

Carol Tice:

Hi, everybody. It's Carol Tice here with lovely Linda Formichelli.

Linda Formichelli:

Hi there.

Carol Tice:

And we are ready to welcome you to our Pitch Clinic Q&A on query letters. We're here to talk all aspects of writing queries and whatever else is on your mind in the world of freelancing, and Linda has some opening thoughts, and so do I, about what we've been seeing on the forums, and then we will get to the questions.

Linda Formichelli:

Awesome. Yes. First, I want to say we are seeing a lot of really nice ideas and nice starts to ideas going up in the forums. So thank you to everybody who is posting, and we've got five of us working full time to make sure everybody gets taken care of, and I'm not sure everybody knows this, but we now have the editor from Health magazine, Amelia Harnish on there. So we have three editors, and me, and Carol.

And I wanted to mention that you shouldn't consider your idea shot down if we say it probably won't work as is. I know there was a thread going on where a few writers were upset because they felt like their ideas were getting shot down, but in reality, very few writers have salable ideas just pop into their heads, and more typically...and this is even with pro writers who have been doing it for 20, 30 years.

They come up with an idea, and then they think about it, and they brainstorm around it, and they play with it, and they think about it until they figure out an angle that really sings, and it's always that way. It's very rare that an idea will come into your head and right away it's like, yes, this will sell. Often it takes a lot of brainstorming, and re-angling, and re-slanting until it's just right. So don't worry about that.

Also I want everybody to be really happy that we have these three editors on board to critique your ideas because that's what you're paying for, to learn how to come up with ideas editors like, and we have editors there telling you this is what we like. This is what we don't like. So it's awesome. Peggy, Amelia, and Heidi have been very kind with their critiques. Editors in the real world don't handle writers like that. So I think this is a really valuable and unique opportunity that I hope everybody will take advantage of.

And then also I feel like some writers are not researching their markets. What I'm seeing is if a writer has an idea for women, they always name Family Circle as their market. If it's a parenting article, you know, no matter what age the kids are that they want to write about, they say Parents, the most obvious choice, and writers are also naming magazines that have gone out of business and pitching consumer-oriented service pieces for business-to-business trade magazines.

So when you come up with an idea and have an idea of what kind of markets might be a fit for you, take a look at those markets. Look at their websites. Look at their archives online. Look at the magazines on the newsstand, at their glossies, and see if your idea seems like it would be a good fit. Don't just throw out the most obvious.

For a parenting idea, I want Parents, and for a women's idea, I want Family Circle, and for a business idea, I want Entrepreneur. There are thousands and thousands of markets out there, and sometimes the real trick is not just coming up with a unique slant for your idea, but coming up with a market that fits your idea. What do you think, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. You know, what I'd love for people to do is if you think it's for Family Circle, I want you to take your headline and your dek, and get that magazine out, and thumb through it, and imagine turning the page and seeing that, and just see if you think that would really happen, if that would really work there or if it would be jarring. If it would be like, what's this topic? Really try and envision your piece in there.

And yeah, when people tell me they have a career article for Red Book or Self, I just know they're not a reader of that publication. Maybe once in a lifetime, they run something like that, but they're what I call long-shot pitches. They're something that are way out of the normal wheelhouse of what they typically do.

Especially as a new writer, you don't want to go there. You want to pitch something that's right up their alley. It's in one of their regular departments. It's a topic that has a high chance of being useful to that editor. Once you have a relationship with an editor is the time to try and push things that are a little more off the beaten trail.

The other thing we see a lot is people positing ideas where they clearly don't know if it's really out there in the marketplace. It's just kind of a thought they have, and the feedback is that we can't really tell. We don't know enough to know if the idea is real yet, and you may need somebody to talk to to confirm that it's really a trend or find the statistic that proves it's really happening.

Because when you get to the Module 2 level and you're writing a whole query, we don't want you to waste a lot of time fleshing out a query on something that, as you get into it, you realize it's not going to pan out, and then you have to start over with another idea. That's kind of why we're trying to fix this stuff in Module 1 so that when you get in Mod 2, it's pretty much just execution and learning the query format.

If you've listened to our Mod 2 materials, and we're sure hoping you have, you know that in your query, you need to make the case that this story is real. You've got the facts and the experts saying this is happening and why you are the writer to do this story. So you're not going to get out of that query mode with an idea that has no documentation and just says something vague like I will talk to medical experts about this.

So get ready to find some facts, and I have a good post for you that I need to dig up, and I'll throw it in the chat on how to find facts and make sure they're true. That was a guest post I recently had. So I'm going to dig that up for you, and while I'm doing that, let's go to the bottom of our stream of ideas that we got, and do you want to take Katherine's?

Linda Formichelli:

Do you want me to start?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. That'd be great.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. Katherine has a great, classic question. How long should queries be? How much detail should I include, or how much should I outline my idea? And the answer to that is always the query should be as long as it needs to be. If you are hooking the editor with a really great headline and you have a really good lead, which you're reading more about in Module 2, then they're going to want to keep reading to see what you've got to offer and how you're wrapping it up.

I've had, when I was sending out print query letters...you know, on actual paper in the mail, I had query letters that were as long as three pages going out to the women's magazines, and they were selling. I've sold articles to magazines that I have worked for in the past with just a couple of sentences.

And it also depends on the size of the story you're pitching. If you're pitching a feature, then you're going to have a longer query. If you're pitching an FOB, a front of the book, like a little news piece and you're not writing the whole thing, then you're just going to have a short query.

So it really depends, but I would not worry about going too long with reason. I mean, you don't want to go on, and on, and on forever. You want to be as concise as you can, but you want to get in there the great lead, the nut graph, some examples, a few quotes, your credentials paragraph. You want to get that all in there.

So how much detail you should include and how much you should outline your idea, that should all be in Module 2, the different parts of the query and the information you need, but the only thing I could say on that is just be sure not to skimp, because if you are a new quantity to this editor, they're taking a risk on assigning you an article.

So the more information you can give them that proves this is a thing that's going on...I can back it up. I have the stats. I have experts. I have great quotes. I am the right person to write it. The more you can do that, the less of a risk it is for the editor to take a chance on you. Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I mean, I always say the answer to how long it should be is as long as it needs to be to convince the editor you should do the story and as concise as possible. Those are the two poles between which you are hung when you write a query. One of the big reasons that people pay writers good money is for their ability to be concise and to write things to a length.

I've had scenarios where I've had 1200-word articles that I then had to turn into 300-word articles, 500-word articles I needed to turn into 2000-word articles, and when you do this long enough, you can do that. You can hack it down or blow it up to whatever size the editor wants it to be, and that ability to sort of meet their needs is really key, and to be concise mostly.

Most often, the request is that was great at 800 words. Now make it 600. So you always want to think about being concise, but I gather that the women's magazines do like pretty fleshed-out ones. I always did well with one-pagers for business magazines and for trades, and then once you have ever written for that editor before, it gets less elaborate what you have to do.

So Sarah has a great question. What percentage of time do you devote to generating a pitch idea versus conducting business, writing a piece? What is too much research time? Well, you always strive to keep it as efficient as you can. My personal MO was always to pump experts I was already talking to for one article for the next idea.

And then I'd leave that interview...you know, I'd ask some question at the end. What's next for you? What was the hot topic at the conference you went to? What else is going on in this sector that I should know about? Are there other interesting trends? I would just leave with the next idea and go pitch it. So it was a perpetual motion machine, and I didn't have to spend a lot of time pre-interviewing.

I've rarely called someone up cold to do a pre-interview because of that, because I'm always sort of daisy chaining along from one expert to the next and getting more ideas for next time. It's a tricky thing. You need a little time to put into it, and I know we saw other questions about, you know, I'm not earning an hourly rate. How does this make sense?

But the problem is, as a new writer, this is the only way you're going to get gigs, is to come in fully researched. The smaller your portfolio is, the more you have to prove it in the query that you can execute this. So, Linda, you have other thoughts?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, and I do want to mention that your goal...I think I mentioned this last week. Your goal is to never have to pitch again. So, as Carol was saying, the more untried you are, the more you want to work on your query. Well, you're going to get a point where you have so many editors coming to you that that time of researching a query becomes zero. So that's kind of awesome.

And I wanted to mention, I did a blog post a while ago because somebody asked me what percentage of time I actually spend working on my assignments versus doing everything else, and I think it was 15% of my time was spent actually writing my assignments, and 85% of the time was spent pitching, and marketing, and doing administrative work, and everything else, and I think that's pretty normal.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I think new freelancers are probably pretty surprised at how little of the time you will spend writing that article draft. If I'm working a 40-hour week, maybe 8 of those hours I'm writing something, you know? I'm so frustrated that I can't find this...

Linda Formichelli:

Do you want me to get Ashley's question?

Carol Tice:

About the true facts, but yeah, take Ashley's question.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes, I will. While Carol is searching, Ashley says what's the best way to go about getting experts before getting an assignment? I don't want to waste someone's time if I don't have an assignment, but I want to have a better chance at getting the assignments with experts to quote, and we actually talked about this last week, but I'm going to say it again because I'm sure we have a lot of new people on the call.

And this is a question we get every single time, is that new writers are very afraid that when they approach people for interviews that they cannot say I have an assignment with whatever magazine, that they're going to make the experts angry in some way. I want to dispel that notion. Most experts love talking about what they do. Will grab any chance to get publicity. They're happy to do it.

But the trick is...and this is what I always did. I would email them or call them and say I'm working on a pitch. I don't usually say query because they don't know what that is. I say I'm working on a pitch for X magazine for an article about Y. I thought you would be the perfect expert, and I was wondering if you would be willing to give me just 10 minutes of your time for me to ask you a few questions so I can get some really good quotes for the pitch, and if this article is assigned, I will be back in contact for a more in-depth interview.

And most of the time, they say yes, and a lot of time, you want to respect their time. After that 10 minutes, say the 10 minutes is up. Do you need to go? But a lot of times, they're just going to keep going and give you all the time you want. What was I going to say about that? Do you have anything to add? I have something to say, but I forgot what it was. What is it, Carol? Oh, I hate that.

Carol Tice:

I know. It happens. Yeah. The thing is, you'll be shocked at how many people will be willing to maybe at least shoot you a quick couple of email responses or spend five minutes on the phone with you. You're thinking, oh, I'm imposing, and I'm wasting their time, and what you're not understanding is that most of the people that you might find on a resource like ProfNet or HARO are dying to get into the media.

They are dying for media, and they will do anything. They're so happy for any chance. So you have to stop thinking like it's a big problem that you're asking them. They're thrilled to be asked, and not everyone will respond when you don't have an assignment, but you just keep going and asking more people till you find one that does. She also says...

Linda Formichelli:

And I remember what I was going to say. Oh, sorry.

Carol Tice:

Oh, okay. Go ahead.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. So, this week, you're trying to get this query done as quickly as you possibly can this week so you can move onto Module 3 next week. So, in the normal case when you have a bunch of time to write a query and there's no deadline, you'll be emailing people, and calling people, and leaving messages.

What you might want to do is a sort of newspaper style of reporting, and I have friends who work this way. Where you pick up the phone. You call a person, and say do you have 10 minutes right now? Because you don't have the time to muck around with, oh, are you free Thursday? Oh, you're on vacation? Get people as fast as you can. Get those 10 minutes in, and get that query out.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I agree. So Ashley was saying how do you find experts to interview if you don't have an established industry? I guess that means you've learned about who the experts are in the industry. There is ProfNet. There is Help a Reporter Out. They're, to me, last-ditch places. We start with basics like government agencies, non-profits, associations, and organizations that are in that industry, finding man-on-the-street anecdotal interview subjects. You can ask around your networks.

Like once I needed people who had sold all their stocks in the downturn because they felt panicked and didn't want to stay in the market, and it ended up being the sister of one of my editors or something. I just asked around all the networks I had, and I turned somebody up. I have also stood outside hardware stores and interviewed people as they came out about their customer service experience in that store.

That's a real man-on-the-street interview. I have actually done actual man-on-the-street interviews, and that's a way you can get things done too, but I think people tend to skip over calling the National Restaurant Association, or the National Thumb Wrestling Association, or whatever. If you are writing about any business topic, or hobby, or anything, there's some organization, and if their executive director isn't a good person, they know the person who is. They know who the experts are, and you just ask them.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, and I just posted an article I wrote for Writer's Digest in the chat called How to Find the Best Sources that has a bunch of places, and I just want to bring up here...Sarah says did the question about whether or not we'd specifically get the green light for Module 2 assignments get answered?

There was a question like that in the forum, and we need to officially say yes, you are ready to go onto Module 2, and if it looks like we meant to say that and we just somehow didn't officially say it, ping us just to make sure. We're trying to make sure we do that with everybody we feel is ready, but sometimes we might give a really good critique and then forget to say move on.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I'm trying to be really diligent about saying...and we're not holding people up if we just think you need to tinker with your headline a little if we think the idea is there...

Linda Formichelli:

That's important.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, because, I mean, in the old days, writers never really had to write much in the way of headlines, but it's a really good exercise to do. We want you to do it, but we're not going to hold you up if we're just still tinkering with the headline. If we think the idea is solid, it makes sense, it's a fit for that market, it's rational, it has a shot in our view of being a real story for that market, we're going to move you on to Mod 2. So no worry there. So many questions are coming in. So Aaron was saying often with an FOB, you just write it up and send it in, but what do you say when you just send it in? Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

I'm sorry. I was posting something in response to another question about recording interviews.

Carol Tice:

That's okay. Aaron was just saying what do you say when you go ahead and just send in a front of the book draft?

Linda Formichelli:

Oh, yes. Yes. I would usually just write a paragraph saying I'm proposing an article for your FOB section called X. It's pasted below. Here are a couple of my credentials. I look

forward to hearing from you. Linda. That's it. You really don't have to pitch it because it's going to be right there, and you don't want to go on too long because they might not get through your introductory letter to read the FOB. So I just keep it short and sweet.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I agree with that, and he says does it mean you can't send it to more than one pub at once? I think if you're sending in a draft, yeah, you wouldn't want to, right?

Linda Formichelli:

You know, I know that's a tough question. It really depends on how risk averse you are. You know what I mean? But I don't see why that's too much different from sending in the same query to two places. I mean, if they accept it, they're not just going to run it without asking you first.

Carol Tice:

Let's hope. I probably wouldn't do it if I was sending in the draft. Personally I would feel a little oogie, but yeah, it's all about your own comfort level there. So, Lindsay says how can I make my topic ideas new? It's so true. It is the bane of every writer's existence. What is our fresh slant? What is the reason this evergreen topic needs to be discussed again?

If you haven't listened to the Story Idea Lab, we talk a lot about how to...or actually, in this Module 2, I think we have the How to Make Your Query Irresistible to Editors. So that's a whole presentation on how to develop news hooks. That's the one that's totally focused on that. So take a listen to that. Sometimes it doesn't take a lot. Sometimes it's just the anniversary of this is coming up, or there's a new book coming out about this. Sometimes it doesn't have to be real complex.

But the reason we flog you so mercilessly about these...there's nothing new here. Is because editors are just going to pass. They're just not going to buy it. They've seen it before. There's nothing new. They know it's a topic they're going to do again, but they're looking for something fresh to say about it. They're not going to just run it again just to run it again, especially not from a writer they don't know.

The people who get those easy assignments...and I'm speaking as someone who wrote the exact same article for Entrepreneur three times, which is How to Research a Franchise Offer Before You Buy One, I can tell you I've done three slightly different slants on that exact story. Each time, a 2,000-word feature, because every year when they do their Franchise 500, they want that article.

But each year, I had to find something a little bit different to say about it, but it was because I already had the relationship that I was getting assignments over and over. It's really hard as a new writer to get an evergreen like that where there may not be any news angle. So that's why we just spend so much time flogging that around of like, come up with news angles, because that really gets you in the door.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, but I have to say, it gets easier once you start developing a niche, and developing relationships with sources and with editors, and you start really reading the magazines that you're writing for, and getting the same clients over and over again. You're going to start to get a sense of what they've seen before and what they haven't seen before and how you can tweak something to make it new again. Right now it just seems completely crazy because you're coming at it from the first stage where you're just bombarded with ideas, and you don't know what's new, and all these markets are out there, but it gets easy. It gets easier.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, and one thing...I saw Rohi had asked...he said I just want to concentrate on Men's Health. What do you think about that? And that is one way to approach it, is to kind of just pick a couple magazines, and study them really hard, and develop ideas for them. That's pretty much how I operated, you know?

I was in Seattle magazine and Entrepreneur. So I developed ideas mostly for them, and every once in a while, I'd pitch somebody else, but I'd get in the groove of really, really knowing what they wanted, and then it was easier to deliver, and this relates to Carol's question in Ephrata about...

As opposed to me, Carol, about how do you determine if it's worth your time investment as you're doing all this research, and putting these preliminary quotes together, and writing the query, and I'd have to say the answer is if you did that analysis as a new writer, it would not pan out. It would not pencil out. You would think I'm crazy.

But as Linda said, it's going to get easier and more efficient as you go. If you were going to go forever having to fully pre-interview, and research, and find news angles, and write page-and-a-half long queries, no one would write for magazines, but that's not what's going to happen hopefully. You're going to get efficient.

You're going to do things like I was talking about, like daisy chaining pre-interviews off of existing interviews so that you don't have a lot of extra research to do, and you'll study a particular publication and get a better and better sense of what they want. So your hourly rate will improve dramatically as you go along here. Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, and you know, I want to mention something related, which is that one of the reasons I'm encouraging everybody to look at markets and look at the thousands of markets out there to figure out the best fit for your idea is because everybody is flogging the same three or four markets. Family Circle, Entrepreneur, Parents, and so on.

And I have to tell you, I've written for all these magazines. I've written for many of the national women's, and health, and parenting magazines, and the thing with them is you almost always have to pitch them. You can be writing for them for five years, and they are still expecting a gigantic, fleshed-out pitch from you in a lot of cases, and it's just not

time efficient for you when you could be writing for a trade magazine, or a smaller parenting magazine, or a custom publication or the editor calls you with ideas.

So I really want you to be creative in thinking about your markets because everybody is thinking I want to write for these top magazines, and I call them a nice dessert, but for me, the bread and butter assignments that paid the rent were the smaller trade and custom publications, and I think that's the case for many, many writers.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, and at this point, there's some online markets that pay reasonably nice too, and yeah, you know, there's a lot of custom content and brand journalism projects going on and stuff where...this must be why I didn't write for the women's magazines, because that's just really arduous.

And that's actually why I switched from writing for Entrepreneur magazine to writing for them online, is because they had a bunch of editor changeover, and their pitching process became incredibly onerous where it would take like, eight weeks every time to get an approval even though I had a relationship.

And it would be going through all these different hands, and then the word counts were going down and down, and I found I could pitch a one-paragraph pitch to the online editor and get a \$600 online exclusive article. So I just started doing that instead. You do have to think about efficiency and how you enjoy spending your time.

So Ananda said she found a market, Fine Gardening, that says they want all the articles in first person. So they're essays then. You're probably just going to send them in. Yeah, they're not going to have expert interviews because that's not what they want, but that means that they're also not a fit for Pitch Clinic because, in general, you just write those up and send them in and you don't send pitches about them.

She says is there a good resource list somewhere of quality online and print magazines that accepts freelance writing? We call it the Writer's Market here in the U.S. There are some other countries that do similar type products. There are some lists online. Do some Googling around. Online markets are tougher. I feel like the guide for that has yet to emerge.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. It's a bit new, but yeah.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. There are a few compilations, and if you check out my blog, I have like, 140 websites and blogs that pay, but it's all pretty low pay. It's like \$50, \$100 a post. Mostly we do research, and we ask for networks, and at this point, if you Google health/trade publications, you'll be swimming in answers in possible markets. So it's not like it is difficult to find.

It is sometimes difficult to know if they pay, but sometimes you just have to ask them, and if there doesn't seem to be any way to ask them, you cannot find any sort of contact, they probably don't take freelance. Good markets that take freelance, if you go on their website, they usually have a here's our guidelines, or here's the editor's email address, or something.

So Maureen has a magazine where they want an old fashioned mailed query letter with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. I know Parade is like that. She says I prefer to query by email. Yeah, wouldn't we all? You say with attached clips. Let me just caution you never to attach anything to anything that you send to an editor you don't already know because they're just going to delete your email. They're very paranoid about opening any attachments from anyone they don't know.

But she says would it be a mistake to go ahead and query by email despite the guideline? I would go ahead and mail it in if they specifically have guidelines that state that. When I did that with Parade, they emailed me back, and then from there, I emailed them.

So places that still say that, I just think it's a personality test. It's a hurdle. They're giving you an assignment and seeing if you will take the trouble to do that, and if you do, you show that you know how to follow directions, and I think it's pretty old school at this point, but yeah, I think there are still some people doing it. Linda, thoughts on that?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. You mentioned not to attach clips, but I did want to add that when you write your query, you could say I've written for X, Y, and Z, and I'd be happy to show you clips if you'd like, and then if they ask for the clips, then you can attach them, but I wouldn't send them unsolicited.

Carol Tice:

Correct. Absolutely.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. So, onward. I like Barbara's question.

Carol Tice:

I don't understand Barbara's question. So you take it.

Linda Formichelli:

Barbara, I understand you. She says I expect that the ideas that swirl around in my head like chaos matter is a result of lack of direction, niche identification, and lack of relationships with editors. Would you say that this is the case? Honestly, I think that my head will be misshapen if I look in the mirror. Ideas going one way, then another. Then again, do you have any advice on how I might reign in my runaway imagination?

And I have to tell you, I think that is awesome. I think that's what you want. I mean, I don't know if you were on the call last week where somebody had an idea, and I said, you know, I don't think that'll work, but that reminded of this, and then that reminded me of that, and that made me think of this, and I think that will be totally awesome for this completely different publication.

That's kind of how you want your mind going, where you're just taking in all this information, synthesizing it, making new connections, coming up with these crazy ideas, tweaking them, figuring out where they fit. I mean, for me anyway, it's not a linear process. I'm an idea person. I take it in from everywhere, synthesize it, and then come out with ideas. What do you think, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Free-associating is a big, important part of this process. I don't think there's anything wrong going on there. I just wrapped up blogging for Forbes four times a month for three years, and my idea file for them was 60 pages long, and I do delete things as I use them.

So that's 60 pages of mostly ideas that I didn't end up using of just iterating, iterating, iterating, thinking, thinking, collecting string, collecting ideas, throwing old press release links on there, going, oh, this could be something. So there's a lot of that that goes on, and yeah, I don't think we're going to discourage you from doing that process. That process is important and good.

Linda Formichelli:

What I have to say though, I think what's bothering her is that she's not finding a niche, and I started out as a generalist. If you have a ton of ideas and a ton of interests, start out as a generalist, and your niches will find you, which is the most organic and sustainable way to do it as opposed to going I think I'll try this niche. Oh, that didn't work out. I think I'll try this one, which is where you write in anything that's interesting to you.

And suddenly you'll start being like, oh, I'm getting a lot of nutrition articles, and I'm really liking this, and a lot of marketing articles are coming up, and that's really cool, and you'll find yourself...you can develop more than one niche. I have several. So I don't think there's a problem. I think you just need to reframe how you're thinking about it.

Carol Tice:

You know what? I saw so many questions along those lines in the forums, but I don't know what my niche is. I didn't even know that I was supposed to have a niche. I was just like, I'm writing stuff. Amazing feature.

Linda Formichelli:

Same thing here.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. When you start out, I wouldn't be too obsessed with trying to figure out your one ideal niche, since I have nine of them still. Yeah. Iterate a lot of ideas. See where your ideas are coming, and then see where you find markets that pay you, and you're going to go through time, and as you go, you're going to see, oh, the articles about this pay better than the articles about that, and I kind of like it better.

And it evolves organically out of doing a lot of writing and working with a lot of different markets. I mean, pick two or three areas that you think are likely for you, and do a bunch of ideas on them, and just let it roll from there, and don't be too worried about how it's shaken up.

So Melinda did an article for an editor, and now she has sent more pitches, and all she gets is thanks, Melinda, and then nothing. So can I just write back and say does that mean you are considering some of these pitches, and if so, when can I expect an assignment? That isn't how I would put it.

Linda Formichelli:

It's a little demanding sounding.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. A little the world owes me an assignment, which they don't. I'd probably say, hey, just wanted to check back in. Sounded like maybe you liked that. I really want to pitch it around some other places if you're not interested. Could you let me know in the next week? Thanks. You know, something like that.

Linda Formichelli:

Very nice. Nicer than you are in real life.

Carol Tice:

What?

Linda Formichelli:

Took you a second there.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, Jenna is asking about front of the book. Yeah. In case you missed the earlier question, we do recommend you just go ahead and write those up and send them in. You don't query because the query would be longer than the piece.

Linda Formichelli:

You could write a short query, but yeah, sometimes if you really like the idea and it's like, 300 words, why not just write it up? I broke into several magazines that way. Psychology Today, Details, and I think...there was another one, but yeah, it works.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Sarah says can you talk about finding studies and sources? Well, we kind of already did sources. I'm glad you bring up studies though because I think I did see some that were pretty bogus and one person that was even proposing, well, can't I just do my own study to get some data?

And you really can't because you're an interested party trying to get a particular answer out of your study. So you're not a credible source for that study. What you really want is a disinterested third party that has done the source, not a study by Clorox about how using Clorox makes your clothing way cleaner than anything else, and there's a ton of that self-interested research being produced by businesses these days.

Elance puts out a ton about how being a freelancer is awesome. Our people all say so. Yes, well, that's the slice of people who work through Elance, not the whole world of freelancing, and it's just completely self-interested. So what you want is a foundation, a place like Gallop that's known for conducting impartial polls, a think tank that does nothing but research about a particular topic.

She also says can you talk a little about online and digital markets? I feel uncomfortable pitching websites and digital markets. Do they work differently? Not very. How do you know who is legitimate and who isn't and figure out who to approach?

Well, most of the online markets that take freelance and pay have writers' guidelines just sitting on their site. I haven't found it really difficult to figure out, but you can always ask around your network if you see one and say, hey, what does Brazen Careerist pay, if anything, kind of thing. Yeah.

Mimi says is it okay for a query to go longer than a page? Yes, indeed.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, and we talked about that earlier. So, yeah.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. She says can you ballpark a minimum and maximum word count for a query to an editor who's never heard of you? It just really depends on what magazine you're talking about. Linda, you have some resources here. Did you put them in the chat too?

Linda Formichelli:

Those are for Mimi's next question. She said I think a lot of us would narrow down potential markets to approach more quickly if we knew how much they paid for articles. Some places give very big indications of what they'll pay, like the Christian Science Monitor. What's the easiest way to get accurate numbers? Do you recommend subscribing to Writer's Market online?

Writer's Market's a pretty good resource. It's not at all comprehensive because they couldn't possibly have all the magazines out there, but it's a good start. I'm going to post

something in the chat. There is a website called Who Pays Writers. It's kind of like a Wiki where people post what they've been paid for various magazines, and you can search.

And they have some big-name magazines in there too. The most recent post says Cosmo pays \$2.00 a word for 1200-word essays for example, and then Carol had a guest post on the Renegade Writer blog called 6 Smart Ways to Find Out If a Magazine Pays for Freelance Articles. So I'm going to post those right now.

Carol Tice:

Oh, I had totally forgotten I did that. Thank you for remembering, and when I was really actively looking for more magazines markets, I did have the Writer's Market online, and I would go on there and look at their postings of new markets that had just come on, and I would go on there and put in key words and run their database to five dollar signs and just see what came out.

Linda Formichelli:

I did the same thing. I would look at everything that has, I think, four as their top, and then I would look at everything that has four dollar signs. Everything in the whole thing.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. I'd just go, who pays a lot? That's who I want to write for.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, because for them, four dollar signs is like \$0.50 a word and up, which is not what I would consider four dollar signs, but whatever.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. So Jackie says do you do a lot of traveling to report and then write your stories, or is it primarily done by phone and internet? The vast majority of what I've been doing lately is phone and internet. It really depends on who you're writing for. When I wrote for Seattle magazine and was reporting stories about what's going on in our town of Seattle, I did a lot of in-person, shoe leather type work.

When I did features for Forbes, I went out and talked to those business centers in person just because they were paying me \$2.00 a word. I thought they deserved it. It was certainly expected I think, but in general, often when you're reporting for national stories, no one's envisioning that you're going to fly all around the country to talk to all these experts. It's mostly on the phone.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I think I've done hundreds of articles...I don't even know how many I've done, and I think I have literally done maybe 3 to 5 in-person interviews ever, but it depends on, again, just the stories you're writing. If you're going to do an in-depth profile of somebody for a big magazine, they're going to want you to go out there and talk to the person and so on.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. The question is could you bring back that story without physically being there? Would it make any difference if you were there or not there? For instance, I wrote a story for Seattle magazine that was all about where does Seattle trash go? And I followed it where it goes, and went, and saw, beheld the unbelievable 10-story-high pile of recycling and the amazing, gigantic humps of compost and all the way to The Dalles, Oregon to the dump that the rest of it goes to, and there is no way I could've reported that story remotely without going and beholding what there was. So that's the question you're asking yourself. Is do I need to see something here? Do I need...

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. I just wanted to...

Carol Tice:

Go ahead.

Linda Formichelli:

Oh, I was going to say I did one for Writer's Digest where I was talking about famous writers and their writing spaces, and I found some writers...I think they had several writers doing it because I can only do people in New Hampshire.

And I went to visit Lisa Gardner at her writing space, and took a look around, and took pictures, and talked to her, and interviewed her in person because I can't really talk about the person's writing space and the atmosphere in there and what it looks like unless I'm really there looking at it.

So, yeah, if it makes a difference, then yes, but in most cases, it's not going to. You know, if you're interviewing an expert on the newest nutrition study, it doesn't matter if you see them face-to-face.

Carol Tice:

I've also met with people on Skype. One of my Forbes features for the magazine, I did a Skype call with him and had him get up with his laptop and show me around his office and see what it was like in downtown Des Moines or wherever he was.

There was a famous reporter...I'm forgetting who now, who always had these great details in his article, and people knew he never went anywhere, but he would always ask them. He'd say what do you have on your desk that's like a totem for you? Do you have some sayings on the wall? I'm just curious what your touchstones are, and he would just get that on the phone. So you can be creative.

So Katrina has a question. Do you have any tips for following up with an editor after a rejection? I had a pitch accepted and then nicely rejected. I read Jon Morrow once wrote back why, and he got a response, but I'm not...

Linda Formichelli:

I love that.

Carol Tice:

But I'm not confident enough to do that. I don't think I am either. Do you have suggestions on that? I don't know. I always tended to just move on.

Linda Formichelli:

Well, I don't know. It depends on the rejection. If it's just a form rejection like sorry, this isn't right for us, I'd be like, all right, whatever, but if they wrote back what I call a nice rejection, where they maybe gave you a reason or invited you to pitch again or something, I would always write back and say thank you very much for considering my idea. It's too bad it won't work for you, but I'm going to get busy brainstorming some more ideas for you, and then I would do that.

And I have a writer friend, Kelly James-Enger, who...I can't remember what she called it. Like pinging them or something, where, within 24 hours of getting a rejection, she would have another idea out to them while she was still fresh in their mind. I never did that, but it worked for her.

Carol Tice:

No, that is something I do do. Yeah. I am the idea queen, and if you don't like this one, yeah, I'm going to just pop another on you right away. Absolutely.

Linda Formichelli:

You're going to wear them down.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I have more ideas. I want to keep in your mind that I am an idea machine, and you should totally think of me if you need to fill some space. So Deanne has a book author she wants to interview, but she's from Australia. Does it matter that she's not in the U.S. for a magazine like Parents? I don't know their topic. I know Entrepreneur, no non-U.S. sources unless they're Richard Branson. They just do not write about non-U.S. companies. Maybe they're a little better now, but historically, that was a really ironclad rule.

Linda Formichelli:

But I think if it's a book that's going to be available in the U.S., I don't think it matters if she's used as an expert source if she's in Australia. I mean, I would always float it in the query. You know what I mean? If she has a really great book, and an editor will let you know. I love the idea, but you can't use this source or whatever.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Agree, and as long as it isn't the whole article is about this one expert from Australia. Yeah, that probably wouldn't fly, but if she's just one of your three experts in a

typical feature, it's probably cool, especially it sounds like she's right on the nail of your topic. So that matters.

So Melinda was asking if people have had good luck paying for Mediabistro and using their How To Pitch guides? We're actually pretty down on those. Right, Linda?

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. There was a big dust-up a couple years ago that it was discovered that they were recycling their How To Pitch articles without updating them, and you're paying for these. You know what I mean? So they would be like, oh, here's a great market, and here's how to pitch, but the information was two years old, and I'm down on Mediabistro because I've had bad experiences with them, and I say they're kind of jerky. So I don't recommend people go to them.

Carol Tice:

I just never heard a big success story where they were like, oh, Mediabistro, I'm just getting these amazing leads. I really never heard anybody rave about it. So that's kind of what I go with that on. Oh, yeah. Rohi was saying he hasn't found any guidelines for Men's Health. Then just study the publication if you can't find them, or call up the magazine and ask if they have writer's guidelines, or email their editor and ask if they have writer's guidelines. Those would be some possibilities.

Linda Formichelli:

Let's get to Ashley. We skipped one.

Carol Tice:

No, I got him earlier on, the other one.

Linda Formichelli:

Ashley's? Okay.

Carol Tice:

Oh, Ashley? Did I skip something by Ashley?

Linda Formichelli:

Right below Rohi.

Carol Tice:

Oh, yeah. No, this is a good question. I'm glad you caught that. Do you want to read that?

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. I keep brainstorming ideas and then finding out that a similar or exactly the same idea has just been covered by a major publication. Yeah. Been there many, many times. I guess it means I'm on the right track with my ideas, but always a day late and a dollar short. What can I do? Carol, I know you want to answer this.

Carol Tice:

I do. Just because it's already recently appeared in magazine X does not mean it will not appear in magazine Y. It just means you can't pitch it to that magazine any more. Those of us who do a lot of news reporting have watched what we call the news cycle, where a story will go through every magazine, every form of media, radio, television.

It'll start at a tabloid. You know, so and so was doing this, and then some newspaper will verify that's really real, and they'll start writing it, and then it'll be on 20/20 and 60 Minutes, and eventually it'll go back to the tabloid. It'll go all the way around, and everybody will write some angle on it.

Oh, yeah, I did a fun article about this where I took the story of...I'm going to find this one. I couldn't find that other one, but I'm going to find this one because I took the story of Angelina Jolie having her preventive double mastectomy and talked about how all kinds of different markets would continue to go merrily along reporting that story. So that'll give you an amusing look at that.

I will never forget TMZ's real angle. Angelina's post-mastectomy breasts look awesome. The thing is every magazine has their own readership and their own interests, and they want a different take on that story. They want to know different things about that story, and so if it's a great story and you have another angle for it that's right for another readership, you're fine.

I've even written the same story myself for more than one readership. I would do a story for the Puget Sound Business Journal about new restaurants that are opening in Seattle in the downturn. Like hot, million-dollar, build-out restaurant openings, and then I wrote that story again for Nation's Restaurant News for a national audience of restaurant owners instead of a Seattle audience of all kinds of business owners. So that's all it means, is that you can't do that one magazine and that you need a different angle for a different magazine.

Linda Formichelli:

I like Jessie's question, and by the way, I like your ideas too, Jessie. You have the board game idea, and we're a big board game family and the board game industry. So we're cool with that. Anyway, the question is I noticed that as I write my query, I have a number of thoughts on little tweaks or alternate ways I could present the overall idea.

The problem is I'm not sure what precise slant would be most appealing to editors. Should I include some alternate ways to present the article in the query, or does that make the query seem watered down or less appealing? Carol may have a different take on this, but I do think it makes it seem kind of diluted where you're not presenting a strong idea that you're confident is going to be good.

I feel like you would be confusing them, because what editors want to do is read your pitch and say, wow, I can see that headline on the cover, and I can see the article laid

out just this way right inside. Whereas if you're presenting three, or five, or whatever, or I could do these sidebars, or I could do a chunky format, or I could do a charticle, they're just going to not be able to envision it as strongly because now you're introducing uncertainty into it. What do you think, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I mean, maybe in a tagline I might write, in the alternate, I could do this one other slant, but in general, what you want to do is come in sort of like Wonder Woman, just like I have this awesome idea. Bullets bounce right off it. It is so for you. This is what the angle is. You will love it. You want to come from a power position.

And I think you can't do that if you're like, there are 8 different ways we could tweak this, and I haven't decided which is the best one. Yeah, it's not that strong, but let's go to Cora's classic question that we always want to get. How long do you leave an idea with an editor before following up, and just following up on email or over the phone?

As Linda well knows and longtime followers of my blog will also know, I do not follow up. I just send more pitches. I assume I will never hear back again and move on as if that is the end of the road, and then when I hear back, I'm pleasantly surprised. I do not invest any mental energy in wishing, worrying, wondering if it's the right amount of time to call or email and how should I do it.

I just think it sounds desperate, and I just don't like the whole dynamic of it. So I don't do it. I just send more, and more, and more ideas. So that's me. Linda does actually follow up.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes, and I actually interviewed a writer once who said that she got 90% of her assignments through follow-ups. So I always did that. I would usually give it two weeks, which I think is a pretty good amount of time, and I would just say I sent you my query titled X on date Y. I haven't heard back from you. So I'm afraid it might've gotten lost in cyberspace. So I'm pasting it below again, and let me know what you think.

And I would paste it below again so they wouldn't have to go look it up again, and I would get response like, oh, I meant to get to this, or oh, I didn't see it, or oh, my computer crashed, or whatever, but I've never had anybody be upset at me or angry at me for following up, and I've gotten assignments that way. So it's really up to you. You could do what Carol does. You could do what I do. It depends on your comfort level.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, but definitely keep it to one follow-up, or you start to be a stalker.

Linda Formichelli:

And I would email. Well, you know, sometimes if I was really wanting to do this idea, I would follow up with an email, and then I would follow up after that with a phone call, and then I would just give up.

Carol Tice:

So Louisa, who has that fabulous moms and guns story pitch...

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, that's awesome.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Floating around said she came on the story because her husband's coworker's wife was getting a concealed carry permit. Can I open my pitch with that anecdote or is it too close of a relationship? I don't think it is. It's a coworker, not a friend and his wife, and I think it's far enough removed, but you could also probably work with any gun shop to get some great example of a woman who came in and bought a gun and got a permit.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, and Louisa, I mentioned in that thread that I have a friend who got a gun in the last year or two. She's a mom of a toddler and a kindergarten kid, and I think she owns a cross-fit gym now. She's pretty hardcore, but if you want me to hook you up with her, I could possibly do that.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. So Tori says she's pre-interviewing, but I'm not sure what a really great quote looks like or how to get one on a 10-minute call. The short answer is practice, but a couple quick tips. Ask open-ended questions. Be sure you're not asking questions that could be answered yes, or no, or I don't think so.

You want to ask really open questions that get them talking and sometimes questions that maybe push their buttons a little bit where they're going to have a really heated response. How do you react when people say that you're defrauding the city of Seattle with this project? And you can send a few questions ahead to get them thinking, but this is sort of like the Supreme Court on pornography.

Great quotes, you're going to know them when you hear them. They're going to just smack you in the face. They're not process oriented. They're lively. They have emotion words in them. They're succinct. They're fascinating. They're not everyone should eat more salt in their diet says so and so, or you should take your dog outside three times a day says so and so. These are things that should be paraphrased that are just facts that you're getting. Linda, you have any other great quote tips?

Linda Formichelli:

Not on that. No. I think you did an awesome job.

Carol Tice:

So Steph out in the Netherlands says I see business-to-business a lot on blogs on the Internet, and I'm not sure what it means. In terms of freelance writing, this is the world of

trade publications on the publication side of writing for businesses whose primary customer is another business.

So like enterprise software companies that sell to companies. They sell their software to other companies or Nation's Restaurant News, a magazine for owners of businesses. That's sort of the world of writing for business and writing to a business customer.

So Quinn says no submission guidelines on the one...what do you recommend? Call them. Email them. Tell them about myself or just ask for the guidelines? I don't know if I've ever asked anyone for guidelines. I guess I have.

Linda Formichelli:

You know, I don't even look at guidelines. I don't use guidelines. I know how to write a good query. I know how to find the right editor. If I'm pretty certain they use freelance, I'm not too worried about their guidelines personally. I mean, I've never had a problem.

I got to tell you, I once spoke with an editor. I think she was at Women's Day or something, and she said most editors don't know what is in their guidelines because they were written a long time ago by somebody else. It's not like they're reading them every day.

And the purpose of a lot of guidelines is to scare off new writers with all of these qualifications. You need to have this. You need to have that. So I just ignore the guidelines personally.

Carol Tice:

Just study the publication, and then you should know all you really need to know. You'll know if particular sections are staff written. You'll know what a typical word count is that they work with. So Quinn said Linda has said to offer editors solutions to problems, and is that an alternative as something you should do in pitching a magazine, pitching a roundup or the alternative of doing multiple pieces on a single business? I don't know.

Linda Formichelli:

Well, we just answered this with Jessie pretty much. I would just keep it to one idea, but also my post was about bringing editors solutions, not problems. So if you have a problem like, oh my God, my key source isn't showing up, you don't write to her and say that. You say, oh, I also found these other three sources I can use instead. Your query, I wouldn't really call it a problem. So I don't think it really fits this mold, but yeah, like we were telling Jessie, I think if you come up with one strong idea and present it really succinctly and strongly, I think that's your best bet.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I'm aware that we're coming up on the hour, and once again, just so many questions, but we'll just keep rolling. Quinn is planning to pitch a series to a local weekly that's expanding their coverage, and she just wants it for the clips. She's not concerned

about the money. I think I saw this on the forums and responded. She said how do I handle this in my query letter?

My recommendation is to not pitch them a series. Pitch them an idea, and get an assignment, and then say, hey, what if this got expanded into a series? No one's going to assign you a series off the bat. They don't know you. They've never worked with you. No one's going to green light that.

All right, Linda says she has an answer to Sarah's question.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Sarah says for one of my queries, I will get a quote from a vet as one of my experts. I'm assuming it's not ethical to quote my own vet since I pay for her to care my animals. Is this correct? Yeah, I wouldn't interview your own vet, not only for the reason you stated, but also because when you are pitching an article, you want to get not the most convenient to you sources, like people you already know or people in your local area, but you want the very best sources, especially if you're pitching a national magazine.

If you're pitching a local magazine, yes, you want local vets, but not your own. If you're pitching a national magazine, you're going to want to contact the American Medical Veterinary Society. See if you can get some people who are professors, or the heads of vet clinics, or the authors of books, things like that. You want some bigger names that are more authoritative than a small town vet. So think about who would really impress the heck out of this editor, not who's the easiest for me to get.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I agree. So Sarah says I like long-form journalism, but I worry about being able to execute on them. Yeah. They often don't pay out as an hourly basis, but a lot of us really have a passion for doing long-form. I used to write for Seattle magazine just because I loved it, and it was the only place I could write 3,000-word features any more.

My tip on that is to look for ideas that are executable where it's not a book topic. It is containable in an article topic, and you know where the story is...like that one I just mentioned about where does Seattle's trash go? I could see where the stories go. Okay, I'm going to go three places. There's recycling. There's compost. There's the dump. I'm going to talk to some city officials.

I see where this story is, and it's pretty contained, and I can talk about how laws are changing, and how the rules are changing, and what we can expect in the future. How much trash are we going to make? What are we going to do with it all? I could kind of see where the story was.

You want to watch out about getting into long-form stories where you don't know where that story's going to lead and you don't know how many people you might need to talk to. I actually had one of those that I worked on forever and ever, and it never saw print.

It just was a bottomless pit. It was about a charity fraud, and it was like, I could never wrap it up with a bow and get to the end of it. So you really want to watch out for that.

So, Ananda, I think our handout on editors is coming at the end of class, if it isn't already up in Mod 2. I think it maybe comes in the final module of all our tips. We've covered where to find sources besides ProfNet and HARO.

Should we record our interview calls? If you would like to transcribe them and don't take good notes. I think we have a whole thread on what's the best way to record a call. It depends on how you're doing your call and what platform.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, and I had a big blog post up last year about how to record interviews, and if you look back through the chat, I posted it up there because people were talking about it in the chat, and it's probably out of date already, but I think it'll give you a good start. It's always changing, but yeah, I have to tell you though. Can I just mention how I do it?

I use Skype. I pay for a regular phone number. I can call any number. It looks like I'm calling from a regular number, but I'm calling on Skype, and then there's something called call recorder, which I think is just \$20, and it pops up when you open Skype. You click record. It saves it as a QuickTime file I think, and then I would just send that to the transcriptionist. So it was very straightforward, easy, no recorders, no wires. It was awesome.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, but remember if you're just starting out and don't have the money for a transcriptionist, that's spending three hours transcribing that. I had a formative experience early on that kicked me of the habit of recording because I don't have the time. It cuts your hourly rate. I take really good notes, and I type 120 words a minute. That's my solution and...

Linda Formichelli:

Well, you know what I used to do when I was...oh, go ahead. Sorry.

Carol Tice:

It's okay. I just want to move on because of time. So Lisa says is there a reference for trade pubs like Writer's Market? No. Writer's Market has some trade pubs, but you can also go to TradePub.com and see many, many trade pubs.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes. It's not meant for writers, but it's a good start.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Oh, so Sarah says when you see a vet being cited around a lot, would you recommend using them? Sometimes, as long as you don't think they're too

overexposed, they've already appeared everywhere. Maybe you want to find some other one.

Oh, Lisa says I assumed the forums close when class ends on April 30. No. No, your access isn't going anywhere. You can keep on asking. It's cool. We'll stick our heads in once a week or something after the official time and check it out, or you can send us an email if you needed some feedback.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. We're getting a lot of questions on query lengths, but we answered that at the beginning.

Carol Tice:

We did those. Yeah. So Cora says...and I think someone else had this too. About should I put forward how I see the final feature in terms of word count? I never say what word count I think it should be, and I see that a lot with new writers. They say I am proposing a 1500-word feature about this. I've never said that in my life. Let the editor tell you how much space they've got for you.

Do you want to not get it because she only has 800 words or not get a 3,000-word feature because you said 1200 words? It just makes no sense. They are the expert in how much room they got, and you know not nearly enough to imagine, unless it's a regular column that's always 500 words, and then you just know that. Then you don't need to mention it.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, and then you mentioned format, sidebars, boxouts. Yes, if you have any sort of packaging ideas...I think this should be a charticle, or I'll write a sidebar on this, or I'm envisioning a chunky format, yeah, you definitely want to mention that because you are really trying to paint a picture in the editor's head, not just of what will be in the article, but how it's going to look on the page really, if you have an idea. If you don't have a packaging idea, you don't have to have one, but it really strengthens your pitch.

Carol Tice:

Right. So Renee says can we talk more about FOB? She says she's looking at Family Circle, and she doesn't see what the FOBs are. Well, look in the front of the book at the little 200, 300-word short items that are up there in the front. They might not have it.

Linda Formichelli:

And not everybody has...

Carol Tice:

Some people don't do it.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. They might not have them, and they might be in the middle of the magazine. It's just a lot of magazines have a news roundup, or tips, or trends that are just a whole bunch of 300-word pieces all in one section. Those are what we call FOBs, but not everybody has them.

Carol Tice:

One hundred fifty words even.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Yeah. Sure.

Carol Tice:

Rachel says is it appropriate to include photos with your query to bolster your pitch? No. They are going to use pro art and they're not expecting that in general.

Linda Formichelli:

But you can mention...you know, if you're pitching a smaller magazine and you say I have photos, you could mention it, and they might ask to see them, but yeah, usually not.

Carol Tice:

So Najua says she's having trouble striking that balance between you should do some legwork and/or you're over reporting, and over researching, and wasting time. She says I'm spending hours on research to make sure the idea can stand before developing a query. Am I over researching? Probably not at first until you get a sense of your magazines, and then it'll get easier.

So, yeah, we answered this question about American experts for American magazines.

Linda Formichelli:

Wow, you're calling from Malaysia. Wow.

Carol Tice:

I know and Slovenia. Hey.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah and the Netherlands I see on here.

Carol Tice:

I know. This is a very international class.

Linda Formichelli:

And India. Yeah. This is so awesome.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. It really is. So Maggie says I'm curious if there's an average number of ideas that get pitched before one hits the mark? There really isn't. It's totally individual about the strength of your pitches and the markets you're trying. You know, everybody who's got this I want to write for Family Circle, Redbook, Entrepreneur, Obsession, these are super, super, super competitive places. Really hard to break in as the new writer.

If you're banging your head against the wall, think about writing for Seattle Business Magazine, or Atlanta Parent, or something and getting more wins and working your way up. What is the difference between the homework you previously approved and the homework assigned at the end of Mod 2? Well, in Mod 1, we were only looking at your headline, your dek, one-line summary, and what market is it for. In Mod 2, you are writing the query letter.

Linda Formichelli:

Based on the idea that we approved.

Carol Tice:

The full thing based on your approved idea.

Linda Formichelli:

So we have another question about the class here too. Patty says do we need all assignments and queries approved and sent out by April 30 to qualify for the refund? No. By the end of April 30, you need to have completed all the homework assignments in the class, which is the idea, the query letter, the letter of introduction, and then revising those based on the editor's feedback until they're satisfied with them. That needs to be done by April 30. By May 26, which is the date we are having a special call for people who finished the class, by that date, you need to have your 8 queries and/or letters of introduction sent out.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Our basic vision is you're sending those out in May. That you learn in April, and in May, you're sending out two pitches a week or thereabouts. They don't have to be that way.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, and they need to be unique, individual ideas. You're not going to send the same thing to 8 people and call it a day.

Carol Tice:

Renee says I want to pitch a particular director at Family Circle, but I'm having trouble finding her email. Call the magazine. She's tried Mediabistro, Writer's Market, Wooden Horse, Google. Yeah, call them up.

Linda Formichelli:

There's a website...if you look it up, you'll find it, but it lets you check whether email addresses are valid, and you can just guess at her email address and keep entering it until you find one that actually the system says is valid. Look it up on Google. I can't remember what it's called.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. This is in our how to find editor's emails, but look at the ad guide and the email convention that they use, and then, yeah, take a guess at it, and try and verify it.

So Leanne says when you're querying a long-form article, do you want to send the first few paragraphs to show you know where it's headed? Yeah. We're going to have you do that in short articles too if you take a listen to the query training.

Joy says when you're pre-interviewing, do you email two or three requests, or do you email more in case someone doesn't respond? I don't know. Like I say, I usually get them from people I'm already talking to.

Linda Formichelli:

Well, yeah, I hate doing this because I hate to ask somebody for an interview and be like, oh, sorry, I don't need you, but if you're on a tight deadline, you need to do that. A lot of people aren't going to get back to you, but I say if you can just get on the phone and try to get them right there with their 10 minutes this week, you don't have to worry about that. You call them up. You say can I talk to you for 10 minutes, and you talk to them for 10 minutes, and you're done.

Carol Tice:

So Katherine's saying can we run ideas and headlines by you in the forum to develop them for the May query submissions? You can, but in general, we'd like you to focus on getting a successful query letter draft done. People are going to be needing to interview and research, and there's going to be a lot of work going on, and then same with LOIs. So I'd say mostly focus on the homework. It's probably not realistic that we're going to give feedback on 8 ideas per student in this class. So, yeah.

Linda Formichelli:

Oh, I have a good question from Bob here. My query will involve interviewing 8 to 10 people. Do they all have to be done before the query? No. No. No, and I hope we talk about this in Module 2. You only need a couple, three people to get the gist of what you're doing, and you could always say I'm also planning on interviewing these people and then mention a few.

But you don't have to interview all those people for your query at all. In fact, 8 to 10 people for an article is a lot I would say. I mean, my rule of thumb is one per 500 words plus one. So a 1500-word article would have four sources. I can't think of an article where you need to interview 10 people, but maybe there's something you came up with that you do.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. What are you proposing there? We want you to think in terms of pitching a 500, 800-word story. That's the kind of things you're going to get as a newer writer. So that sounds like an awful lot of sources.

Chris says do you send more pitches to editors who aren't getting back to you on the first one? Yeah. Sure. Absolutely. Keep going. I just had a great guest post about someone who pitched 8 times or 13 times or something before they got...and then they got a gig. They got a gig. So, yeah. I'm just looking through the chat ones here.

Yeah, I feel like I'm imposing on people. You're not. You're not imposing on them. Can you look through Q&A? I'm scanning through chat.

Linda Formichelli:

Yes, I am.

Carol Tice:

Okay.

Linda Formichelli:

Oh, Tori says what is the best way to figure out the demographic of a magazine? I have a really hard time knowing when looking at the ads. You know, a lot of times, you can find their media kit online, which is what they use to sell ad space to advertisers, and that specifically says this is the demographic of our readers, because ad people want to know who they're reaching, and if they don't have it online, you can often contact their sales department and ask for a media kit, and that has a lot of information.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, I love the media kits. That will tell you everything. They know everything about their readers, and they want to get advertisers that are like our readers all make \$60,000 a year and live in the most ritzy parts of town and drive Mercedes. They know tons about their readers.

Linda Formichelli:

Oh, can I read this thing from...oh, sorry. I thought you were done.

Carol Tice:

Go ahead. Go ahead.

Linda Formichelli:

Oh, Katrina says I followed your advice for talking to experts this morning. I've contacted two experts via email and received immediate responses. Both experts were more than willing to help, especially the expert who I found via doing a search for upcoming book releases on Amazon. Best advice I ever got was to take advice of the

experts. So, just so you know, see, it works. The experts are happy to talk to you. Thank you, Katrina.

Carol Tice:

Oh, Bob said I'm trying to find the six best hip and emerging breweries in San Diego. I thought it would take a lot of interviews to make it accurate. No. Three experts, two even will do you there, and I think I said in the forums, look for awards that they've won. You can always qualify it out that way so that you have a leg to stand on data wise.

Eliza says how much time do you spend researching a magazine to decide if it's a good fit? Because I feel like I'm over researching. It's really hard to be efficient when you first start, but I'm a real skimmer. You don't need to read the magazine. You need to skim the magazine.

Look at the ads. Look at the headlines. Look at the topics. Look at the departments. See if bylines match the masthead or if there are freelancers happening. Do that with about three issues. I could probably do that in about 15 minutes and get a real sense of whether that one is for me or not.

Oh, Chris says where do you find upcoming book releases on Amazon? You just sort by release date, and then that throws all the things that haven't come out yet that are in the future to the top. Oh, yeah. Eliza just put in the same answer.

Linda Formichelli:

And Kat has a good question. Kat has written for clients, but she hasn't written anything on the subject of her first pitch which was approved last week. How do I sidestep this in the credentials section while saying I have writing experience?

So, yeah, if you can basically write a kick-ass query letter that shows that you have interviewed people and that you can talk about this topic, even though you've never written about it before, and then they can see that you have credentials, writing those two things added together means you can probably write about the topic you're pitching. So I wouldn't worry too much about it. You don't need to have expertise or experience in the topic you want to write about.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. So Monica says when you're sending simultaneous queries, do you ever send just the same query letter to different magazines? I haven't. I tend to tweak them. I don't think you really send them all the exact same thing.

Linda Formichelli:

Oh, my chat went away. Hold on.

Carol Tice:

Venus says the 8 pitches we sent out in May do not have to be approved to you? That's correct. We're hoping you've learned the fundamentals from us. By the time you go

through 4 weeks of this, you know what a salable idea is, and you're going to write your query. You're going to research and write your queries or write your LOIs and be sending them out.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah, and Dena's asking about the acronyms we're using, I think FOB and stuff like that. We have a glossary that we made of magazine terms. Where is it? Can we use it?

Carol Tice:

I posted one that's like 37 Terms You Need to Know. I think I put it up.

Linda Formichelli:

Where did you put it?

Carol Tice:

But that stands for front of the book...I think I threw it in chat, and HARO is Help a Reporter out. I think that's the other one that we've been using.

Linda Formichelli:

We use a lot of words like hed and dek.

Carol Tice:

Katrina found a contact for Rohi. I'm going to just copy it over to chat because it's in Q&A where he can't see it, and this is what we find. People throw up their arms and say to us, oh, I just cannot find any contacts here, and we can find it in five minutes. So you need to ask yourself how motivated you are here when you want to get things.

Linda Formichelli:

Can I read Shawanda's question?

Carol Tice:

Yeah.

Linda Formichelli:

Is a publication that's small in a specific niche or localized, like Boating Times Miami magazine, still considered a consumer magazine? Yes, it's still a consumer magazine as opposed to a trade magazine or a custom publication, and she says if so, would a pitch or LOI be best to send? I would say usually a pitch is the best to send for any consumer magazine. What do you think, Carol?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely.

Linda Formichelli:

I mean a query letter. Yeah.

Carol Tice:

I've run into a lot of writers who've said I keep writing and introducing myself to these publications, and they never write back, and it's because you have no ideas. Venus says if we daisy chain like I do, we're using the same sources for several ideas or articles for the same market. No, usually for different markets. I would then take that expert that I just used in market 1, and I would pitch that idea to market 2 usually.

Linda Formichelli:

Yeah. Do we transcribe these Q&A Dena wants to know? I can't remember. We do, right?

Carol Tice:

Yes, of course we do.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. Awesome.

Carol Tice:

We always do. So I like Shawanda's other question. I want to write about cruising, but my mother still works for a cruise line. Would it be a conflict of interest to pitch a story about that cruise line? Yes, it would. You are never going to use them as a source. Use other cruise lines. There are many.

Linda Formichelli:

We have a good question from Joe here. Are editors more likely to accept a pitch or at least respond if a writer indicates that they're interested in writing regularly for the publication, or is mentioning something like that too forward? I don't think that would be a benefit or an advantage in terms of your pitch to say and I want to write for you regularly because we all want to write for them regularly. You know what I mean? That's what we're competing for. They have no shortage of people who want to write for them regularly. So I wouldn't. I don't think it's a need to mention that.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Lots of questions about how to record calls. Take that over to the question forum and discuss. Everybody has their own favorites there. Kat says I've got clients and have written for content companies, but I haven't written anything on the subject of my pitch. How do I sidestep this in the credentials section while still saying I have writing experience? Like the English royalty do, never apologize. Never explain. Just say I am an Atlanta-based freelance writer.

Linda Formichelli:

I just took that question, Carol.

Carol Tice:

Oh, I'm sorry. So Joe wanted to hear more about what is brand journalism and what are custom magazines? Custom magazines are things like Costco Connection, Alaska Airlines Magazine.

Linda Formichelli:

Fresh Magazine for Hannaford.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, put out by companies. Brand journalism is when a company is running a magazine, and an example you can see online easily is American Express OPEN Forum, which is a sort of article/bloggish format newspaper kind of thing, and it's put out by American Express to just make you think about American Express more.

But it's just all small business articles. There's lots of that going on. Intel does it. Lots of people want to get into the act on that. Bob says advise me on how to educate a client who only wants to pay \$0.08 a word for blogs that require research and client interaction. They're really articles. You really can't.

Linda Formichelli:

No one's going to quadruple their rate because you asked. Yeah.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. The thing is, when you find really super low payers and they just don't understand the value, they don't understand that if they want an 800-word, fully researched article, it should pay \$400 at least, you're just not going to get them up anywhere near a professional rate. You just got to move on. He says I'd like to counter with \$0.20 a word.

Go ahead, but they're just going to say no likely, because first of all, blog posts aren't usually quoted by the word. So it's kind of a weird way to think of it. That's usually like \$100, \$200 a post if you're lucky. Yeah. Just in general, you can bang your head against those walls, or you can go find clients who actually understand the power of content marketing in their business.

Linda Formichelli:

And Katherine says what about email interviews versus live interviews? What's your experience? Actually, if you look in the forum under Module 2, somebody...was it Alex? Asked that same question, and Carol and I both had really long responses, but in general, you really want to try to do interviews on the phone if you possibly can for so many reasons. I wrote a blog post on it. I'm going to go look for it and put it in the chat. Hold on a second.

Carol Tice:

I just want to say that we're so impressed with the level of energy in this class. We have never had to run over, and you guys are just really, really on fire. It's totally cool. I am

pulling all of this into a word doc so I can look through it to look for things, and we'll do another thread back on questions and take more stuff if you missed anything.

Linda Formichelli:

Here's my post on email interviews in the chat and why you don't want to do them. Why did I just spell that in a totally weird way? Okay.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. You know, all of these are great initial questions to ask.

Linda Formichelli:

Did you get Kat's question on how can we query a custom magazine as one of our 8? Did you get that?

Carol Tice:

Yeah. Sure. Absolutely.

Linda Formichelli:

Okay. You can query trades, customs. Anything you want you can query as part of the 8, and Bob has...yeah, take that one.

Carol Tice:

Yeah, and if you want to pitch a business that's doing content marketing with an LOI where you follow all of our parameters on how to do that, you can do that. I don't care. What we want is pitching, pitching, pitching. I'm really excited about the format for this class because the big problem we have found is people do this, and then they just continue to stay frozen and don't send anything out.

And that's why we built this session of this class this way where it's all about we want to see a lot of pitches come out you where you've got to develop a lot of ideas and be iterating, iterating, and cranking stuff out, and not over elaborating, and over thinking, because this is how you do this for a living. You've got to send out a lot of pitches, especially when you get started.

You got to have a lot of ideas and send them out, and start getting feedback, and seeing where you get a pulse out of an editor who's maybe willing to work with you and who'll maybe give you that nice negative response where it encourages you to pitch them again and where someone might be interested. You can only really get better at this by doing it a lot. So that's why we have built it that way. Anyway, I'm going to let you all go. I feel bad that we're constantly running over, and I feel hungry.

Linda Formichelli:

Maybe we should make the calls an hour and a half, because our last two calls have been an hour and a half, and it's perfect, but yeah, my 6-year-old just arrived home. So I think it's time for us to wrap up.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. I think we're just going to call them a 90-minute block of time if you need it because we want to be here and get to the questions. I will look through what we didn't catch and put in anything I think we missed, and we will see you back on the forums, everybody. This is terrific, and post those ideas and hopefully soon those queries, and yeah, if you have not gotten a Mod 1 approval but you think maybe you should have one, if you could just PM one of us or something, we'll be sure to take a look in...

Linda Formichelli:

We'll bump it up or something. Yeah, but we need to approve you, and we try to remember to approve everybody who we think should be approved, but sometimes we're like, yes, the is great, and then we don't say move onto Module 2, and that's our fault.

Carol Tice:

Yeah. All right. We'll see you back on the forums, everybody.

Linda Formichelli:

Thanks, everyone. Bye.