pitch:

Email subject: Time-sensitive Pitch: NBC's Al Trautwig isn't alone in his adoption ignorance

Hi Amy - I have a time-sensitive pitch for you about Al Trautwig's recent tweet (since deleted) saying that Simone Biles' adoptive parents, her biological grandparents, aren't her "real" parents.

As a woman adopted by my own aunt and uncle, I've heard similarly ignorant comments throughout my 40 years. How my sister doesn't look like me because we're not "really" sisters, or how my parents are clearly saints and not just my parents because they saved me, and so on.

I would like to complete a piece for the Washington Post addressing the ignorance of such comments and how they undermine adoption and familial ties as well as taking the focus off of the accomplishments of those who have been adopted. As this is Olympics-related, I would love to hear from you soon so that I can send you the completed draft later today.

Thank you for your time - Jenn Morson

Successful evergreen pitch in response to pitch call:

Email subject: X-solicited pitches for Architectural Digest

Dear Alyssa,

Thank you for soliciting pitches for Architectural Digest in X. I'd love to be considered for this vertical, and I have several ideas brewing.

I had a roommate in a post-college group living situation whose boyfriend was over all the time. And not only was he always there, but he wore a union suit-type pajama outfit. I would find him in the kitchen with a mug of hot cocoa, wearing this ridiculous red get up, complete with button up rear end flap. I'd love to write about how to talk to your roommate about overnight guests and how to draw proper boundaries.

In addition to being a freelance writer, I have real estate experience, so this kind of writing is right up my alley.

Here is some of my recent work:

<https://www.self.com/story/how-to-survive-hyperemesis-gravidarum-the-morning-sickness-from-hell>

<https://www.whattoexpect.com/news/first-year/how-much-pda-okay-front-baby-kids/>

<https://www.racked.com/2017/7/24/16000612/amelia-earhart-clothing-line>

My complete portfolio can be found here: jenmorson.contently.com

Thank you so much for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you! - Jenn Morson

Pitches from Sharon

Example of a successful pitch to NYT Motherlode without substantial clips:

I didn't have much of a publishing track record when I successfully pitched Motherlode in 2014, but I had my eye on the space for a long time. I became Facebook friends with Editor K.J. Dell'Antonia, so I knew what topics interested her. In hindsight, the pitch is too wordy, partly due to references to a Facebook discussion, but it got the job done. Once I had that NYT credit, doors to other publications opened more easily.

Hi K.J.,

I saw your Facebook post today about Annette Lareau's book UNEQUAL CHILDHOODS, and I went right over to Ron Leiber's page to rant about soccer. I have three children playing competitive soccer for Seattle United: my 12-year-old daughter is on the Washington state championship team for her age group (though currently sidelined by a dislocated shoulder); my 11-year-old son and 10-year-old daughter are in the midst of tryouts for the Elite Player Development Program, a precursor to the Olympic development program. Unlike Lisa Catherine Harper, who raved about her daughter's competitive soccer participation for Motherlode in October, I find the world of competitive soccer exhausting, boring, frustrating, and yes, elitist. I am thrilled to see people like Annette Lareau and Ron Leiber raising these issues. Hilary Levy Friedman also touched on the inequities in youth sports in [a recent article for The Atlantic](#).

I'd love to do a piece for Motherlode on the issues of privilege in soccer. I would share some personal examples to illustrate the demands of elite soccer that only families with means can address. Because we have three players in our family, participation involves hiring a caregiver to transport one kid, while I transport another kid, while the third child is off in a carpool or being driven by my husband. My children were internationally adopted from Ethiopia and India, and so we've chosen to live in the most racially and economically diverse part of the city. This has proved a huge issue for soccer carpooling, however; kids from our part of town simply don't participate in Seattle United in large numbers, even though the supposedly all-city club is a nonprofit with a scholarship program. I would also contact the board to find out how many kids actually receive financial aid from the league, and if they see inequity as a problem.

My essays on parenting have been published in Adoptive Families and The Sun, and I've blogged for [HuffPost Parents](#) and [Adoptive Families Circle](#). If you are interested and feel this issue is timely, I could have the post to you by early next week, or perhaps the topic would be a good fit for early January, after our much anticipated two-week holiday soccer break is over.

Thanks for your consideration, Sharon Van Epps

Example of successful pitch to a specific call for submissions:

Here's an example of a response to a pitch call. You can see how my pitching style evolved to be more concise and confident, which allowed me to break into food writing with no experience in that area. Although we suggested earlier that you should not pitch an essay, now that I have an essay track record to share with editors, I pitch them all the time! You can do anything if it works.

Dear Geraldine Campbell,

Congratulations on your new job at The Kitchn! I saw your call for pitches for an essay on the wonderfulness of white rice. Here's my take.

In Praise of White Rice --

I didn't always love white rice. I fell in love during the year and a half that I lived in Hyderabad, India, where rice is so essential to daily life that friends greet each other with the question, "Have you had your rice today?" There I discovered that rice could be prepared dozens of ways and paired with hundreds of accompaniments, and that eating rice simple and unadorned will keep you alive through any emotional or physical illness. Now that I'm a mother, white rice is one of the few things all three of my children will eat, and so we do, with beans, with chicken, with Ethiopian shiro and Indian dal. For me, it's the ultimate comfort food.

I confess that although I LOVE food and cooking, I haven't written about it before. I've published parenting-related essays in [Brain,Child](#), [The Washington Post](#), [The New York Times](#), and other venues. My humor has appeared in [Ravishly](#) and [McSweeney's](#).

If you think my essay would work for you, I could deliver within ten days of assignment. Thanks so much.

All best,

Sharon Van Epps

Pitches from Rudri

Note: When I pitched this piece, I did have some previous clips regarding food writing, but no clips that mixed a narrative + food.

Example of successful pitch to a specific call for submissions to SAVEUR:

Dear Mr. Falkowitz,

I learned about the opportunity to pitch Saveur regarding Houston related stories from Facebook.

I lived in Houston for several years and am East-Indian and a native Texan. I will explore the Indian chaat experience in the piece, "Finding India in the Heart of Houston." As a young girl visiting Mumbai, I walked the streets of Juhu Beach with my grandfather. We stopped at the street vendors to taste pani-puri - a small, fried whole-wheat puff shell containing potatoes, moong beans, and tamarind chutney dipped into a spicy mixture of masala water. One by one, we'd take turns, swallowing the entire puri into our mouths.

My grandfather has since passed and it has been twenty years since I've visited India. However, the resurgence of chaat food in Indian restaurants in American suburbs help me revisit the nostalgia of the past. In these chaat places, I see families, grandmothers, mothers, fathers and children eating with their fingers; the lines between the American-born Indian teen and the Delhi-born patriarch disappear. Perhaps all those years ago, this was the point my grandfather was trying to make - chaat has a way of unifying generations even when individuals are born in two different continents.

In Houston, there is a shopping center called Hillcroft where there is not only one place for chaat, but several restaurants that offer an opportunity to savor a variety of Indian street food. This 850 - 1000 word piece will offer a unique first person look on how my identities merge in an unlikely way and how an East Indian can feel at home in Houston.

Here is my bio: Rudri Bhatt Patel is a lawyer turned writer and editor. She is the co-founder and co-editor for the literary journal, The Sunlight Press and on staff at Literary Mama. Her work has appeared in [The Washington Post](#), [ESPN](#), [DAME](#), [Brain,Child Magazine](#), [Role Reboot](#), [Mothers Always Write](#), [Parent.Co](#), [Phoenix New Times](#), [Raising Arizona Kids](#) and elsewhere. She is currently working on a memoir. Follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) or her site, [Being Rudri](#).

A few relevant clips:

<http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/restaurants/the-art-of-drinking-chai-heres-where-to-get-a-cup-of-the-authentic-indian-tea-in-metro-phoenix-8997785>

<http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/restaurants/how-to-order-like-a-gujarati-in-phoenix-9412669>

Thanks in advance for your consideration and time,
Rudri Bhatt Patel

Successful pitch acceptance after no response and second follow-up (ESPN W)

Ms. Hudson:

My name is Rudri Bhatt Patel and I am a fellow Binder. I appreciate your time in evaluating the following pitch:

“You have to study. You have to be smart. There isn’t time for sports.” My East-Indian parents didn’t necessarily value the importance of playing on the basketball team or whacking the tennis ball on the court. The cultural impetus in most East-Indian families of my parents’ generation dismissed the role sports played in childhood development, self-esteem and working with others. What my parents failed to consider are the research studies that indicate a child’s academic performance is enhanced by participating in sports. (I will cite stats/research from a 2012 Psychology Today article: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-moment-youth/201201/the-psychology-youth-sports>)

In my 1000-word essay, “*Breaking the Stereotype: An East-Indian Mom Pushes to Value Academics and Sports Equally*,” I will address why I’ve decided to emphasize pursuing tennis and academics equally in order for my daughter to receive a more well-rounded education. There are learning lessons and leadership opportunities sports are capable of teaching children – if parents decide to be open-minded about the possibilities.

Bio: Rudri Bhatt Patel is a lawyer turned writer and editor. She is on staff at *Literary Mama* and her work has appeared in [The Washington Post](#), [Brain, Child Magazine](#), [Role Reboot](#), [Mothers Always Write](#), [Parent.Co](#), [Raising Arizona Kids](#) and elsewhere. She is currently working on a memoir on grief, the Hindu culture and how it provides perspective on life’s ordinary graces. Follow her on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) or her blog, [Being Rudri](#).

Here are some clips of my previous work:

Brain, Child: <http://www.brainchildmag.com/2015/01/the-mother-of-the-house/>

Mothers Always Write: <http://mothersalwayswrite.com/here/>

WaPo: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2015/12/21/why-this-diwali-observing-hindu-family-also-celebrates-christmas/>

Thank you for considering my pitch.

Best,
Rudri Bhatt Patel

Pitches from Jen Simon

This was a timely pitch based on a quote Chrissy Teigen gave about how she didn't know she was suffering from postpartum depression. The editor at Women's Day liked my idea but asked me to take out the info about Teigen, publishing it as an evergreen piece.

Hi Maria,

I'm writing about an article I think will resonate with and help your readers. Chrissy Teigen just announced she didn't realize she was suffering from postpartum depression. While that may seem strange to some people, I understand how she felt -- I also didn't know my intense sadness and anxiety were a result of postpartum depression. In the article below and attached, I share my personal experience, statistics, and quotes from a Psychotherapist about why women might not know their unhappiness is more serious than the typical "Baby Blues."

I've written about parenting, depression, and addiction for The Washington Post, Yahoo, Cosmo, Redbook, Scary Mommy and many more websites. Please feel free to make any edits to this timely piece.

Best,
Jen

Example of a successful pitch to Slate.com

Hi Susan,

There is one thing that unites Democrats and Republicans, rural and urban dwellers, even people of all ages -- the knowledge that the opioid crisis has reached epidemic level proportions and needs to be fixed. Trump, like many other politicians, claims to want to help addicts, but the GOP's new health care proposal would have the opposite effect -- punishing those who have mental illnesses that often lead to addiction. Even though I was an educated, suburban mom, I became addicted to opioids to make my untreated postpartum depression and anxiety. The thing that helped me overcome my addiction? The appropriate medications.

Below and attached is a personal essay I've written about my experience with addiction and one way to curb the opioid epidemic - by not repealing the Affordable Care Act. I've contributed to The Washington Post, Yahoo, Cosmopolitan, Redbook, Woman's Day, and many more publications.

I'd be happy to send you any more information or make any changes.

Thanks,
Jen