

written by Leigh Shulman | [The Future Is Red](#)

A QUICK & DIRTY

GUIDE TO
PITCHING

& GETTING PUBLISHED

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

What is a pitch?

Creating your writing goals

- Why you must have clear goals
- How-to find your goal
- Free writing to your goal
- From free write to final goal

All about pitching

- Setting a structure
- A powerful tool to design your plan
- Where should I pitch?
- What to include in your pitch
- Think like an editor

All about pitching continued

- Top ten tips to write a stand out pitch
- Good pitch vs Bad pitch
- Learn to love rejection
- Keeping track of your pitches

FAQ

Pitching HARO for publicity

- What is HARO
- How-to and who-to pitch
- Make your HARO queries stand out

A Special Offer Just for you

Additional reading and resources

About the author

INTRODUCTION



I'm Leigh Shulman, a writer, traveler, teacher and mom. For as long as I can remember, I've been writing and working with people like you to help you reach their writing goals.

It's what I love doing.

Pitching, however, is another story. It's what I call the "brush your teeth" of the writing world. It's something you simply have to do if you want to publish in magazines, blogs and other websites. One of the biggest complaints I hear from new writers is that pitching feels like throwing words into the void.

I developed this guide over the course of a month long focus on pitching in The Writer's Process, the private online writing group I run. It is designed to streamline your pitching as well as demystify the pitching process.

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If you've found this guide helpful and would like to receive more targeted advice to help you write more freely and really fall back in love with the act of writing, **sign up for my Read, Write and Create Newsletter.**

WHAT IS A PITCH?



Let's start with the basics.

You have an idea for an article. You write a brief overview of your idea, headline and what you'll include in the article.

You explain why it's the perfect fit for the place you want to publish. You explain why you are the perfect person to write the article.

This is what you send to editors in order to convince them to hire you to write.

FIRST... CREATE A CLEAR & OVERARCHING GOAL

The first question I ask the first time I meet with my one-on-one clients?

What are your writing goals?

Many writers have no aim to their pitching.

They send out queries to every possible outlet on every idea that interests them hoping something will stick. Don't. It's a waste of your time.

You may receive yeses and end up writing articles, but *this buckshot method of publishing wears your efforts thin and leaves you feeling burned out*. Even worse, you'll likely find yourself floating around rudderless in your writing career.

It is crucial to have a clear, directed plan for your writing.

When you set a clear goals for what you want in your writing career, you immediately have guidelines that determine:

- Where to pitch
- What to write about
- What types of articles you want to write
- Where you want to publish
- Whether or not you want to write long or short form

HOW-TO FIND YOUR GOAL

Freewriting... of course.

If you're reading this and have only a vague idea of what your objective should be, great. This exercise will help you flesh out your ideas and clarify what you want.

If you already have a idea of your goals, try this exercise anyway. Things change over time, and it never hurts to check in and see if what you wanted in the past still resonates with you today.

Now, stop reading. We're going to do a quick free write.

What you'll need:

- A piece of paper and a pen. Or open a new document on your laptop if you prefer. Write in whatever way is most comfortable for you.
- Timer
- A quiet place to write.



LET'S BEGIN OUR FREE WRITING

Set your timer for 10 minutes and simply write out how you picture your ideal writing career.

Questions to consider:

- What do you want to write? Articles? Books?
- Where would you like to see your words published?
- What topics do you want to write about? Where are your interests?
- Where does your experience lie and where would you like to enhance your knowledge.
- What other activities do you want to include as part of your writer's life?

Write it all down.

The only rules to the free write are:

- Don't stop writing.
- Don't cross anything out. If you don't like what you're saying or want to change the subject, just move onto the next like and keep going with your next thought.
- No judgments. What you say is what you say. How you say it doesn't matter either. The key is to simply get everything written down in one place.



FROM FREEWRITE TO FINAL GOAL

When you're finished free writing, reread what you wrote and distill everything down to one clear goal that incorporates all the things you want.

Don't worry if you're not entirely sure of your goal. This is a starting point to guide you. You'll continue refining your goals as you gain experience and new opportunities arise.

Some examples:

- I want to build a writing and education business that empowers and inspires people to express themselves creatively while allowing me to work where I want.
- I want to write detective novels and self publish them through my personal author's website to the audience I develop.
- I want to present myself as an expert in US Republican politics, writing articles for the top political magazines as well as be paid for television appearances and speaking engagements.

SETTING YOUR STRUCTURE

There are two parts to being a writer:

The **creative part**. That's where you free write, try new things and invent worlds and ideas that never before existed. Then there's the the **business side**. This is the part when you *publish* and *make money*.

In order to publish, you must pitch.

Think of this as brushing your teeth. You simply need to do it. You set up your tools. You know your goal. You know what you need to do to get from point A to point B, and then you just do it.

Pitch. Follow up. Promote. Rinse. Repeat.

This is why having a clear business strategy plan is so important. *It guides your daily decisions and weekly to-do lists, providing structure to the writing process.* Otherwise, if you're like most writers, including myself, you can end up on a tangent, lose focus and nothing gets done.

WHERE SHOULD I PITCH?

Many writers decide to just pitch anywhere and everywhere, hoping for the best. **Not a good idea.** Pitch without a plan, and you've created mountains of busy work for yourself, work that doesn't necessarily serve your best interests as a writer. You'll be wasting your time.

When deciding where to pitch, ask yourself three questions.

1. Does the pitch you're writing serve your overarching goal and plan?

Evaluate each new project and opportunity carefully. If it doesn't fit your goal, it's likely to distract and leave you unfocused. If an opportunity pops up that you simply don't want to miss, then revisit your goals. Perhaps you simply need a bit of tweaking to make it fit.

2. Do you enjoy reading the outlet where you want to publish?

What magazines, websites and blogs do you read religiously. What writers do you admire? Doesn't it make sense to aim to publish in places you love alongside writers you enjoy?

3. Will you receive something in return for your writing?

In most cases, yes, I mean money. Will you be paid? If not, will you receive something else that equals the value of your writing?

WHAT SHOULD YOUR PITCH INCLUDE?

Begin with a strong, clear lede.

The lede is the introduction to your story, designed to introduce an overview of your story as well as entice the reader to read more.



Facebook features tens of photos of women with their breasts exposed, yet mainly the breastfeeding photos are banned and removed from the site.

Continue with a story outline.

Include an overview of what ideas and points the story will cover as well as title, appropriate publication section for the story.



I will explore how Facebook bans accounts plus look at what action women have taken in order to look into the legal ramifications of Facebook, a private company, creating such a seemingly inequitable user policy in order to determine if Facebook's policy is a fair one.

Conclude with the reasons why you're the one to write it.

Do you have special knowledge or experience? Do you have relevant material you've published previously?



I've interviewed ten women who have been banned plus researched legal groups that support the banned women and breastfeeding advocacy groups.

Finally, include links or samples of your previous work. You can link to an online portfolio or directly to previously published work. If you don't have online clips, then you can scan and attach samples. Or better yet, scan and post them on your site, then provide links.

These are the basics. They let the editor know the who, what, when, where and why. You should, however, tailor each pitch specifically for the publication.

THINK LIKE AN EDITOR TO CREATE A WELL TAILORED PITCH



Of course you want to make sure the piece you ultimately publish will serve your needs and goals. That should be your first consideration when choosing a place to pitch.

The editor, however, is there to meet the needs of the publication. **When presenting your pitch to an editor, you should put the editor and the needs of the publication first.**

Imagine...You're the editor of a magazine where you you want to publish. You have deadlines and a months worth of content to fill. Each article you choose must fit the tone, style and look & feel of the publishing outlet. You're juggling quite a few pitches and stories-in-progress from many different writers.

What would make life easiest for you?

You want e-mail correspondence to go quickly and smoothly. You want the first e-mail to include all the information you need to make your decision. Who? What? When? Where? Why?

You appreciate people who reply in a timely way so you're not left wondering if a writer is going to write the story or not. You want to deal with professionals, people who meet their deadlines, write well and can take constructive criticism.

TOP TEN TIPS TO WRITE A STAND OUT PITCH

- **Do your research.** Read, read read. Know the tone, style and audience of the place you want to publish then pitch accordingly.
 - **Pitch on topic for the publication and to the correct section of the publication.** Don't pitch a breastfeeding article to a men's magazine. Or suggest best places to visit on your summer break to the lifestyle section of a travel magazine.
 - **Make sure your article hasn't already been covered.** Search databases and back stories to see what has already been published.
 - **Send your pitch to the right editor.** An editor might forward a pitch along, but don't count on it. When you approach the correct editor, you let the editor know that you do your research and know the publication well enough to know the sections and editors.
 - **Be direct.** Let the editor know right from your opening paragraph that you want to write for the magazine or website. Then present your idea. No beating around the bush.
 - **Read the submissions guidelines.** Be sure to include all the links and personal information they require.
 - **Be specific.** One of the biggest mistakes writers make is pitching topics and not actual story ideas. When you're too broad, you force the editor to help define and refine your pitch. Do the work yourself.
 - **Copy edit your pitch to perfection.** If your pitch is a mess, you're telling the editor your article will be even worse.
 - **Reply quickly to e-mails even if the editor says no.** When an editor writes back, they're taking the time to respond. Thank them for it and it opens a door for further contact with the editor.
 - **Always be gracious even when communicating disagreement or discussing payment.** Part of pitching is developing a relationship with editors. If you handle yourself professionally, they'll be happy to hear from you the next time.
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GOOD PITCH VS. BAD PITCH

10 Ways Being A Good Writer Can Help Your Non-Writing Career

Good pitch

I've always found jobs for which I wasn't entirely qualified simply based on the fact I can write well. I've designed websites for MTV, edited science articles for Elsevier Press and was hired by an artist to help organize his catalogs.

In this article, I'll cover how solid writing builds relationships and attracts people on social media, how cover letters and e-mails help you stand out, and how writing well gives you a foot in the door to a field outside your expertise, particularly technical, because those fields lack quality writers.

Bad pitch

I have spent more than 20 years as a CEO in the non-profit world and there is no doubt that my writing skills have contributed to my success. I've written grants, speeches and done some editorial writing as part of my job. I've since retired from corporate non-profit and can now pursue writing full time, but it took 30 years to get here!

Please feel free to contact me if you'd like more information.

Note: The bad pitch has no actual story, no suggested title, and any editor would be forced to contact the writer to flesh out ideas. **It would be easier to just say no.**

LEARN TO LOVE REJECTION

When you're pitching regularly -- which you must do if you hope to publish -- you will be **rejected** on a regular basis.

Get used to it.

The most successful freelance writer will be rejected at least 50% of the time, and that's if you're lucky. So you can imagine when just starting out, your rejection rate will be even higher.

Accept that fact right now and just do what you need to do. Pitch.

Pitching is as much about the process as it is about acceptance. If you keep pitching, you will be published.

If you're pitching and never face rejection, you're doing something wrong. It's a clear sign it's time to up your game.

THE
REJECT
SHOP
DISCOUNT VARIETY STORE

KEEPING TRACK OF PITCHES

THE RULE OF THIRTEEN

Keep at least 13 pitches out at all times. When you receive a yes, remove that pitch from your list and send another. If you receive a no, take the article, refine and send to another publication.

Juggling thirteen or more pitches at one time?

That's a lot of information to keep organized, so I've included a simple form to help you out.

[Download form now!](#)

This form allows you keep track of when you send pitches, when it's time to follow up with an editor and make sure you don't pitch the same story to more than one outlet at a time.

If you don't hear back from an editor, check in with them. Of course, there's a fine line between thorough and annoying. If you're pitching a time sensitive topic, try back after a day or two. If the story is more evergreen, wait anywhere between a week and three weeks.

Often, a publication's submissions guidelines will let you know how long to wait before contacting them.

[Salon](#), for example, says if you don't hear from them in three weeks, assume your pitch has been rejected. [The Change Blog](#) instructs writers to wait two weeks for a reply.

FAQ...

Should I include more than one pitch per letter or e-mail?

Most times, you want to be clear and direct. That means one pitch at a time. Sometimes, though, an editor will ask you to throw a few pitches his way. Then by all means, go right ahead.

When should I mention payment?

Once your pitch has been accepted. Often, the submissions page of a website or publication will tell you how much you can expect to be paid. Either way, make sure to clarify payment details as soon as you've been given the assignment.

Should I write for free?

Tough question. Obviously, no writer can go forever without being paid, and too many publications offer the false god of exposure in exchange for your writing. Exposure varies by the amount of readers the website or publication receives. It also will depend on how popular your article becomes. If you publish on a big website and receive a huge number of hits, then a link back to a landing page can be worth far more than the 50 or 100 dollars you'd receive for writing the one article. That, of course, assumes you are running your website like a business. You should have something to offer the people who link to your site. You should have a newsletter and when people link to your page, they should immediately have the option to sign up for your newsletter. Then your own sales and newsletter will generate payment for your writing.

Other reasons to work for free.

It's for a good cause. It's for a friend or colleague you truly believe in the work she does. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity. Ultimately, as with most things, you have to decide for yourself if it is worth it for you to work for free.

FAQ CONTINUED...

What if I don't hear back from editors and want to offer the pitch elsewhere?

Feel free to graciously let them know that if they're not interested, you'd like to pitch the idea elsewhere. Tell them you will wait another two or three days in case they want the article, and otherwise, you'll send it to other places. Thank them for their time and let them know you hope you can work together in the future. Respect goes a long way in building relationships with editors, even when you're having to say no or set boundaries with them.

Should I include samples of my writing?

Absolutely. Include your best writing, particularly as they relate to the pitch at hand. Keep in mind, though, that many editors won't read them. Of course some will. Others will rely on the strength of your pitch. Include 3 or so links in your e-mail. Or set a page on your website or Linked In that includes a list of your clips.

What if I don't yet have a portfolio? Can I use my blog to showcase my writing?

Yes, you can most definitely use your website as a portfolio to showcase your writing. In fact, your website or blog should represent you as a writer and a business. You can highlight your experience and past work as well as your writing. Make sure, of course, that what you post on your website is well written, cleanly copy edited and has solid headlines. You can also experiment on your own website, write creatively and show the range of your writing abilities.

Can I pitch the same story to more than one publication at once?

Usually... No. What if two say yes, and you have to retract your offer to one. What better way to be blacklisted by an editor? If you must pitch to more than one outlet at a time, make sure each editor knows from the beginning that you are doing so.

PITCHING REPORTERS THROUGH HARO

Three times a day, HARO or [Help A Reporter Out](#) sends out queries from reporters looking for sources for their articles.

You can sign up as a reporter to research your own articles or as a source.

As a source, you can pitch reporters and if your story is a good match, they'll include you or your business in their stories. Yes, free publicity.

HARO is a quick and easy way to practice pitching. You'll begin to see what greetings, descriptions of what you do work for you and which do not. You'll know when what you're doing is working, because you'll see the responses.

Because of HARO, I have not only been featured in high profile places like Mashable, Huffington Post and AOL, but it's brought me to meet editors, writers, authors and TV producers from all different areas of writing and media production.

BENEFITS OF HARO

- Free publicity
 - Research for your writing
 - Make connections with other writers and reporters,
 - Practice your pitching.
-

A HARO HOW-TO

Which Queries Should You Pitch?

Again, it's generally best to stick to the queries and topics that match your writing and business goals. You can also pitch to reporters and outlets that have audiences you want to reach.

Never use the contacts you make through HARO to build marketing lists. Ever. This is a violation of HARO rules and is likely to get you kicked off the service.

If a journalist contacts you directly for a story, it is fair game to write back and build a relationship.

What To Include In Your Pitch?

This, of course, will depend on the reporter and query, but generally, you want to give the following.

- A brief introduction to who you are and what you do as it relates specifically to the query.
- More information on how you and your experience can help her story.
- If a reporter asks for more information, provide it. If not, don't.

Don't send press releases or long rambling e-mails full of needless details. Keep it short. Keep it clear. Keep it on point.

HOW TO STAND OUT IN HARO QUERIES

Research the reporter and where he'll be publishing his story.

Getting to know a reporter's niches and how he writes gives you greater insight into what he will include in the article and how to angle your pitch.

Read the submission guidelines carefully and follow them to the letter.

Carefully read any links included in the query. If a reporter asks for you to include your information in your pitch, do so. If they ask for a brief overview so they can contact you later, then do just that.

Be short and to the point.

No one wants to read long paragraphs in answer to a simple question.

Say something a bit different than what others might be saying.

Before replying think about what people are most likely to say. Then choose something different to add to the conversation. Of course, always be honest and maintain your own voice and personal brand.

Prepare a clear, concise tagline to introduce yourself.

Include the main points of who you are, what you do and your areas of expertise, particularly as it pertains to the query you're pitching.

Remember your goal is to help the writer, not publicize yourself. If you put the writer's needs first, you're more likely to be chosen.

PUT YOURSELF IN THE TOP TWO PERCENT

I recently queried HARO for a story I'm writing. Out of almost 100 pitches received, only two -- yes TWO -- followed these guidelines.

That means, you can easily place yourself in the top five percent of people pitching simply by following these rules.

Of course, not all reporters take the time to read through all pitches. It's easy for yours to get lost, so don't take it personally if you don't hear back.

READING & RESOURCES

A small selection of resources and reading for more information about pitching as well as designing your writing career.

PITCHING

- [How Not To Pitch](#) – Pitching advice from top editors and writers.
- Slate magazine's [How-to Write A Cover Letter](#) – applies to pitching as well.
- Atlantic magazine's [How Not To Pitch](#) – a response to the Slate article
- [Writer's Market Query Clinic](#) – examples for all types of pitches and submissions
- [Six Ways To Knock Your Next Guest Post Out Of the Park](#) – from The Write Life

RESOURCES FOR WRITERS

- [Funds for Writers](#) – resources to fund your writing from payment to submissions to grants and more
- [The Write Life](#) – resources and articles to guide your writing career

COPY EDITING

- [Copyblogger](#) – perhaps the top website of advice for those looking to write for business
- [Five Words To Eliminate From Your Writing](#) – quickly clean up your copy

READING & RESOURCES CONTINUED...

HOW MUCH TO CHARGE & PLACES THAT PAY FOR WRITING

- The Beacon Reader's [Pay Me Please](#) - lists of who pays and who doesn't
- Scratch Magazine's [Who Pays](#) - another list of paying publications
- Writer's Market [How Much To Charge](#) list - covers writing, editing and copy

THE PAYMENT VS EXPOSURE DEBATE

- [Slaves of the Internet Unite](#) - New York Times article that explains why freelancers should be paid
- [Why You Should Write For Free](#) - the other side of the argument by Alexis Grant
- [Should I Work For Free](#) - A lighthearted pictograph that highlights some of the issues in the debate

These resources come from the files and forums of The Writer's Process, my private online writing group. If you'd like to know more about The Writer's Process and how you can move your writing forward, [you can read all about it here](#) or e-mail me at leigh@thefutureisred.com for more information.

ABOUT LEIGH SHULMAN

I remember the first time I sat down to write. I was twelve, flooded with raging hormones and super pissed at my parents (basically like all twelve year olds). Instead of acting out, I pulled out a pen and paper and put my feelings on the page. I was hooked!

Fast forward 20 years: My work has been featured in The New York Times, The Huffington Post, The Establishment, Guernica, Mashable and many other publications. I've published 2 books and have taught at CUNY, Yeshiva University, the Brooklyn Academy of Music plus countless other programs.

I seriously, couldn't be happier.

Now, I spend my time coaching women 1:1 and at amazing retreats because I want to help more women feel confident with their writing, finish their masterpieces and build professional careers!

This is why I'm so excited about Pen. Paper. Paradise. I want to prove to you, without a doubt, that you are strong, wonderful and creative. I want to show you why that you can write and absolutely must share what you have to say with the world.

Are you ready to change your life and write your dreams?

Join me in my free Facebook group for women writing books. I call it The First Seventy-Five, because that first 75% of writing a book is where you're most likely to give up on the whole thing. In the group, you'll find support, resources and accountability to keep going until you FINISH THAT BOOK!

JOIN ME NOW IN MY FREE FACEBOOK GROUP