

Take Your Best Shot—Keys to Writing Your Book’s Pitch

An “elevator pitch” is a short synopsis of your book—the main essence of it—short enough that it could be given during a chance thirty-second elevator ride with the agent or editor of your dreams. The pitch should intrigue the party trapped in the elevator so much so that they stop worrying about the crazy author in the enclosed space with them, and start wondering more about how they can get a look at the crazy author’s manuscript.

Elements of a Non-Fiction Pitch: An effective pitch for a work of non-fiction will most likely utilize four or more sentences that will consist of the following four elements:

- A question to be answered OR a problem stated
- The authority the author has for writing the book
- A promise to the reader of what the book will convey
- A hook that tells the reader exactly why they will want the book

These elements contained in this type of pitch are the same elements found on back cover blurbs of non-fiction work. While the author wants to keep the pitch brief, it should be noted that certain elements may take more than one sentence, as we’ll see in our examples.

A Question to be Answered OR A Problem Stated: Grab the editor’s attention immediately with either a thought-provoking question or by making a provocative statement:

- From the back cover of *Ragged Hope* by Cynthia Ruchti: Where is God when you are doing everything right, but because of someone else, everything is wrong?
- From the back cover of *The Art of War for Writers* by James Scott Bell: Successfully starting and finishing a publishable novel is often like fighting a series of battles. You not only have to work hard to shape memorable characters, develop gripping plots, and craft dazzling dialogue, but you also have to fight against self-doubts and fears. And then there’s the challenge of learning to navigate the ever-changing publishing industry.

Author Authority: No one is going to read a non-fiction book by someone without authority in the subject being brought to the table. So ... no matter your credentials, amplify (not embellish) the reasons why you are the person who needs to write this book.

- Ragged Hope:* Where is God when you are doing everything right, but, because of someone else, everything is wrong? Cynthia Ruchti has walked this road and has spoken to thousands of people through her radio show.
- The Art of War for Writers:* Successfully starting and finishing a publishable novel is often like fighting a series of battles. You not only have to work hard to shape memorable characters, develop gripping plots, and craft dazzling dialogue, but you also have to fight

against self-doubts and fears. And then there's the challenge of learning to navigate the ever-changing publishing industry. That's why best-selling novelist, James Scott Bell, author of the Write Great Fiction staples, *Plot and Structure* and *Revision & Self-Editing*, came up with the ultimate novel writing battle plan: *The Art of War for Writers*.

A Promise to the Reader: To write a work of non-fiction, no matter the subject, the author has to have faith that what they are presenting will be helpful to the reader. The next sentence in the pitch shares their faith, making a promise to the reader/editor of what they will learn or what they will receive from the book.

- *Ragged Hope*: Where is God when you are doing everything right, but, because of someone else, everything is wrong? Cynthia Ruchti has walked this road and has spoken to thousands of people through her radio show. There is grace and a future in every situation—even (and especially) in those we did not cause and now have to live. *Ragged Hope* is an insightful and hope-giving guide to assure you that God is ever-present and His love is unwavering.
- *The Art of War for Writers*: Successfully starting and finishing a publishable novel is often like fighting a series of battles. You not only have to work hard to shape memorable characters, develop gripping plots, and craft dazzling dialogue, but you also have to fight against self-doubts and fears. And then there's the challenge of learning to navigate the ever-changing publishing industry. That's why best-selling novelist, James Scott Bell, author of the Write Great Fiction staples, *Plot and Structure* and *Revision & Self-Editing*, came up with the ultimate novel writing battle plan: *The Art of War for Writers*. You'll find tactics and strategies for idea generation and development, character building, plotting, drafting, querying, and submitting, dealing with rejection, coping with unrealistic expectations, and much more.

The Hook: Why the Reader Needs to Buy This Book: With the promise made as to what the reader will find to help them or to instruct them within the pages, the last step is to provide the reason why the reader will want to purchase this book:

- *Ragged Hope*: Where is God when you are doing everything right, but, because of someone else, everything is wrong? Cynthia Ruchti has walked this road and has spoken to thousands of people through her radio show. There is grace and a future in every situation—even (and especially) in those we did not cause and now have to live. *Ragged Hope* is an insightful and hope-giving guide to assure you that God is ever-present and His love is unwavering. Vetted by professional counselors and caregivers, this is the one guide you need to thrive no matter what situation or fallout you face.
- *The Art of War for Writers*: Successfully starting and finishing a publishable novel is often like fighting a series of battles. You not only have to work hard to shape memorable characters, develop gripping plots, and craft dazzling dialogue, but you also have to fight against self-doubts and fears. And then there's the challenge of learning to navigate the ever-changing publishing industry. That's why best-selling novelist, James Scott Bell,

author of the Write Great Fiction staples, *Plot and Structure* and *Revision & Self-Editing*, came up with the ultimate novel writing battle plan: *The Art of War for Writers*. You'll find tactics and strategies for idea generation and development, character building, plotting, drafting, querying, and submitting, dealing with rejection, coping with unrealistic expectations, and much more. With timeless, innovative, and concise writing reflections and techniques, *The Art of War for Writers* is your roadmap to victory.

Take Your Best Shot (Non-Fiction):

Question to be Answered OR Problem Stated:

Author Authority:

Promise to the Reader:

The Hook: Why the Reader Needs This Book:

Fiction Pitch: Four Important Components conveyed in two sentences form a perfect elevator pitch:

Plot: Though your novel may have several plots, include only the major plot in your pitch.

Tone/Setting/Genre: Match your elevator pitch to your genre or story's voice with key words that will put the reader in the time period, genre, and mode of the story.

Verbs: Use active, imaginative verbs that make the pitch exciting.

Adjectives: In a novel, authors are usually told to cut the adjectives. In a pitch, you need to use them wisely to paint a picture.

Elements of a Pitch for Fiction: Two simple sentences you construct will convey the following:

The Protagonist(s) (Lead Character)

In a pitch your main character's name is not important. Capture an agent, an editor, or even a potential reader with what your characters do and not their names.

- (Action/Adventure) ***Imperfect Trust*** by Elizabeth Noyes: An injured FBI computer analyst who is also a video game designer
- (Romantic/Suspense) ***Counterpoint*** by Marji Laine: A grieving daughter
- (A Journey/Quest and Historical) ***Annabell's Ruth*** by Betty Thomason Owens: A Hawaiian war bride living with her husband and his family in California in the early 1950s
- (Coming of Age) ***10 Steps to Girlfriend Status*** by Cynthia T. Toney: A teenager whose life has become close to perfect
- (Speculative Fiction) ***Wake the Dead*** by Victoria Buck: In the not-so-distant future, the celebrity host of a government game show
- Misstep***: (Contemporary Fiction) ***Misstep*** by Deborah Lee Harper: A naval chaplain who has retired to the sleepy town of Road's End, Virginia,

The Goal (Objective)

What is the main goal of your main character(s)? What do they want to achieve by the end of the story? Note: the placement of the comma after the statement of the goal. That's because there is a "but" coming.

- (Action/Adventure) ***Imperfect Trust***: An injured FBI computer analyst who is also a video game designer is on the lam and hiding out in a small Idaho town after a mission goes terribly awry,
- (Romantic Suspense) ***Counterpoint***: A grieving daughter wants to move forward with her life,
- (A Journey/Quest and Historical) ***Annabelle's Ruth***: A Hawaiian war bride living with her husband and his family in California in the early 1950s wants life to return to normal as the country heals from World War II,
- (Coming of Age) ***10 Steps to Girlfriend Status***: A teenager whose life has become close to perfect is counting down the steps to reaching girlfriend status with the guy she loves,

- (Speculative Fiction) **Wake the Dead**: In the not-so-distant future, the celebrity host of a government game show wants to continue to make contestants happy by utilizing ground breaking techno-medical advancements that will better lives and help people live longer,
- (Contemporary Fiction) **Misstep**: (Contemporary Fiction) **Misstep**: A naval chaplain who has retired to the sleepy town of Road's End, Virginia, hopes to find peace and quiet in the rural community,

Conflict (Situation)/The Antagonist (Opponent):

What is the conflict that your main character struggles against while attempting to achieve his or her goal? In most cases, the conflict is caused by an antagonist or an opponent: Someone or something that presents the driving force of the conflict and prevents the protagonist from reaching his or her goal.

- (Action/Adventure) **Imperfect Trust**: An injured FBI computer analyst who is also a video game designer is on the lam and hiding out in a small Idaho town after a mission goes terribly awry, but the owner of a local security tech company digs up her history as a computer hacker and endangers her life with his inquiries to federal agencies, alerting the drug-dealing, computer-geek psycho, who has already carved his initials into her chest, to her whereabouts.
- (Romantic/Suspense) **Counterpoint**: A grieving daughter wants to move forward with her life, but her deceased father has willed his beloved diner to his unfriendly business partner, a man who refuses to continue her father's ministry of feeding the town's homeless with evening dinners, her ex-fiancé has returned from the mission field, and someone suddenly wants her dead.
- (A Journey/Quest and Historical) **Annabelle's Ruth**: A Hawaiian war bride living with her husband and his family in California in the early 1950s, wants life to return to normal as the country heals from World War II, but when her husband, his brother, and father are killed in a boating accident, she chooses to uproot her life again and move to her mother-in-law's hometown in Tennessee, where folks aren't as likely to accept her because of her cultural background.
- (Coming of Age) **10 Steps to Girlfriend Status**: A teenager whose life has become close to perfect is counting down the steps to reaching girlfriend status with the guy she loves, but then she notices her beloved older neighbor is having difficulty remembering things, her best friend is acting like a stranger, and if that isn't enough, she learns of a family secret no one wants her to know.
- (Speculative Fiction) **Wake the Dead**: In the not-so-distant future, the celebrity host of a government game show wants to continue to make contestants happy by utilizing ground breaking techno-medical advancements that will better lives and help people live longer, but an on-stage explosion, sanctioned by the government kills him and changes his life forever.
- (Contemporary Fiction) **Misstep**: A naval chaplain who has retired to the sleepy town of Road's End, Virginia, hopes to find peace and quiet in the rural community, but peace and quiet are far from what he finds when the pastorate of the town's only church is thrust upon him, and in the midst of a severe winter storm, a camel he has nowhere to keep is delivered for a live Christmas nativity he knows nothing about, a car full of criminals arrive seeking to kill the church janitor, and a town (and church) full of elderly eccentrics is bent on keeping that from happening.

Climax (Kicker Ending for the Pitch)

The second sentence can be a yes or no question or a leading comment that leaves the fate of the protagonist(s) in doubt. Remember, the climactic ending is two-fold: 1) it relays the promise of a powerful ending to a manuscript; and 2) it brings the closing of the pitch to a dramatic ending.

- (Action/Adventure) ***Imperfect Trust***: An injured FBI computer analyst who is also a video game designer is on the lam and hiding out in a small Idaho town after a mission goes terribly awry, but the owner of a local security tech company digs up her history as a computer hacker and endangers her life with his inquiries to federal agencies, alerting the drug-dealing, computer-geek psycho, who has already carved his initials into her chest, to her whereabouts. Certain death looms if she's unable to program her way out of danger.
- (Romantic/Suspense) ***Counterpoint***: A grieving daughter wants to move forward with her life, but her deceased father has willed his beloved diner to his unfriendly business partner, a man who refuses to continue her father's ministry of feeding the town's homeless with evening dinners, her ex-fiancé has returned from the mission field, and someone suddenly wants her dead. With a killer on her trail and the unwanted protection of her ex-fiancé, will she find a way to keep the business that is so dear to her and so important to the welfare of the town's less fortunate?
- (A Journey/Quest and Historical) ***Annabelle's Ruth***: A Hawaiian war bride living with her husband and his family in California in the early 1950s, wants life to return to normal as the country heals from World War II, but when her husband, his brother, and father are killed in a boating accident, she chooses to uproot her life again and move to her mother-in-law's hometown in Tennessee, where folks aren't as likely to accept her because of her cultural background. Upon their arrival, she learns that honoring and providing for her mother-in-law will be the least of her troubles.
- (Coming of Age) ***10 Steps to Girlfriend Status***: A teenager whose life has become close to perfect is counting down the steps to reaching girlfriend status with the guy she loves, but then she notices her beloved older neighbor is having difficulty remembering things, her best friend is acting like a stranger, and if that isn't enough, she learns of a family secret no one wants her to know. With all that going on in her life, will she ever find out what it takes to become someone's girlfriend?
- (Speculative Fiction) ***Wake the Dead***: In the not-so-distant future, the celebrity host of a government game show wants to continue to make contestants happy by utilizing ground breaking techno-medical advancements that will better lives and help people live longer, but an on-stage explosion, sanctioned by the government, kills him and changes his life forever. Can a man forced into being an example of modern techno-medical advancement escape the regime that turned him into a machine and free the world of their oppression?
- (Contemporary Fiction) ***Misstep***: A naval chaplain who has retired to the sleepy town of Road's End, Virginia, hopes to find peace and quiet in the rural community, but peace and quiet are far from what he finds when the pastorate of the town's only church is thrust upon him, and in the midst of a severe winter storm, a camel he has nowhere to keep is delivered for a live Christmas nativity he knows nothing about, a car full of criminals arrive seeking to kill the church janitor, and a town (and church) full of elderly eccentrics is bent on keeping that from happening. Will he be able to protect the folks of Road's End from murder, mayhem, and their own foolishness, or will his first week as pastor be his last?

Take Your Best Shot (Fiction)

Protagonist(s) _____

Main Goal of the Story _____

Conflict (either situation or antagonist keeping protagonist(s) from his/her/their goal _____

Climactic ending (a question or a leading comment to make them think about the possibilities): _____