

Carol Tice:

Hi everybody. I am Carol Tice from the Make A Living Writing blog and Freelance Writer's Den and welcome to our first session of Pitch Clinic. I am here with my teaching partner Linda Formichelli from the Renegade Writer.

Linda Formichelli:

Hey everyone.

Carol Tice:

And we are here to do one of our favorite trainings, let's make your story idea not suck. This is a fast-moving, fun session where our Pitch Clinic students hit us with their best story ideas and we help you make them better. It's just that simple. This is just a podcast. There are no slides, so just sit back and listen or post your story idea in the forum of a headline in the question box. Probably the first question you have is why Pitch Clinic.

We created this course because of a big problem in freelance writing. In fact, it might be the biggest problem in freelance writing. What happens is you write a query letter or you send out a letter of introduction to a publication or to a business you want to write copy for and then nothing happens. They never reply. It's just increasingly common that you hear nothing. Editors are too busy and if they don't love your idea, you just hear crickets. You pitch a few blog post ideas to a business blog and you hear nothing. You introduce yourself to a trade publication editor, maybe mention a quick story idea you have, and you never hear back, and that means you have no way to improve. You don't know what you're doing wrong.

With Pitch Clinic, you've got two writers who have spent a ton of time sending pitch letters, over 35 years combined, not dating ourselves or anything, and learning what it takes for an editor to sit up and yes, and in our forum for Pitch Clinic, we have two longtime magazine editors, Peggy Bennett from Entrepreneur and Heidi Raschke who was formally with Mpls.St.Paul Magazine.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. So we have reviewed hundreds of pitches in our Freelancer Writers Den community and over time, we realize that most of them had the same basic mistakes. So before we get into critiquing the story ideas that people have sent in, we want to go over the five most common mistakes that we see, and you will see these as we critique the ideas and be okay, that's that one and that's that one, so Carol will do the first one.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Right on. What I wanted to say just to close the loop before we get into those five common mistakes is that Pitch Clinic is that missing piece of information where you can find out what is going wrong with your queries, how you can make them better, how you can make an editor like them, so that's why we're here, and looking through the many, many queries we have reviewed that the first most common mistake that we see is that

your ideas are too general. You've got a book topic, not an article idea. You need to think about ideas you could write up in maybe 1500 words max or as little as 300 words if an editor wants you to do it that short. You know, look on Amazon. There are entire books dedicated to your idea. That's a sure sign that your idea is too broad. Try to pull out a thin slice of that idea to broaden it into an article and we're going to see some examples of that when we start critiquing the ideas. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I remember we had at least one in the ones we're going to be critiquing that has this problem, so that's awesome as an example. So the second common mistake we see with article ideas is the opposite of what Carol had is your idea is too narrow. For example, maybe your idea is basically one tip. Like you want to do a health article but every malady is corrected by taking magnesium supplements or another problem is that you've narrowed down your audience so much that your idea wouldn't resonate with a magazine's readership. Like you want to write about a problem that happens only to Hispanic women over the age of 50 who lives in the Midwest, and I totally made that up but you get the idea.

Another example is you want to write about health problems that affects only less than one percent of the population. You really want to work on ideas that are relevant to a high percentage of a magazine's readership. They are typically not going to run an idea if only one percent of their readers are really going to be onboard with that article, and Carol has the next one.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Number three is sort of a pet peeve of mine and that is no news hook. A frequent issue particularly for new writers is you think of ideas where there's just no news item that drives the editor to want to run your idea right now. For example, you want to write about Type 2 Diabetes, but why would an editor want to run that now? What's new about it that people need to know? People forget that the word news has the word new in it. That's why we read the news because we want to know what's new. Is there a new study that just came out, a new book by well-known author, or a new survey that shows the problem has skyrocketed in the last year?

If you have a really unique, awesome, strong idea, you can sometimes get away with it without having a news hook but it really is a good idea to think about what you could say that makes your idea new and fresh and guess what, we have a bonus in Pitch Clinic coming along in an upcoming module on How to Develop a News Hook and Make Your Query Irresistible to Editors. I just find without this news hook, just having been a staff writer and watching editors sort story ideas, you tend to go into the maybe pile. This is kind of interesting. Our readers could maybe find it interesting. It doesn't have to run this week. Okay. Good. I'll put it over here in the maybe pile. Now, what are all the things that have to run right now? Okay. I'm choosing between those. So you just kind of become a second priority. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. You know, I love how Carol said the ideas have to be fresh because when you start gaining a lot of magazine and online publication clients, you're going to hear the word fresh from your editor so much that you're never going to want to hear it again. How can we freshen this up? What's fresh about this story? I mean it's really, really super important.

So I have the fourth common mistake we see, which is that you don't study the publication you want to write for. We have seen writers pitching shopping ideas to help publications, ideas for consumers that they pitched to trade magazines, which are for business owners and things like that, and I have definitely pitched magazines and sold to magazines I had never read. This is before the internet kind of really took off and there's no excuse these days.

Almost every magazine has at least some of their archives online, along with a mission statement. You can often find or ask for a publication's media kit, which outlines the reader's demographics and upcoming topics the magazines will tackle. So it's really important when you want to pitch a magazine and are coming up with an idea that you have a good understanding of what the magazine runs, what they have run, and what their readership is like and what kind of things they would be interested in. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Right on. I have tip number five, which is the article is about you, your advice, or your friends and we totally understand that new writers want to write about their own experiences because it's easy and not scary, unlike having to find and interview experts, but the fact is almost all good-paying nonfiction is reported, and you and your ideas are not in the story. You're just the reporter getting information from experts and the real people affected by the issue. You might be able to open your pitch with a personal anecdote depending on the magazine you're pitching, but that's extent of it.

The word I rarely appears in a pitch or an article that pays well. You know, we just find we get a ton of pitches for I want to write a personal essay about. Well, most personal essays don't pay anything and a few places that really do pay well, it's super competitive and difficult to get in. It's just not a niche where you can reliably earn in, so that's why it is not a focus in pitch planning.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Awesome and you wanted to mention using your friends as sources was another part of this question, and it's a conflict of interest and it's considered lazy reporting. If an editor finds out that you have interviewed people for your pitch or subsequently your article and they're all kind of in your local area or people who are friends with you or related to you, it's just really not done. Did you want to add anything to that, Carol?

Carol Tice:

No. Let's roll and review some ideas.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, so that gave you a few of the broad strokes of where queries typically go wrong and now we're going to take a look at our enrolled Pitch Clinic student's ideas and help make them better, and Carol, you have the first one.

Carol Tice:

I believe I do and it is from Quinn in Wethersfield, and it's Give Your Weaving Some Historical Luster, and it's about a 195-year-old mill, Bartlettyarns in Maine that has the last working, wooden, spinning mule that makes yarn with a kind of luster to it that you don't get anywhere else. Her idea's for target markets were Fiber Arts Magazine for like the crotchetiers and knitters, tourism like New England and Maine history, tourism re-enactors magazines, and educational parental about kids using the yarn from Bartlett Yarn.

So my reaction was that this seems like a pretty solid, valid idea for a nice single company profile. The company is unique, which is rarely the case. Most profiles that are pitched don't really have enough uniqueness to them. I think this headline probably needs a deck that fills us in a little that the story is about a historic yarn maker to just kind of guide us into the story a little better. I think the knitting magazine, if they haven't profiled this before, this might be a pretty easy sale for a short piece. Single company profiles tend to be shortish.

For tourism, I'm thinking you're probably going to have a better chance of success making this a roundup of historic things to do that Bartlettyarns is in the neighborhood of, you know, this town in Maine has the following three historic things you can do, five historic things. Those are just always an easier sale because they pack in more information and editors are always trying to figure out, how can I jam in more information into this publication and into every issue so that people just have to read it. It's packed, packed with what they need to know.

I don't know how much children are interested in yarn quality, so I thought that was kind of a weaker angle. I don't know. Do parents care about whether their kids are knitting at school with \$0.99 yarn or really awesome yarn? But also one other angle that you didn't mention is I wonder if there are manufacturing trades, trade publications, where you might sell this. You know lessons from a nearly 200-year-old manufacturer on how to stay relevant. Manufacturing is such a beleaguered sector of the US economy.

I just think you might sell and resell that to different types of manufacturing trades but certainly the apparel trades like Apparel Magazine, and in the upcoming modules of Pitch Clinic, we go more into how you can research and find these kinds of trade publications because they don't appear on the newsstand, and of course, this would also work as a roundup if you interviewed several owners of longstanding manufacturing plants about how they've survived, so those are the ideas I've got on it. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I just wanted to mention that, you know I moved away from New Hampshire four years ago so I'm not sure if this magazine is still in publication but my husband wrote a while back for Yankee Magazine, which focuses on the New England area. So if that's still around that might be something worth looking into.

So I have the next one, and it's from Beth and her idea is how can women fix prolapse issues without surgery. Thousands of women are suffering from prolapse have healed naturally by doing specific exercises in correcting posture. I think this is really interesting idea for women's magazine or a health magazine. I have two main questions. My first main question is how many women are affected by uterine prolapse and the second question is what age range these women typically are.

So first, if this is a relatively rare problem, it might not be relevant to enough of a health for women's magazines readership and thousands is really vague so you're going to need to dig deep into this, do some research, and find an actual number or percentage and it needs to be fairly large, and then asking about what age range this typically happens is well, sadly the fact is that if it happens mostly to older women, there simply aren't a whole kind of market, magazine market, that target women over 50 and don't shoot the messenger.

I don't ____ (13:26) these magazines but that is just a sad fact but if this happens to women that are in the target demographic of a lot of magazines on the newsstand but it happens to not very many of them, one way you can fix that problem is to include the prolapse idea into a roundup of maybe five to seven plumbing problems that women can fix naturally as long as they all don't have the same solution.

When you do a roundup, you increase the percentage of women the article will be relevant. Maybe prolapse only happens to a small percentage of women but if you have five other things that happen to other small percentages of women all together that adds up to quite a few and that's a way of kind of rescuing an idea that might not be relevant to enough people. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. My question was which magazine it would be for. I do think you have to think about audience. A lot of the women's magazines skew pretty young and we get a lot of pitches from people about women's health problems that skew pretty old and we're not sure there's a good mesh there, so be sure you know who the reader is. You can always look at the advertising guide where you pretend you're going to advertise for the magazine and they'll tell you who the age of the readers and much more, what they earn, where they live, are they employed ____ (14:49).

So I have the next question, which is from Beth in Nashville. It's a story idea for Horse Illustrated on Re-homing Your Unrideable Horse. The article would explore five to seven humane options for owners who have chosen to re-home a horse that can't be ridden and I thought this seemed like a really solid idea if that magazine has not discussed this

topic in the past couple of years. You'd need to do a check. They may well have already but there are several equine magazines out there. I think it would be especially strong if there are new resources or you could provide names of maybe charities that help you do that. I think that provides a strong service angle to it, and you'd need a story from someone who re-homed their horse who is ideally not you, as well as, an individual or an organization that took an unrideable horse.

I think that's sort of the question that raises like who would take a horse that you can't ride. They're expensive to feed and keep up, and maybe an expert who could share best practices about this or another idea that I had is that there may be a sidebar about knowing when your horse shouldn't be ridden anymore. I thought that would really strengthen the service side of it. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Awesome. Yes. I have nothing to add there. I thought that was a pretty solid idea too. I have an idea here from Rohit and its Five Scientifically Proven Ways to Be More Happy and the examples given are mindfulness, gratitude, forgiveness, generosity, and free-writing and Rohit, this is a totally awesome idea but I have to tell it's so great that just about every health, spirituality, and women's magazine already covered it and I know that because this is just the things I write about and the things I read about so I've seen a lot, but I would say it's about time to start looking deeper into these old tropes and see if there's something new to say or even a way you can contradict it for a refreshing look and I'm pretty sure that's something we talked about in Pitch Clinic in the story ideas lab is coming up with what I call opposite ideas where everybody's talking about one thing and you try to look at the opposite. That's a really great way to sell something and make it new again.

So for example, everyone says you need to cultivate forgiveness to be happy. I mean I've seen in it Experience Life. I've seen it in the women's magazines, but maybe there are times when it's best not to forgive or maybe people are hurting themselves like forgiving too easily when they have a legitimate gripe or when someone has truly done them wrong. So I want you to keep thinking about this idea and really delve deep into it and mine it like crazy because it is ripe for a new spin right now. What do you think, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I love that idea of turning it on its head and that's the kind of creativity when you come in with something counterintuitive or contrary that really, I think, makes editors sit up and notice and not yawn. What I want is everyone on this call to imagine editors getting 100 pitches a day because that is often what is happening to them and think about how you're going to make this stand out and when you pitch them an idea that they have heard dozens and dozens of times before, they just move on. You've got to be better than that. I think Linda has the next one.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes and this one is a really good example of something that you're going to see a lot as we critique these ideas, which is that you can take a look at any idea that pops in your head and it might not work at first but if you keep working it and thinking about it, you can spin ideas off of it that will work, so don't be discouraged if we critique your idea, you know, when it's not perfect or if you have an idea and you think oh God, this is terrible because really all ideas that first pop into our head, I call them seeds of ideas, and you really need to nurture them to make grow into saleable ideas, so this is an example of that.

This is from Lee Anne, and it's called a Winter's Diary and she says an artist in residence at the Yvonne Jean-Haffen Museum in Dinan Brittany, DC resident Lillian's personal journal captures the essence of life in a small French town. Her delightful illustrations complete the picture. I would like to pitch to France Magazine, which is based in DC. They have an essay section but I have never seen an essay in journal form.

So first of all, I'm a little bit confused because I'm not sure if you're suggesting profiling yourself or publishing parts of your journal and then illustrating it, and that does sound like something that would work for a regional magazine that runs personal essays but Pitch Clinic focuses on reported articles that you would need to query as Carol was mentioning before. We don't really focus essays because it's just not very easy to earn well from them. So I was thinking about your idea and I was thinking what can we do to turn your experiences into a reported article in the type that you could sell to different typical magazines.

Now remember earlier we talked about how we, in our experiences, are typically not part of a reported article but maybe you could pitch a travel article that's a roundup of small rural French towns that most people don't think to visit or an article for an artist magazine on the best towns readers can visit to get inspiration for their art I thought would be really cool. You could even divide it up by the types of art they do like for example, this type of artist will get good inspiration here, while this type of artist will get inspired somewhere else and this'll be a really great article to package as sort of a charticle, which is an article in chart format.

I meant there so many different ways that you could spin your experience without having to do a personal essay and of course, you can do a personal essay. You just don't need to pitch them. You have to write the whole essay and typically send it in. So when you're pitching reported pieces, mine your life for ideas but think about how you can spin them into articles that will help readers in their own lives. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah and the thing to remember is you're going to be promoting your memoir because it'll be noted in your tagline. It'll be like Lillian is the author of X memoir, so you know authors do that sort of thing all the time where they're writing articles around the time of publication just to get that tagline, and that might really work, but otherwise, it's the

_____ (20:53), just I want to write a personal essay about what I know about France. The problem is everybody wants to do that. Everybody wants to write about the trip they took and that, so it's extremely, extremely competitive and there's not a lot of good paying markets that, you know, when everyone can and wants to do it, it drives the prices down.

So I have the next one from Christina, Why bother with college for a Computer Science career with the advent of pre-online resources, it's easier than ever to embark on a new career in computer science without a degree, and Christina, this is an interesting idea but I have to say I challenge the premise of it that you can really get a great tech job by going on Lynda dot com and GitHub and just sort of bootstrapping your way to the tech skills. I'm also not sure which publication would carry this. Maybe a tech blog I'm thinking but in terms of good paying magazines that would take this angle. I'm kind of coming up empty. The college and career publications wouldn't touch it because they're for college students and grads, and all about stay in college and get a degree and it's really going to help you, and so what you have to do to make this story work is you'd have to prove that you can embark on a computer science career that's good paying without a degree.

You need to find a self-taught person that is now in some great paying job in tech without a degree, at least one, probably more than one, and you need to identify probably a few specific tech career paths where self-taught will work. It would have to be beyond the general just sort of learn tech online and I think you'd have to drill down and find out what parts of tech that would really work for because I'm thinking there are areas like say security and stuff where bootstrapping it is not going to get you hired. I'm just not clear that companies hire people who don't have degrees intact to do tech jobs.

You'd need to talk to hiring managers and hear them say they would take a chance on someone who is self-taught and they don't just use their local university as the farm club for hiring. I think they still do having just covered business for 20 plus years. The problem I see here is you could end up in a real embarrassing, time-consuming situation where you're never going to find a real person example and you're hearing hiring manager after hiring manager say oh, we like all our new grads to have an AA degree from local community college, at the very least if not a BA from this big university.

You need to network around and find if the story is real. I think that online training is great for learning if you want to launch your own blog-based business, online business or something. I think there's tons of that going on, people bootstrapping their technology knowledge and launching as businesses, so you might replant this to a business magazine like Entrepreneur or a city-based business magazine like Seattle Business. If it focused on self-taught entrepreneurs in a single city, I think that might give you an easier story to find, so that my reaction to that. Linda? Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

I'm sorry.

Carol Tice:

That's okay.

Linda Formichelli:

I was talking with mute on. Yeah. Before I get into the next one, I was checking the Q&A box and I saw a question from Katrina that I wanted to address. She said can you please explain the term roundup, which I used earlier. In roundup article, you're are literally rounding up several of the same things and putting them in an article. So examples, you might see in a money magazine, Ten Best Places to Retire, in a women's magazine, there might be Five Women Who Started Successful Nonprofits, and you know, they're really a great way to kind of round out an idea that might be too narrow or that might not be relevant to a large number of the magazine's audience because you can hit a lot more people that way, so I hope that helps.

So I have a story idea from Joan and it is Cook Your Way to Style, online style and shopping services like Stitch Fix and Golden Tote are gaining in popularity, how do they work and should I try one. I plan to pitch to Self and Women's Health. So Joan again the seas of an idea as I was talking about before, this is a very good start to an idea. The main problem is that these services aren't really new. I talked to Carol, she's done a lot of business writing, and she tells me they've been around for quite well but that does not mean you cannot do this idea. What means is you need to figure out what to bring to the topic that's new.

For example, one good idea would be to target some retail trade magazines with a story on what brick and mortar stores can do to compete with services like these, are there ways that they can incorporate some of these ideas into their businesses and that's just one way you can slant it. As with a lot of these ideas, pick it apart, spin it in different ways, sleep on it, brainstorm on it, talk to your friends about it, and you'll probably find lots of saleable ideas you can pull out of it, and I know Carol wanted to comment on that too.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I mean Gilt Groupe has been around since 2007, so this idea is not new, and this is a big mistake we see a lot is you discover something and it's new to you so you think it's new and newsworthy but anytime you have that reaction, oh that's new, you need to check around and see how long it's really been around. It may just be new to you, but yeah, there's definitely ways to angle this. I was thinking you could profile five to seven of the startup sites in this space that maybe readers haven't heard of yet that maybe have new angles to how they're doing their online selling or you could compare or contrast the five to seven biggest, most long established online flash sale sites because their models vary. Some you have to pay to join. Some only do one-day sales.

So you could go through and maybe even could be a charticle on how they differ and I thought a style magazine might even take an assignment where you have to buy several items from several of those sites and then you compare what the experience

was like, what was the quality of merchandise, how was the customer service, and so that gets you a couple of angles on that, but the bigger problem here is market match. Health and self, they don't write about shopping online for luxury goods. I mean I actually took a look because I'm curious at whether Self, it might be under their umbrella but their main departments are fitness, food, body, workout, and productivity. It's a time makeover. So I'm not seeing a fit there either. There are, I think, plenty of lifestyle or fashion and style type magazines that might be a fit for that but you're going to need a magazine match. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Awesome, so I have Kiana's idea and Kiana, you put in your whole pitch so I'm just going to edit it for length just for the sake of this call. So the idea is I want to write about how the biggest bully's women encounter are other women and how we need to encourage one another. Now, the way you wrote the whole pitch, it's really, really broad and it comes off as an essay instead of reported piece that you would pitch but you have a great beginning to an idea here and I want to help you narrow it down into something that might be more saleable.

So right now, the idea is like a vent or a rant about something that's been bothering you and that's cool because some of the best ideas come from things that make us angry or that make our friends angry. I mean I've written for many of the women's and health magazines and a lot of the ideas I came up with had to do with something that made me angry or something that was bothering me. So what you need to do then is think of a way to make it helpful to other women. What's the take home message? What can they take from this article that they can go and apply to their lives right now? What can be done? We need to find what's called service for this idea, which is basically the how-to element.

For example, I was just brainstorming on this. You could do an article for women's magazines on what to do if you as a grown woman are bullied by other women say in your children's playgroup, your book club, at work, and so on. The fact that you're aiming this at grown women seems pretty fresh because you usually see bullying aimed at parents of kids and teens, so I thought that that was really cool or you could do an article for the women's magazines on the top five types of bullies adult women may face and what to do about them and this would make a really good charticle, which I mentioned before, which is an article in the form of a chart, or another packaging style you could use and packaging is sort of how you present the article, is a really chunky article it's called where it would be formatted as lots of big boxes and each box would have a different bully and advice on how to handle her and so on. So you have lots of ideas all rolled into this one and I want you to pull your original pitch apart and you will find lots of services pieces that you could query out of this. Carol?

Carol Tice:

So I have an idea from Tiffany, Just Memory. Think you're too young to be struck with dementia, think again. What you need to know about cognitive decline and how you can stop it in its tracks, and her target magazine was for O, the Oprah Magazine. A recent

study found that plaque buildup in the brain associate with Alzheimer's disease in people as young as 20, so it would include an interview with a woman whose husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's as young as 30. Linda and I have a disagreement about this. I say it's interesting but O readers skew much older, so I don't think the young dementia thing works for O, but Linda has some other ideas.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Actually, I like this idea, so there, and Carol was thinking about the women's and health magazines and a lot of magazines don't really want to run articles on depressing topics but I think they will do so if there is hope on the horizon. So I mean a lot of the women's and health magazines run articles on some horrible disease but you know here's the cure for it or here's what's being done right now, here's the new.

So for example, there was recent huge news just in the last week that there's a promising new treatment for Alzheimer's that is working on 75% of mice in studies. So if you could maybe work that into a roundup as we were talking about of the newest, promising treatments that might work for a health magazine, but the thing is you would need to work fast to get this pitch out because every health writer on the planet wants to write about Alzheimer's right now because that study came out or you could come up with an even more unique and targeted slant that is sure to be different from what others are pitching in this idea but I think the idea of pitching it for people who are little bit younger for the magazines like Women's Health and Self and so on talking about how this is happening to younger people but there's hope on the horizon and here it is. The only question as I talked about earlier is you need to find out how many young people this happening to. Like I said, if it's happening to 1% of younger people then it's really a little too narrow and you might need to rethink it.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, and that's why putting it in roundup would work well because then you get five different diseases that are all affecting a small portion but together they add up to kind of hunk and that interests the editor more or I thought about trying to spin it forward. What is like the next advance? What is in the pipeline now that maybe isn't officially done yet? If you can find away to spin it forward, forward spin is another thing editors love. They have long deadlines and if you can tell them what will happen next of down the line. That's a really strong positioning especially for the big national monthlies that have to be six months lead times, so that they don't seem out of date when they come out with your story. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Cool. So I have Joan's idea. It's the Top Five Reasons to do your Kegels. Yep, let's go there. That's funny. Ask any gynecologist and you'll hear the same advice, do your kegel. Why is this exercise so important? What are the newest and best kegeling techniques? Some techniques involve equipment. Do I need to buy stuff to get the most out of my kegel? I plan to pitch this to Women's Health, Self, and Fitness.

So Joan, this is so weird because we had someone in our last class who pitched this exact same idea and wanted to send it to the exact same magazines, and I'm like is that you, but that is lesson and if you think an editor stole your idea because you pitched and you later see it in the magazine and you didn't write it, keep in mind that they are often, really often, getting multiples of the same pitch, so that's sad. I like your idea of finding the newest and best kegel techniques because that takes it away from just let's write about kegels again that we've been hearing about since the 70's and makes it new and fresh, but the question is, is there anything really new to say? You would have to do some research to find that out, maybe do a couple of quick expert interviews, and that is par for the course when you come up with an idea and you're not quite sure about it as you start to research it and talk to people, and make sure it's going to fly before you go to the effort of doing a pitch on it.

Now it's cool that there is kegel equipment. I didn't know that, but what I want to know is this a new thing or has it been around for a while and also keep in mind that the audience of these magazines like Women's Health and Self are fairly young, so the readership may be too young to be dealing with the issues you normally need to do kegels for like I think incontinence, so you would need to find some use in it up and maybe figure out if there are surprising reasons young women would need to do kegels and then kind of what's new in the field that people don't already know, and editors, health editors, have not already seen. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Right on. I've got a question from Beth in Plano. Her idea is they came for safety but some refugees feel endangered living in the US. A group of refugees from Bhutan say some of them get beaten up and robbed when they walk out of their apartments. We thought we'd be safe here in the US, one of them said.

This is a story that could go a few different directions. I'd like to see you refine this headline so we get a better sense of it because the headline is some refugees but it's sounds like it's really a specific group. I'd like to hear what publication you think this is for. I'm having trouble thinking beyond daily newspaper metro section, which isn't going to pay a lot. Maybe you have a city magazine that does gritty topics. Some of them do. Some don't. If you did several cities, and several immigrant groups and the problems that they encounter, you could maybe give something like USA Today or possibly a social issue type publication like Mother Jones.

The question I have is, are only Bhutanese getting robbed or do they just live in a high crime area? Is it something about their culture that makes them more vulnerable? Are they keeping money under their mattresses because they don't trust banks? There are a lot of questions to parse out but the thing is this is a hard news reporting story. It's not a service piece. There's a problem in our community and we need to care about it. It's like newspaper say we publish news you want to know and news you need to know that we think for your betterment you need to be informed about and this is sort of in that second category. It's a tougher sell. Most of this gets assigned to staff writers and the reason is you're going to need to talk to a lot of different stakeholders, witnesses,

Bhutanese who are willing to be named, photographed, and quoted. You can't just say some of them say this. You'd need input from the police, from community organizers, from immigration experts who work with this population. You'll need stats. How many Bhutanese are living in that city?

So it's a pretty big project, it's often a long feature, and if you don't have a journalism background, editors are going to be really leery about giving you this kind of assignment because of the ethical issues. We get a lot of pitches like this in our classes and unless you already have journalism experience, we like to see you kind of tryout with some easier service piece type of stuff and build your reputation a little because it's just going to be hard to make a sale on these. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Awesome. Sorry. My headset just popped off. So I have Julie in Chicago. Julie, you have a lot of ideas, so I picked the one that I thought we could best turn into a saleable idea right now just so we can get to everybody, all of our students on the call, and I know you're in the Pitch Clinic class, which is awesome, so please post the rest of yours in the Pitch Clinic forum and Carol and our two editors will take a look at them for you.

So the idea I was looking at was called Lessons Learned from Aunt-hood. There are many aunts who are not mothers in their own right. What have they learned from their _____ (37:37), my collective noun for nieces and nephews, while trying to impart their own lessons on the next generation, how have _____ (37:42), and aunts grown up together?

So Julie, you have a really awesome seed of an idea here. I'm thinking an article on lessons aunts have learned might not be so interesting because people reading this, it's hard to tell what they would get out of it that they can apply to their lives. It just sounds something more like oh, isn't this interesting and that's a problem a lot of ideas have is that the idea is oh, this is a really interesting read but people read because they want something that applies to their life that is going to help them improve their own life, and then another question is how many of your target magazine readers are aunts? So it may not be a big enough audience for an article but I have to say with this idea, it does sound like a cool idea for a gift book for aunts. That kind of thing with like essays and pictures, and stuff like that, so keep that in mind.

However, this got me thinking about women with no kids because you mentioned a lot of aunts don't have any kids, and how they can help the next generation, and then that got me thinking of an idea of rounding up a bunch of people who are unusual devotees of certain causes. So I know this is getting way out there but for example, the voluntarily childfree woman who volunteers in orphanages, the person who's afraid of heights who volunteers for those charities that helicopters sick people to medical clinics, the hunter who works for animal rights. It could be a good lesson that one can help in any cause.

So it's kind of taking your idea and expanding it into more a roundup piece and anyway, I know that these ideas I just spun off are way off track from what you were thinking of but it's just an example of how far you can go if you start playing with an idea and one thing leads to the next thing, leads to the next thing. All of a sudden, the idea is totally different but it's saleable.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. This is the kind of brainstorm that we do when we're thinking up ideas. Don't get married to the first sort of iteration of your idea. Start musing on it and thinking about well, is there a national magazine for aunts? No. How else could I do this, and you just keep looking at it and keep thinking about markets for it. I love what Linda did there.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Yeah because you know if you have noticed, every single idea on here, even if we have said it's possibly not saleable as is. We've been able to come up with ideas that would make it more saleable and that's just the way things work for writers.

So I have the next one from Andrea in Toronto, and I love this one. It's Visit a historical Toronto neighborhood before it disappears. Mirvish Village is a quaint and friendly artist area in Toronto, which is formally owned by entrepreneur mogul Ed Mirvish. Sold recently to development corp. West Bank, this street full of shops, galleries and restaurants will cease to exist as it is by the end of 2016. I'd like to pitch this to Afar Magazine. Now that's an interesting angle.

The only problem is you would need to work super fast because most magazines, I think Afar...I can't remember if it's online or printed. I think it's online but a lot of them have a lead time of at least a few months and by the time you pitch an idea and they sit on it for a while and then they accept it and then you get like a month to write it and it gets edited and then they sit on it and then they run it. It might be too late because the neighborhood will be close to gone and they really need enough time for their readers to actually go plan a trip to it.

So what you might want to do is get brave and call the editor of Afar and tell her you have an idea that's super timely and just want to pitch over the phone or you can even pitch it over voicemail and follow up with a quick email like just what you wrote here, and I just thought of something too. You might want to think about airline magazines of the airlines that service that particular area as well as other markets because you really don't want to work on a big pitch for an article idea that really only has one market for it because if it's not accepted then you're kind of stuck. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I hate when that happens. I just wanted to say you might also want to pitch it to a more Canada centric magazine where more readers might be near Toronto and could hop over, and regional's tend to have shorter timelines, so you might score with that.

Linda Formichelli:

Awesome. So I have Ruthanne's idea. It's there is a homeless young man who works at the grocery store/deli where my son works. He is employed but still homeless due to reasons beyond his control and this has been really big in the news or at least this is something that I've been hearing a lot, which is people who are homeless, not because they don't have jobs or because they don't work hard but because they can't save up the cash for two months rent and a security deposit. So your son's co-worker could be an interesting profile for a local magazine or your local paper and that could be a jumping off point to talk about this problem and how it affects people in your area and what you did here is a really great idea of taking a national news story and localizing it, which is a great way to sell stories. You can take something national, localize itself to a local magazine or take something local from a local magazine, nationalize it, and sell it to a big national publication, but I know Carol wanted to comment on this as well.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. It's just this pitch didn't have a headline and I think if you write one, it'll help you crystallize what you want this to be about. I just wanted to point that out. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. You had more here you wanted to say.

Carol Tice:

No. It's cool. I want to move on because we have a lot of pitches to get to.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. All right. Well, I have May and its My Brain was Hijacked, facing the challenges of PTSD, posttraumatic stress disorder, and how to overcome it. Stress is among the top concerns in the nation and PTSD is more prevalent than what most people believe, and May, this is a really good start to an idea. The main issue is that this is huge. This is one of those book topics we're talking about, and I think there have been books on it. If you look on Amazon and look up PTSD or posttraumatic stress disorder, you'll probably find entire books. So I'd like you to think hard about this idea, and play with it, and figure out some really unusual slant you take that editors haven't seen before and that's also kind of more bite sized that you could do in a shorter article.

For example, is there some demographic that gets PTSD that you wouldn't think of normally and is there a magazine that targets them? Many people who come with and survive serious illnesses may be one of them. There are lots of magazines that target various health problems from cancer to MS. Maybe kids sometimes get it. If they go through a traumatic incident, is this something for Parenting Magazine? There's a ton you could spin out of this idea but you really want to look closely at it and kind of extract a thin slice of it, just so it's not too broad and then find the perfect market for it.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Right on.

Linda Formichelli:

Carol?

Carol Tice:

I'm just going through to make sure I'm getting all the student assignments, so I'm screen shooting all of it to make sure we get to them. Did you want to go on to? What are we up to?

Linda Formichelli:

You have Katrina's story idea. Yes.

Carol Tice:

All right. Let me do that. So her idea was Guerilla Warfare for Teachers, how to survive teaching in the age of Common Core. I think I asked her about what publication and she said one of the teacher trade publications, which makes sense. I just want to say that there is a tone of hostility to this, guerilla warfare. I'm wondering who you're making war on and whether that tone would be appropriate because most trade publications are pretty upbeat and want to have practical tips. So I just think if it was a headline, more like How to get the resources you need to teach Common Core successfully or the Missing resources you need for teaching Common Core successfully. I just think it's going to need something.

Looks like I also have Laurie's, which was a destination wedding with one important difference, which was going to be about a boutique Caribbean wedding planner who delivers bespoke services like you could get your suit tailored while you're on a Caribbean island, and it was for destination weddings and honeymoons. I was like nice job finding a really interesting niche publication for that but I would question whether they're going to be interested in a profile of one single wedding planner providing one unusual service in one place. I'm thinking like many of the others we've talked about, this is going to work better as a roundup of luxury wedding services you could get in the Caribbean. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Awesome. Yeah. I have Sarah's idea, which is Ready to Hike with your Hound. Take this quiz to find out. I really like this one. It's got a really awesome headline. It sounds great not only for a dog owner's magazine but maybe an outdoor magazine like one for hikers or walkers or outdoor people. The quiz angle is always fun and that's a good lesson that you want to think not just about the basic idea, this is what I'm going to write about, but editors really are thirsty for how are you going to package this to make it interesting. We talked about the charticle. We talked about the chunky format, and the quiz is another great one.

So I did want to mention that my trick for quizzes is to make sure the answers aren't super intuitive. So when you write your pitch, and you have a few sample questions in there, which you'll learn about in Pitch Clinic, you know, you're going to have some

examples, remember to try to surprise the editor so she can't read the questions and be like yeah, it's A. Yeah, it's B. You know what I mean. You want it surprising. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Absolutely. I got the next one here. I'm trying to do two things at once here, make sure I get all the students stuff. I think I have a few more that I know are from students, so I want to get to them.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Could you reach them out loud because I don't know which ones?

Carol Tice:

Yeah, and if you are a student and haven't heard your idea yet, don't worry. We are getting to you. So from Nicole, Veterans enroll in Solider On Resiliency program for a new shot at life. I've seen a lot of pitches like this stuff. It's about a heartwarming, charitable program that does great things for our troops and the problem is it reads like a press release for that group. The question of how would you angle this so it is not a piece of PR for this charity. You may be guessing by now that roundups is one common way that we prevent that by spotlighting several charities that are helping our troops that come home. Makes it much more like look at these various useful causes rather than I'm on the PR team of this charity, which is what the editor is going to suspect.

The big thing that you have to remember is these editors are getting pitch after pitch after pitch, 100's and 1000's, blizzards of them from PR companies trying to get their business, their charity into the news, so you have to be careful when you're doing a pitch that is...when I used to cover nonprofits as a full time beat, I used to call look at this charity, aren't they wonderful. The problem is that there are a million wonderful charities and why is this the story we need to hear. So this is some things to think about.

Linda, Marie had a couple of ideas. Why don't we take, she said both are reported essays and her first is Raising a Child with Fibromyalgia and Autoimmune Disease that experts can't agree on.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Raising a Child with Fibromyalgia. For those of you who don't know what a reported essay, it's a great thing for people who really want to do essays. It's sort of a service article, so there is that service and how-to angle but it's also weaves in your own personal anecdotes and your personal experiences. Can you read me the title again?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Sure. It was Raising a Child with Fibromyalgia and Autoimmune Disease that experts can't agree on or identify. I think I didn't read that.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Okay. So two things, one is for this to be a reported essay, there has to be service. So you have to talk to experts and get information on how readers who have

kids with fibromyalgia can help their kids, what's new, what's going on in that realm that can help people, and weave that into your personal story. The only issue I have though is that where are you going to sell this, what market are you aiming this at because there might be a magazine specifically for people with fibromyalgia. If there's an association then they might have a magazine that you could look at but otherwise, you have to try to find markets where this is relevant to a good percentage of readers. So if you go to your typical parenting magazine like Parents or Kiwi or something, it probably wouldn't fly, so you need to really think hard about that. Carol, what do you think?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. These are tough, you know, these sort of one disease specific things that don't affect a lot of parents but you know the question is where is the market for it. I have about three identified that I know are from students that we are going to get to here. Why don't you take this one for like food and wine, ten most romantic apple-picking spots local to me in Quebec/Vermont type area?

Linda Formichelli:

Oh my God, that's so cute.

Carol Tice:

It's kind of cute.

Linda Formichelli:

It is very cute. I'm thinking I like that idea. I think it's narrow but it's not too narrow. It's not just the ten best apple picking. It's the ten best romantic apple picking and you can spin this in so many different ways like not just romantic but think of different audiences and what they would care about in their trips and then somehow relate that to the different orchards. My one concern again is who are you going to send this to, who out there is looking for romantic apple picking, who is going on big night with their husband or their wife and they want to go apple picking. So that's something to think about and it's not to say you can't do it. Think about it because you need address that in your query. I surveyed a whole bunch of local people and they said they're interested in romantic apple picking expeditions. So think about that, how you can make sure that editor understands that this is something that makes sense for their readership, but I think it's a pretty cool idea.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Maybe you could talk to some growers about the do-you-pick about how many people come every year, so you could say this is a popular activity is a thought I have. I have another idea for a magazine, which is if there's like an edible Quebec. Those are just all about local food and enjoying local produce and things.

I just wanted to say as we're getting close to the top of the hour, we're going to talk about Pitch Clinic homework for our students. We are going to talk about what's coming up in our Pitch Clinic class, and then we are going to resume if we need to with more student reviews, so don't go way if you are a student here. I have a couple more that

we're going to get to and then we're going to get to...I don't know. I think we should break and talk about homework and talk about what's coming up, and then we're going to take a few more story ideas. Let me talk about the homework real briefly.

Pitch Clinic students, your homework is to develop a story idea to pitch on our forum for editor review as you did here. Be sure to include a headline and a very brief idea of what it's about and a target market you think it's for, and for the forum, once you get approval on that then in the coming weeks, we'll flush that out into a full query but let's start with our headline idea and market, and get some approval on that before you invest more time in it because as you can see, most ideas need tweaking. Right, Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Absolutely, but that's not a bad thing.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Yeah. It's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. Okay. Cool. Students, if we hit one of your ideas and we didn't hit the other in here, just post the other one in the homework forum, in the forum called Pitches, and we'll get to them in there, and you'll get some feedback from Peggy and from Heidi, which will be even more awesome.

So Bob's pitch, to resume our student ideas, is the surprising Wild West past of Old Temecula. I know where Temecula is. It is north of San Diego. I like this idea. I think Temecula doesn't get written about a lot, so it's probably not a San Diego travel or Sunset Magazine type story they've seen before. The only challenge you're up against with stuff like this is just that there's a million sort of generic travel pitches like this where someone wants to write about some particular area. What I find gives these that forward spin is the news angle. Is there a new museum that opened, a new exhibit that's happening? You said there's 40 wineries. Is the news that they've become a wine region? See what you could develop in it that's new. Linda, you got any thoughts on that?

Linda Formichelli:

No. I think that's awesome. You're better with the travel pitches than I am that's for sure.

Carol Tice:

Okay. So here's Helene's is the cure to the student mental health crisis that no one is talking about. The pressure is higher, students are breaking down, lots of solutions are proposed, therapy drugs, but what about food sensitivities. The big suspects are gluten, dairy, citrus, corn.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. There was just a big article on this a few months ago in Experience Life Magazine about how this for younger kids but how food allergies and food intolerances can be causing or exacerbating certain mental issues. That's definitely in the zeitgeist right now, so that's really good. The trick is to find a market that hasn't done it and luckily,

with the idea you have, it sounds like you could be talking about kids or students of any age.

So I think a lot of the parenting magazines might already kind of have graphed on to this and have already done it, so you'll need to do some research to see if they haven't but it's something worth thinking about if you could. There are just a few magazines that target parents of teens and tweens. Family Circle is one of them. So you would need to look into that, but another idea might be the teaching trade journals to talk about this issue that's been uncovered and how maybe teachers can talk to their parents about it. Maybe they see kids bringing in all these horrible foods and they've got these behavioral or mental problems, how do they bring them up with the parents. I think there's a lot of different ways you can spin this idea. It's just a matter of figuring out exactly you want to target and what magazines then target that reader. What do you think, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Absolutely. I think that whole is food giving you mental health things, I mean that could be spun in so many directions for so many different audiences.

Linda Formichelli:

The only thing is a lot of people are already doing it. A lot of magazines have already done it, so you have to find ones that haven't or maybe really unusual audiences this one would fit.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I'm unclear on what would be a good paying sort of student audience magazine or for parents who have college students. I've actually been into that college and career niche because I used to write about that on Yahoo Careers and AOL Jobs.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I've done that too. Yeah.

Carol Tice:

Yeah and there kind of isn't a national magazine for that. There's one I think that's like colleges and careers but I don't think they do this kind of thing, so yeah, tough market match on it, unless it slants a different way.

So Joy has one with serious awe value, are you all ready? It's for Pet Age, puppies with defects, giving them a chance. There's treatments for some of them. They don't need to be euthanized. There are charities and foundations that help. That seems like a pretty awesome article idea to me if they haven't already run it recently, if they haven't done that kind of deal real recently, and Joy, you registered as MJ, so I didn't catch it when I was comparing.

Linda Formichelli:

I mean not only the pet magazines but if there are veterinary trade magazines but also trade magazines aimed at breeders, there might be some that could be really interested in this topic. I mean that could interest a lot of different types of people and a lot of different types of professions. I think that's really solid.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. This might be one of those ideas you could circulate around and do the horse magazines, why just dogs. It could potentially be something you could retool a lot. So Helene said I was thinking of university students and my target market would be university magazines. Name one that's for students. I mean you mean the alumni magazines for the parents and the donors because I think the university magazine is actually better known as the school newspaper and I don't think they pay much. I'm not sure there's a good market there.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. There might be something out there but yeah, you have to do some research and then you know sometimes you have an idea and you had this idea for market, and you research and you find out there's only one or two and it's not worth it and that happens sometimes but yeah, do some research and see if there are some out there because I mean it's been a long time since I've been in college.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. At one point, I looked though. Isn't there some national college student magazine? You know what. I think there is one and it's for all the kids who made national merit scholar or something, so that might be something to look at.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah like Key Club magazine and stuff like that. I'm not sure if that would be right for places like this but yeah, do some research, do some research.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. It's going to take a little research but you know there could be a market even for that college student angle. Being the mother of a college student, I can tell you that they don't care what they eat, so you're kind up against that. They eat a lot of junk. It's really, really difficult, you know, I almost wonder if this is for a trade magazine for school psychologists. Now, there's a trade pub market that that would be possibly good for, but the other thing to know is you'd have to really nail this down with experts. It can't just sort of be anecdotal. We all know that soy, you could be allergic to it. You'll have to really nail these facts down to say if you're having a student with depression like maybe you want to talk to them about food allergy, so that's my thinking on that.

Let's see. Helene found one. University of Ferris, Canada. Oh, maybe there's a Canadian one that is nationwide. We kind of don't do well with that in America. I can tell you. There's nothing really that goes across everybody. Though one thing you might look at is the Wall Street Journal. I don't know if they do it anymore but they used to do

a college edition of the Wall Street Journal for like business students would get this college edition of WSJ. I wrote some things for them and they paid pretty well, so that's something you might look at that could do well.

I think we have hit everybody. If there is a student that we have not hit, I apologize and we will definitely have you first up in next week's live call and of course, feel free to pitch in our Pitches forum on the Pitch Clinic class forum. If you are in the class and have any problems in the class, finding anything, logging in, just email help@usefulwritingcourses.com and our help desk will be on that for you. Thanks everybody. Wow, this is an amazing call.

Linda Formichelli:

That was so fun. Thank you.

Carol Tice:

I think this may have been our most people ever on a call, so yeah, and thanks to everybody for great questions, and great story ideas.

Linda Formichelli:

Thanks everyone. Hope to see you in Pitch Clinic.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. See you back on the Pitch Clinic forums.