

**Carol Tice:**

Hey everybody, it's Carol Tice here with Linda Formichelli.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Hello.

**Carol Tice:**

And this is our third week Q&A for Pitch Clinic. And we are here to talk about letters of introduction, and we're looking for people's sample idea bullets and their opening lead paragraphs of their LOIs. And we're also taking all the previous homework assignments, story ideas and leads of query letters. And I think that Linda has some opening thoughts she wants to share with you on just sort of what we've been seeing in the homework.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yes, and I do want to let everybody know that we're also taking a look at stuff from the previous week, so I know some people are posting ideas and things from the other lessons. Don't worry about that, we're also going to be taking those. Judy says she can't hear us. Can everybody else hear me? Carol, you can hear me, right?

**Carol Tice:**

Yes. Okay. ...solutions for her. Go ahead and give your thoughts.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yes. So one thing I'd like to mention about LOIs is that we seem to be getting a lot of LOIs where people are using our template a little too literally. So it will be, as a freelance writer I really enjoyed your article X, and then some like little compliment, and then, I went through your back issues and I have a few ideas I thought you might like... And I mean, it's at least worked for me, that's my template. But I would love to see people using a little bit more creativity.

I mean, you can definitely show your personality and write it in a different way, and change up the format a little bit. I mean, this is not something that editors are expecting word for word. And in fact, we've been teaching this class so many times I'm always afraid that editors are going to start getting a lot of these pitches and thinking, what is going on? Everybody's like taking the same drug here and using the exact same words.

I've even had writers in this class use my exact phrase, "I'm fast, professional, and easy to work with, no diva here." I've even had guys use it. So I just want you to know that's actually mine, and it's just there as an example, so I would love people to show their creativity and do it in their own way. As long as all the elements are there and it's well-written it's fine.

Also, we're getting a lot of great ideas, a lot of great pitches, we are also seeing a lot of pitches that are lacking some of the major elements that we talk about in the materials. And I have a feeling that some people are not actually looking at the materials but just

looking at the templates and kind of winging it or maybe just wanting us to critique everything right on the call, just coming up with whatever they want and wanting us to go over it on the call.

And I would really love people to go through the materials and make sure they have all the elements. You really do need a news hook, a lead, a nut graph, examples, experts, all of that stuff, and a lot of those are missing. So I just wanted to mention that. Please pay attention to the materials. And also, instead of using the templates word for word, come up with your own way of saying things. Carol?

**Carol Tice:**

I could not agree more. Yeah. I feel like the main drift of this class is to instill these fundamentals in you of, these are basic building blocks that if you've got these in a pitch your editor will at least feel like, this person knows how to pitch and has some ideas. And even if they don't like the one idea you send I just think it really ups your chances of having them say, "But sure, pitch me again sometime," or of saying, "Hey, no, not that one, but what about this idea I have? Could you write that?"

I just think these fundamentals signal to the editor that you understand what they need to know. I'd say if I had one big tip to give it's to put yourself in the shoes of your editor and think about them looking at 100 pitches in a week, or in some cases maybe in a day, and they're just flipping through, flipping through.

Make it easy for them to see that you have something where you know where the experts are, you know where the research stat is that anchors this, you have a news hook, and this is something that's executable in 500, 700 words. I was seeing a lot of book topic kind of very broad general things coming over, and I think that terrifies editors.

Because then they just think, I don't really know what I'm going to get in 700 words on this topic I've seen multiple books about, and I just need to know I'm not going to have a train wreck. Because you may know that the number one job of editors is to never have blank pages in the magazine, so they need to avoid disasters where something comes in and it just cannot run, it is a mess.

And that's what they're looking for is, that they've got a thing, okay, I see, this is something my readers need, it's got a news hook, it's got an expert that makes sense, it's got a research stat that makes it current, and they can see all the elements are there and that they could send you off to do this. So that's what you're trying to get done here. And that kind of informs our feedback.

**Linda Formichelli:**

And if I could...

**Carol Tice:**

Go ahead, Linda.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Well, if I could mention something too. If an editor doesn't know you or if you're just a brand-new writer, and then like Carol said, they need to have no blank pages, they're taking a huge risk on hiring you, and you need to do everything you can to convince them that you know what you're doing and that you have an idea that's going to fly. And that's why it's so important to mention at least in the full query what experts you're going to be talking to and to give a few fleshed-out examples.

So for example, I would tell your readers, and you'd give like two of them, and that shows the editor, okay, there's actually something there. These tips are good, they're fleshed-out. Instead of just kind of doing the tell, not show. You need to show, not tell. So you can't just say, "I will tell your readers the best way to organize their kitchen," you would need to actually give some examples of that, if that makes sense.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, and say who these tips are going to be coming from. I think we continue to see people who seem to be writing off the top of their own knowledge, and that is a terrific way to write your own personal blog, but that is not what editors are looking to assign. They're looking to assign stories where you are going to research and quote other experts, even if you know a lot about the topic. You should know that I've written articles for the Writer's Market, and I am not the expert in them.

I quote other people in them, even though I know a heck of a lot about freelance writing. And that's just how it works in reporting. You are not the expert of your story. Then you're writing a personal essay and it's a whole other world where you don't pitch, and you often don't get paid very much. Personal essays are really a tough, super competitive market.

And you tend to just write them up and send them in, so it's a different world from what we are covering in Pitch Clinic where we're looking to get something assigned where we're going to go out and talk to people and put a story together with multiple sources and points of view, so just a big thing to keep in mind. So with that, you want to kick it off with Alice's idea?

**Linda Formichelli:**

Sure. I think you were actually...

**Carol Tice:**

I have that idea, don't I?

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yes.

**Carol Tice:**

But I'd apparently like to slough it off on you, no, just kidding. Okay, so Alice has a new pitch for either American History or the DAR's magazine American Spirit. And here is the lead of it. So Alice, if you're on the call I'd love to hear what would be the proposed headline of it, which would help us to get oriented a little more.

But what she has is, "We're familiar with George Washington and Thomas Jefferson of the American Revolutionary War, but do you know about Robert Morris and Haym Salomon? They were men who helped fund the Revolutionary War while the almost 242,000,000 in Continental currency was being printed and devalued until the Colonies were on the verge of bankruptcy. Robert Morris served as Superintendent of Finance..." In the second reference you have you just want to say Morris.

"...served as Superintendent of Finance and more than once used his own fortune or credit to help keep the Colonies going, while Haym Salomon was a broker who helped raise funds for the war effort." And as a Jew I have to say I love this Jewish financier story in here. But reading through this I just thought it was a little bland, and that it in a way kind of went off in a couple side trails. Oh, Linda has the headline, "How the Revolutionary War Was Funded." I'm thinking we can do something more creative with that.

**Linda Formichelli:**

That could be a good subtitle.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, I feel like we need something...

**Linda Formichelli:**

We need something snappier for the title itself.

**Carol Tice:**

That's just what I was about to say. My reaction was that we could inject a little more drama into this, rather than just kind of basically saying, "Hey, these two guys helped fund the Revolutionary War." I was thinking something like, "While George Washington was crossing the Delaware two little-known men were helping pay for his boat." And then you lay out quickly who they are, and don't get into side trails like the Continental currency was being devalued and stuff. I think that's deeper into the meat of the story.

You just want to grab us with like, "Hey, here are two little-known Revolutionary War heroes who worked behind the scenes to pump the money in that we needed." And from here I'm assuming we're heading into a nut graph that says, "In my story, you know, Revolutionary dough..." or whatever we're calling it for a headline.

"Readers will learn how Salomon and Morris obtained the funding needed for the war, and I will talk to X, expert in Revolutionary War history," and so on. So it sounds like a

fun idea, I think it just needs a little punching up. Linda, anything else, or you want to talk about Amy's?

**Linda Formichelli:**

No, no, I agree. I thought it was a really cool idea, but I thought the same thing. I mean, you could definitely write it with a lot more drama, because it's really an interesting topic. And yeah, definitely what you have now for the headline sounds like it could be better as a subhead or a subtitle. So let's go to Amy's. I know we both had the same comment really.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, and this is apparently a postmortem on an LOI that she actually sent out and got a gig on, but I think we want to give you some cautions on it going forward. We're glad that this worked, but there's...

**Linda Formichelli:**

But they didn't want her ideas, but they wanted I guess to assign her something else.

**Carol Tice:**

Okay. So yeah, why don't you talk about the ideas here?

**Linda Formichelli:**

Okay. So it is for, what company is this for? Oh, it's a company that makes an invoicing tool. She saw that they had a blog and it hadn't been updated in a while, so she wanted to suggest some new content for them, which is awesome, that's perfect and great. Her ideas are, the company's name is Invoiced, and her ideas are, "How are Invoiced customers getting the most bang for their buck?"

"Why our customers chose Invoiced over other tools in the marketplace, and the top five customer requests for new Invoiced functionality, coming soon." And it's funny because Carol and I didn't know we were both working on this at the same time, and we both had the same comment that these ideas are very PR, they're very salesy. Instead of showing the benefit to the reader and giving them something that's interesting for them to read it comes off more like a press release. And I know Carol had some comments on that.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah. I mean, I have done a hell of a lot of business blogging, and I've never written a headline that had the name of the company in the headline of the blog post. In the world of content marketing and developing blog posts and things like that you just don't write stuff that comes off like a press release. That's not going to get any engagement or readers. Instead you kind of need to turn it a quarter hair where you might include a link from them, but it purports to provide a broader swath of valuable information.

So instead of how are Invoiced customers getting the most bang for their buck it might be something like, "How to get the most bang for your buck with an invoicing tool. Six

top tools compared,” something like that where you’re like, “Oh, comparison charts, I love those.” And that chart might show that Invoiced is the greatest solution, but it’s like you can’t be trumpeting like, this is all about how great Invoiced is, or no one’s going to read it.

And most companies are savvy enough to understand that that isn’t how we roll in business blogging. They call it content marketing because you’re providing a valuable content to the reader that gets your name in front of them, so it has to be a little less hit you over the head with a hammer kind of thing.

So yeah, that’s what I got on that. Yeah, Linda’s giving me a note on Martha. Yeah, I actually talked to her about the article on e-mails, so I think I’ve hit that and we’ve talked about it. But did you get her other one that’s the massage one in here?

**Linda Formichelli:**

I did. Let me do a search on this. Massage, here it is. Yes Martha, I mean, I hope you’re on the call. I got to tell you we love that you are really trying and you’re really taking direction, and I can see the improvement with every iteration that you do, and I love that you have a new idea for us. And it’s called “A Rowdy Client, What to Do?” and it is about what to do as a female massage therapist when you end up with a male client who behaves inappropriately.

So first of all, the headline “A Rowdy Client, What to Do?” it could be a little bit grabbier. And also, you have a question mark and an exclamation point after What to Do. And if you check out magazines, especially trades, they tend to use less gushy punctuation. You have to be very careful with exclamation points and also with overusing rhetorical questions or the question format. So that’s just a tip on that.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, I feel like magazines tend to cast this into the positive case. The thing is, no one wants to read an article about, let’s wonder about what to do about this together. What they want to read is your seven tips of how to... Yeah, they’re looking for the usable information, and you want to signal in the headline that you have it.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yeah. So it could be a really grabby headline. Depending on the magazine it could have a pun in it or something. And then the subhead could be, six solutions to male clients who, whatever. So that’s just a tip on that. And then another thing about this idea is, of course it sounds perfect for a massage trade magazine, as you suggested. You have some experience in this topic. But we’re wondering about the news hook. Has there been a recent incident?

Because I would assume that a massage trade magazine that writes month in and month out about client situations and how to handle them would have done this over and over again. So is there any way to make it new? Is there a new book, a new expert, is there an incident that you’ve seen in the news? Or even if you’re still a massage

therapist now, is there an incident that happened to you recently that you've never encountered before?

Because a lot of the times even though you won't be using your expertise in terms of giving tips, like here's what I do when this happens to me, a lot of magazines really do like anecdotal headlines where there's an anecdote from yourself or from somebody else. So that should be a really good lead and news hook all in one. So you said it's for *Massage Today* and *Massage & Bodywork*, the target market is massage therapists, sounds good.

You mentioned that you would interview the owner of a massage therapy training center and a female massage therapist who has been in practice for over 10 years. So I'm getting the idea that you know these people. And what Carol and I were both asking is, she said she spent 23 years as a massage therapist, so... I got to tell you, by the way, you probably have lots of ideas that could be turned into articles for these trade magazines.

So anyway, Carol and I both want to know, are these the absolute best experts for this article, or are they only ones that you happen to know? Because a lot of times we want to talk to our local pediatrician, or the foot doctor we went to recently, or our accountant, and because we know these people we know that they're pros.

But when you're writing for a trade magazine or any magazine they want not just who you know or who's most convenient to you but who is the very best expert on this topic. So there might actually be someone out there who is an expert in dealing with male massage clients or in dealing with these types of situations, and you want to seek them out and maybe name a couple of them.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, yeah, even though you know a few people start with a massage industry association and find out...

**Linda Formichelli:**

That's a good call.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, find out who their legal expert is and/or their trainer about setting healthy boundaries. And yeah, you kind of don't want to necessarily default to just sort of, I know a guy, even if you know a guy, but try and...

I covered a lot of beats for a long time, and I would still try and start with, okay, who'd be a good expert for this? Okay, I know a few people, but like, let's do some searching and see if I could find a new guy I haven't used before. You want to just see on Amazon, does someone have a new book out about this? Yeah, really look around.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yes, perfect, and then we have the opening to the article. I love your first sentence, by the way, "It's bound to happen." And you're like, what, what? And then it goes on to say, "You receive a telephone call from a new male client asking to book an appointment for an hour massage. You schedule a convenient time, giving him your address, directions to the office if needed, along with a request to call 24 hours prior to the appointment if the schedule time becomes inconvenient.

"I have firsthand experience with this situation, which gives me insight into how to handle a nude male client, however my experience will not be discussed or referred to." So your first sentence is, "It's bound to happen," and you're like, what, what, and then the drama kind of peters out, where it's like so far we have is that the client has scheduled an appointment. So we're like, okay, big deal, lots of clients schedule appointments.

And I think you also go into a little too much detail of like, giving the directions to the office and the request to call if it's inconvenient. I don't think we need that information. I think we need to know, "It's bound to happen. A male client makes an appointment, you get him on the table, and he does X," that's the drama right there, and I think that's what the crux of the article is. You need to get to that right up front. But I think this idea is really shaping up. I think it's looking good. Carol?

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, I agree. And yeah, the comment that you just made, this is something for really everybody to incorporate is, we all have a natural tendency to write what we call in journalism windup leads where we kind of include, "I got up in the morning and I brushed my teeth, and..." instead of cutting to the thing. And in journalistic writing you usually want to cut right to the thing that happens. We don't need to know what you wore that morning or...

You want to look at your lead and remember that every sentence, the job of that sentence is to make me read the next sentence. I have to, I'm compelled, because it's so interesting, and it's drawing me forward. And so when you're like, "He makes an appointment and I give him instructions to the spa," I don't feel like I need to read more. I'm like, that's not that fascinating to me. I know that that's something you do when you make a massage appointment.

So you want to cut right to, "And then he whipped his dick out in front of me and made a rude comment." You want to get us right to the shock and awe thing that's the reason we're here. And then we're on the edge of our seat. Yeah, someone is dying, who did not disclose their name. How interesting. But you get what I mean? You really want to cut right to it. That's the example I was giving last week about, "Michelle Williams remembers the first night she became homeless."

I could have started with, "Michelle Williams was waiting by a bus stop for the number 27. She waited for half an hour," but that's not as interesting, is it? So yeah, think about



cutting to the chase. And an easy way to do it is to just write your lead however you want and then cut it down. That's often how we eliminate this sort of throat-clearing. I have a post about this that I'll throw in the comments called "How to Cut the Phlegm from Your Blog Posts." So I'll throw that in. Anyway, who is next, while I'm looking for that?

**Linda Formichelli:**

I'm cracking up over here.

**Carol Tice:**

So we talked about Amy's post, we talked about Martha's massage post.

**Linda Formichelli:**

You know what? Although I think we skipped some way up here because we jumped down to Martha's. So we are actually on...

**Carol Tice:**

Diane for the Federal...

**Linda Formichelli:**

Hold on a second. Are we? Let me scroll, scroll. Yes, Diane. Hey Diane, I used to write for the Federal Credit Union, and I wrote for Robin. It's very sad that she passed. So Diane has an LOI for the Federal Credit Union magazine. And she has lots of credentials in that area, she'd written for them in the past. And Diane, you mentioned that you had some confusion over the structure of the LOI versus the query.

And the way you did it here is actually exactly right, it's perfect. These are completely different formats so they're going to look totally different. The LOI the way we do it has the greeting that shows you're a freelancer and that you're familiar with the market. It has a few ideas, your credential, and the ask, and that's just a basic outline that you can tweak, and play with, and personalize, and make your own. But just those elements are really important. Whereas the query is somewhat different.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, Linda, I think it's actually my fault because I think I wrote in the homework that we wanted to see your lead for your LOI, and we're just talking about, what's your opening paragraph? Like the choice of like, what's your opening paragraph here, what's your opening salvo in your LOI, or show us your bullets of the three ideas you want to flesh out.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Okay, give me a second. I need to kiss a boo-boo here. Come here. Ask Daddy for an ice pack, okay? Okay. Take a shower.

**Carol Tice:**

Yes, we are doing it all.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Anyway. So the lead is, or the greeting or whatever you want to call it is, “I just visited your website and noticed the SLSA Understanding the New Overtime Regulations live webcast link, very timely. I’m a past freelancer for the Federal Credit Union,” and she gives the title, “who worked with Robin Johnston, and have an idea for a follow-up article to this webcast for your September/October issue.” So I think this is actually, Carol and I both said, not bad, simple, direct.

I would get rid of where it says very timely, because it sounds tacked-on, like you were struggling to come up with a compliment. If you take that out it actually also flows much better. Carol suggests that you don’t include the title of the article you’ve written for in the past. It didn’t bother me, but if you do it I would put the title in quotes, because it’s a little bit confusing as to why that was there. And Carol, I know you had a comment there.

**Carol Tice:**

I felt like it made me feel like you think I’m not going to believe you when you say you’ve written for the publication before, like you have to list the exact article you wrote. There’s kind of a general rule in pitching that experienced freelancers say less and new freelancers say more about themselves, and they feel they need to prove things. And I just say like, “I’m a longtime freelance business writer who wrote a pitch for you.” That’s literally what I say. So it did make the sentence kind of convoluted, and I just thought it wasn’t needed.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yeah, yeah, it’s true, why not take it out? And you also mentioned you work with Robin Johnston, and I mean, that’s kind of proof that you have written for them before, because she passed several years ago, I’m going to say like six or seven, right? So I think it shows, yeah, you’ve written for them, you’ve been there. And then you say, “Do you all still work with freelancers?”

I would combine that with the next paragraph, because it’s a little bit jarring to have that, and then you say, “I’m a freelancer. Do you work with freelancers?” and then “Here’s my idea,” without any sort of transition. So maybe if you combined that with the next paragraph that would make it more of a transition.

And then you have the idea. “I just attended a great labor law update that didn’t simply cover the new overtime rule, it covered how leaders should handle recordkeeping once everyone’s been notified of the changes in December.

“Seven highly effective habits for creating time records for newly nonexempt employees would help readers understand not just what they need to do but why, and how handling records in this way will help them steel their credit unions against any potential lawsuits brought by nonexempt workers as well as audits by the Department of Labor and its

newly-hired 815 auditors.” I actually really like this. It’s just clear, it shows why this is a follow-up from the webinar, it’s relevant.

I might put a little bit of an ask at the end like, “Could I write this article for you?” or “Does this sound interesting to you?” Because again, the transition into your creds is really abrupt and it’s a little bit confusing. So you mention your creds, they’re very good. I love where you have, and this is where I was talking about everybody making it your own and not just following the template word for word, but like inserting your name in there.

Diane writes, “Deadlines don’t scare me. I’ve been writing for Spark with four-day to one-week turnaround since October of last year, that’s with interviews. Clips and links are available, would you like some forwarded? Thanks and best,” so I think this is really nice. Do you have any comments, Carol?

**Carol Tice:**

I love the 815 auditors. That’s a really way of signaling that I have data.

**Linda Formichelli:**

And I’ve researched it.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah. I actually have...

**Linda Formichelli:**

It’s a teaser.

**Carol Tice:**

...quotable information, without having to get into a long boring citation of where it came from but just kind of building it into the picture. I thought that was really, really slick. I think you have the next one as well.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yes, I have Alejandra’s, I hope I pronounced that right. You have two, so I will take them separately. One is, “How to Tell When a Hairstylist Is a Good Fit for Your Hair.” The markets you have, I think it’s for this idea, would be All You, Real Simple, and My Home Ideas. I think I would pitch this idea to the women’s and the fashion and beauty magazines.

I would also give it a more snappy headline, especially for those women’s magazines. So how to tell when a hairstylist is a good fit for your hair, that could be a really good subtitle, but I would have something snappy and maybe a pun or alliteration. Women’s magazines love that stuff. Believe me, I’ve done it for years.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, “No More Bad Hair Days.”

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, something, something with hair. “What we’ll read in the story that we haven’t read before, the idea about the hairstylist will talk about what to look for in a hairstylist, what kind of questions to ask, such as their credentials, portfolio, et cetera. This will teach how to not only pick the right hairstylist but to find one that you can build a long-lasting friendly relationship with, in turn avoiding the stresses of having to explain to a new hairstylist what you want your hair to look like and risking a disaster.”

I actually really like this idea, because we’re always reading about how to find a good hairdresser, and it’s always, ask somebody who has a haircut you like, and who does their hair? But we never get information on how to actually vet the hairdressers before committing.

I mean, I think most women like me just end up trying somebody out, and if it’s a disaster you don’t go back, and if they’re good you go back. But we’d like to avoid that disaster. So I think maybe you want to mention that in your pitch, is why this is relevant to readers. This really isn’t something that people talk about a lot, it’s sort of the missing information.

**Carol Tice:**

You know what brain wave I’m having just listening to this idea, again, is there’s got to be some tabloid piece you could grab about disaster haircuts of the celebrities where some celebrity has gotten some embarrassing haircut recently, and then you could use that as a news hook.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yeah, oh yeah. That’s a really good one, because she mentioned she doesn’t really have a news hook, and that’s a good one. And also if an idea is something that’s pretty new or you can package it in some sort of new way you can get away without a news hook, and we’re going to be talking about that with her next idea. But also I want to mention that I would also go beyond what questions to ask and looking at their portfolio.

There might be some tips you can get from celebrity hairstylists as to like surprising things or things you wouldn’t think of to look for when you’re vetting your hairdresser, like maybe there’s some tipoffs they give that they’re not going to be right for you. So I would really dig into that and go beyond this, because those are a little bit obvious tips. So you will be obviously talking to experts, so I like that. The second idea is “Five Helpful Sites for Wedding Planning,” and I’m not sure what the markets are.

**Carol Tice:**

Oh my God, that was...

**Linda Formichelli:**

Did someone saw your head off?

**Carol Tice:**

No, I have my favorite song as my ringtone, but it's like totally loud. Sorry about that. I just hung up on them by accident.

**Linda Formichelli:**

So anyway, "The idea about the wedding planning sites is to help those brides-to-be that are pretty much on their own with little or no knowledge of where to start planning a wedding. The list will explore all the different options available and will do a comparison between the sites." So you have a good seed of an idea here, but it's really, really broad. There have to be thousands of wedding planning sites, covering like every aspect of planning a wedding.

Maybe you could narrow this down into the type of help that they give, like maybe only sites on hiring photographers, or maybe only sites on getting the best fit for your wedding dress, or handling guests or something like that. And then maybe you could also make this more interesting by packaging it in a different way. Like I know I always am a believer in the charticle.

Magazines love these charticles where you have maybe the site and the pros and the cons, and what the experts say, or like the best tip you found on this site or something. But it needs to be narrow, and it needs to be presented in a little more of a unique way, because right now it's very basic and very broad. And also, again, you don't have a news hook, so maybe do some digging to see what's new in terms of trends in wedding planning sites. I don't know, Carol, if you have any tips on like what could make this newsier.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah. Certainly if there are some news sites that we could get, or a bigger list, 50 helpful websites for wedding planning. Five, to me it's just not an article, it's like five lines long, is the problem here. The other thing you could do is, these wedding sites, I mean, the wedding mags write these wedding topics over and over and over, so to me if you did 101 great new wedding venues where you can get married that you used to not be able to.

There was just a great article in The Seattle Times where they looked on Airbnb in Seattle for all of the places you could Airbnb that are a boat. And they did a story, they found 27 of them that I could Airbnb a night on a boat. Hello. And so one of them was a restored working tugboat, and so they centered it around that one, like you can spend a night on a working tugboat. There's also 27 other places you could also stay on a boat in Seattle.

So that kind of focusing it down, for a national magazine you'll want to have examples from all over. But if you had like 100 totally amazing new unusual places I could get married I think that would be the kind of thing they would jump all over. And as far as websites, I think it would have to be a bigger list, there'd have to be some new ones, or

maybe some niche ones. “Want your wedding to reflect your cultural values? Check our list of 100 great places to get married if you’re African American from China.”

Like it could be by type of person or interest. So I think there’s a lot of fun directions you can take it. But yeah, it’s like we’re not quite there yet, and it just needs to get a little bit more specific. Or it could be “The 10 most amazing wedding cake making companies that there are now that ship all over the country.”

I don’t know about just websites, I mean, unless you’ve got some amazing websites that you think people don’t already know and they won’t find on page one of the Google search. So dig a little deeper. I’m sure there’s some fun stuff in here. Linda?

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yes. I don’t have any other comments, I think we’re good. But Carol, you wanted to do Jada’s?

**Carol Tice:**

Oh, yeah. Yes, so this is for Bite magazine, which is apparently a trade pub for dentists, I love it. I’d never heard of that one before, and I thought that was so cool. So obviously the dentists running their practices are the target audience. And her pitch is “How to Make Your Dental Blog Not Suck.” And just to stop at the headline, I had this conversation in depth with Martha who had “The Four Things You’re Doing Wrong in Your Garden.”

We all know that going negative seems to win for blogs, but it is not the habit of magazines to go negative. They are all about positive, uplifting, helpful nests, all the time, so they’re not going to tend to do that. So she has, “Your dental clinic has a great message that teeth are a frontline to good health and disease prevention, not to mention good teeth are more attractive, yet these strong messages are rarely getting across to the people who matter, the target audience you’re trying to attract.

“Instead, your blog is just a news stream of boring business updates that aren’t useful or interesting to anyone.” So that sentence kind of stopped me, because I think you can see it’s kind of a windup lead here too, where we’re talking all about your dental practice, and how getting your teeth cleaned is good, and we’re not really on the topic until about sentence 3 or 4. So once again we want to cut the windup. And then the problem I have is, how many dentists are blogging?

How many dental practices have a blog? I’m not sure in this niche you can say, “Your blog is a news stream of boring business updates.” How many dental blogs have you looked at? Are they really all like that? I wanted to know if you could find out what percentage of US dentists, or Australian, or whatever have a blog, for starters. Because I’m concerned that the story for them might be, should you start a blog, the pros and cons, because most of them don’t have blogs.

So I think you might want to get to know this audience a little bit better. But I don't think you want to make an assumption that all of their blogs are awful. And in fact you might flip this on its head as you're researching, and if you find a few great dental blogs maybe you could do a roundup of the hottest. Learn from these seven hot dental blogs how to run your dental blog. That would be a completely hip story with great examples. And in general you want to stick to facts, don't ever assume.

So don't assume all their blogs are boring new streams, because you'll get into trouble. Then she has another one for this magazine that's "Content Marketing 101 for Dental Practices," is the headline, and her lead sentence is, "Content marketing, the big buzzword that seems to be everywhere." This didn't work for me because first of all, I'm thinking there's a heck of a lot of dentists who probably don't know what content marketing is.

So if you tell me it's a big buzzword that seems to be everywhere, now I just feel dumb. I feel like, oh my God, there's something important, and I don't even know what it is. Remember that magazines are all about the uplift and helping you, and so I just think it starts it off on the wrong foot. And who says it's a buzzword? And I wanted to say a big sort of 10,000-foot thing to everyone, is never use the word "seems" in a pitch, unless it's in a quote somebody said.

But it seems to be everywhere? I mean, from where are you getting that supposition? You really don't want to act like you vaguely know something when you're pitching ever, you want to be, 815 auditors, that's where you want to be, not, this seems to be popular. Well, says who? We need to know. Please tell us. So I think you need another way into this.

The idea of doing content marketing 101 for dental practices is probably a great idea, they probably have no idea of it, but we need a better way in. So that's just sort of my reaction to that. And Jada, you have kind of a habit of asking questions, questions, questions. So to dig into this, it says, "But what exactly is content marketing in the context of a dental practice? For instance, simple tips on how blogging, e-mail, or social media are part of a content marketing mix to attract customers.

"Why is it so important? What are three things dental practices can do to get started?" You don't want to pepper editors with questions, questions, questions, you want to bring them answers, answers, answers. So just casting your information in the form of a question over and over and over like that I think is a problem. So that's what I wanted to say.

She also has one for a trade mag for the Aged Care Insite. I think this is, I'm not sure what it is. Leading independent Aged Care print and content digital provider, I'm thinking it's like magazines for nursing home workers or something. But she says she wants to pitch them something for the August/September issue. Bad news, the August/September issue is already printed. It's over, it is totally done. So that connection is not going to work.

And you've got a bunch of ideas that have no news hooks to them. If you ever want to try and slide an idea into an issue that's about to go to press it's going to need a rocking hot news hook where the editor is literally going to practically be saying, "Stop the presses because we really, really need to include this." And companies do want to do that sometimes. If there's breaking news that's really big for their industry they will rip up pages and throw something in.

But they're going to be looking for a hot news hook if you want to do something last-minute, where they really need to get on the record that they knew this happened and not seem outdated when the issue comes out and people are like, "What, there was a mass shooting and you didn't say anything about it." So they need to avoid that. But with no news hook you've got no help, they are not going to be interested. But I want to run these three ideas by everybody.

"Mental Health in Workplace Safety, The Relationship Between Nutrition and Frailty." I'm just wondering if anyone can tell me what we found a problem here. One of them says, "This article would also provide practical strategies that OH&S professionals should consider to implement mental health workplace safety programs within their organizations." Well, experts like who?

If you want to stand out, yes, that's correct, Stacey, yeah Alice, they are two different stories, but they're book book-size ideas. Mental health in workplace safety, that is a book. The relationship between nutrition and frailty in the elderly is a book. So the editor's going to be looking for, what 700-word slice of that book-length topic are you planning to hand me here?

And no doubt there are many good slices about, maybe a fresh study has come out about a certain vitamin that elderly people take and it really helps prevent bone breakage. I'm sure there's all kind of fun news hooks you could get in there. So look around and look at narrowing those down.

And then she had one more from Arthritis Today, "Everyday Superfoods to Reduce Inflammation Naturally." It's a topic we've seen before. There are superfoods that help us with lots of things. She was pitching it as a charticle, which I like the idea of, and it sounds like she has a research-based dietary inflammation index, so there's a hunk of data to work on. But why now? I would think there would need to be new data about some everyday superfoods that do this, something new.

So here's another thing I want all of you, besides "seems to be," that I want you to all never say in a pitch for Women's Health or Prevention, is "Mind Over Food, Is Moderation Really Possible? One of the common pieces of dietary advice is that everything is okay in moderation, but is it? Research shows that some people can't get their mind over food." So something you never want to say is "research shows."



If you have research you are going to have to tell us what it is, where you found it, what year it was done, on how big of a group of people, yeah. So yeah, she says, “To be honest, I’m struggling with the news angles.” Yes, and a lot of students are. And I guess I feel like what’s happening is they’re going, “Well gee, I don’t know the news hook,” and then we’re just sort of pressing on.

Instead what we’re looking for you to do is sit down and start researching, and find your news hook. In a lot of cases of a lot of these pitches we’ve just read, they’re out there. There’s probably news hooks for these. There’s a bad haircut a celebrity got. So be looking. So do you want to take this one from Bruce? It looks like we both have had some thoughts here.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Let me see, let me see, where are we now? There you are, Bruce. Yes, it is an LOI for Internet Retailer magazine. Actually you have the first...

**Carol Tice:**

I had some thoughts on it, but I thought you could just go for it, because I’ve been talking too long.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yes, it’s true, you have been talking too long.

**Carol Tice:**

Tired of the sound of my own voice. Your turn.

**Linda Formichelli:**

He starts off, “As a technology writer I enjoyed reading Internet Retailer today.” Carol says, “I think you mean ‘enjoy reading it,’ like as if you read it regularly.” “Feria Ali’s article on Amazon ratings rings true with my shopping experience. I find three star reviews often including a mix of strengths and weaknesses are most helpful.” Carol thinks this goes on a little bit much with the complimenting, and just get the pitch right into that paragraph.

And then you said, “After reading some back issues of Internet Retailer I came up with three ideas I thought would be of interest to your readers.” So that sounds like it’s something that comes out of the LOI template, and I see a lot of this sentence. And I know it’s just an innocuous like plain bland sentence, but I would really love people to come up with their own way of introducing their ideas. You have three ideas, they need headlines.

So right now you’re just talking about what category they would be in, such as the marketing category, the Omnichannel category, and so on. The first idea looks awesome. It’s a plan to look at how Etsy sellers have grown their business with online marketing methods. Specific companies are, and he gives some companies and how many Etsy sales they have, and what they do, so that’s good.

For the Omnichannel category you have, “Amazon’s popular same-day shipping to much of the US,” so yeah, that’s actually not a full sentence. Because then it says, “There is growing pressure on Internet retailers to provide same-day shipping.” I think you have a word missing there. “In this article I will cover how to select and manage third party shipping services. I plan to cover both mainstream and national providers like USPS, Federal Express, and UPS, and new market entrants like Ship, Ships are In, Fleet.”

I actually really like this idea, and I was wondering if a more saleable idea would be on whether an Internet company should risk going with one of these new smaller shippers. What are the benefits, what are the disadvantages, are there any tips to dealing with them, and so on? Because I think there’s so much information probably already out there on how to deal with UPS, and Federal Express, and all the standbys as an Internet retailer.

But if there’s some of these new up and comers that might be worth an article on their own. And then your third idea, which also needs a headline, was “In 2016 there are over 3,000,000 monthly \_\_\_\_\_ (48.57) transactions per month. A growing list of retailers, Overstock, and TigerDirect are accepting bitcoin payments. In this article I will explore the foreign exchange, security, technology integration issues involved with accepting such payments.”

And both Carol and I were wondering if a magazine of this type that deals day in and day out with Internet retailing and Internet technology wouldn’t have done this topic before. And if so, if you could kind of dig into that and see maybe what the new issues are that are cropping up or anything new that’s happening with that. And then the cred is, “I bring a background in technology in business coverage to the publication.

“I’ve covered Amazon, payments for e-commerce, sales management, and other business topics for InfoWorld, CIO, Profit Guide, and other publications.” Great creds. You don’t go on and on, it’s simple, it’s very nice. “Shall I send you links to a few of my recent articles? Warm regards,” so yeah, it’s looking really good. I would just give headlines, make sure your ideas have that news hook, and maybe shorten your lead a little bit. So...

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, my problem with these three was there’s no headlines.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yeah, we talked about that.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, it just says what category. An editor can’t grab onto that. Oh, you have an idea for that. Well, what is your idea? They’re looking for your six-word headline summation of your idea, so be sure to do that. So Mike had asked in chat, “I’m a chronic over-thinker,

any advice?" Yeah, think volume. Stop over-belaboring one pitch and tell yourself you need to send 10 a week, and you'll start cutting to the chase. Just don't give it space, just press Send and move on. Linda, do you have any thoughts on that?

**Linda Formichelli:**

No, no, we are good. I was looking at Alice's idea. And also, you know what, there's another question up here though about interviews, I think. Actually there are several.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, we're getting there.

**Linda Formichelli:**

All right, so you want to get to these?

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Well, we have an idea from Alice, and I remember this idea from last week or the week before, and this is the lead. "As a freelance writer with an interest in the Old West and the actors who portrayed it I enjoyed reading about some of these actors on your website. As a youngster I was glued to the television set as Gene Autry or Roy Rogers raced across the sagebrush to save the rancher town from the bad guys and win the beautiful lady to boot. But where did Hollywood find such open spaces?

"In the Alabama Hills on the eastern side of California's Sierra Madre and the nearby town of Lone Pine." I would actually separate that into a paragraph of its own. It's much more powerful that way. Because right now your lead is getting a little bit long and unwieldy. And "This area has served as Hollywood's popular backlot for B westerns and other types of major films since 1920. My article highlights filmmaking in the Alabama Hills and the stars who worked there." Carol, you had a comment?

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah. We gave some feedback last week on this, that 70 years ago this place was a movie set isn't enough of a current news hook. I think there was some film festival coming to Lone Pine or something, but I don't think that really does it. We're still looking for what's going on now, what's filming now in Lone Pine, what has filmed in the past five years in Lone Pine? I think it's great to do the really historical stuff, but you got to have something that also brings it up more to the current day where there's more now to it.

I'm just not getting what the news hook of it is. And we've injected ourselves into the opening of the story in a way that I'm not totally sure works. "I was glued to the TV set." Well, lots of people were. But I think instead like maybe a particular movie they shot there, it would be great to hear a couple titles of what was shot there, and what's been

shot there since. I mean, if it's just an abandoned lot now, and like no one has used it and now it's a national park, and no one is shooting in it any more, I just don't know.

You have to get beyond the sort of, that's mildly interesting, thing where it's like, oh, that's sort of interesting that these old Gene Autry films were filmed in the Sierra Madre. Okay, and now? But why is it fascinating now? Tell me, tell me. I bet there is a reason, I bet there's some new westerns that have been filmed there. So you got to tell us about... I think for a like western or good old days type of magazine you've got to connect us back to the present, of what's going on there now. I don't know, that's just my reaction to it.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Okay. Do you want me to move on to Leslie's idea?

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, go ahead.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Okay, this is an LOI to a coffee and tea trade publication. "Dear Vanessa, As a freelance writer who starts her day with coffee and then switches to black tea in the late afternoon I enjoyed two of the articles in the most recent edition of Tea and Coffee, one about X and one about Y. Trends and numbers are essential for business owners to understand. I was looking at a few back issues and came up with some ideas I thought might interest your readers."

So again everybody, use the template as a guideline, it doesn't need to be word for word. It's just that the elements need to be there. And think of a really creative way to come up with it. "So the ideas are, a roundup from small shop owners around the country on what works to bring customers in the door around the December holidays, ideal charities for shop owners to support from the community garden to the local marathon fundraiser, and promotional success that doesn't cost an arm and a leg."

These are actually all really good ideas, but I would give them really powerful, really snappy headlines and just a little bit more detail. I would just flesh them out into a short paragraph each. And then she goes on to say, "I have several years of experience as a writer and have written about past coffee and tea trends for the local business journal newspaper." I love that, short, to the point like Carol was saying. Pro writers don't go on and on trying to prove to the editor beyond a shadow of a doubt that, I'm a pro, I swear.

It's just calm confidence, so I really like that. "May I send you some clips? Best regards and happy coffee and tea tipping." That's a great cute ending, I like that. So with this one mostly I would try to rework a little bit to be sort of in your own voice with the lead and how you introduce the ideas and, then give a headline for each idea and flesh it out a little bit.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah. So I have an idea, because it's already like an hour. These calls fly by like nothing I've ever done.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Because we like to talk.

**Carol Tice:**

There's so many interesting ideas and ways to tweak them. I think we should look at the ones that are in chat and then come back to the ones we have that were sent ahead just so that people who are on the call leaving things live are sure to get their thing. So Alana had an idea for a travel mag or for Marie Claire, "Five Things You Can Do to Help Animals While Traveling."

She says, "Your love of animals doesn't stop just because you're on vacation, so whether you are heading to Kauai, Costa Rica, or the next town over, why not make your trip extra memorable for both you and a furry friend?" This is that lead where my editor wants to say, "Leave me out of it." You don't know that I love animals or that I want to do animal-related voluntouring on your vacation. And you're making a lot of assumptions about people, and if they're wrong then people just kind of move on.

This question of doing pet voluntourism, animal voluntourism, I'm not sure somewhere like Marie Claire is the right fit for this. And the airline mags, I mean, they like to write about their advertisers mostly. So I'm just not sure that that's the market match, but there might be a Humane Society publication that would love that story of volunteering you can do while you're on a vacation. That was sort of my reaction to that. Linda, do you have any thoughts?

**Linda Formichelli:**

No, no, I like that idea though. Where are you seeing this, though, this isn't on the chat, is it?

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, it was up in the chat.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Right. Must be way up there. So okay. I think she might have sent it just to you, because I am just not seeing it. Carol?

**Carol Tice:**

Sorry. Yeah, maybe it was sent privately, I don't know. Mike, I'm assuming you're joking when you say, "Then why not write the whole book if it's a book topic?" Obviously a lot more effort required, and often no upfront pay, and a lot of other questions and issues there.

**Linda Formichelli:**

And also a lot of the times the book is already done. There's a lot of books on the topic, which the editor says, "Okay, not only is this a book, but what is going to be new about this, you know? Why now, why me?"

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah. I mean, it's really kind of the same question if you're writing the book topic is, why does this book need to be written now? So...

**Linda Formichelli:**

Do you have this one other question from Mike? "I wrote a blog post for a digital media company that I turned in about six weeks ago. I haven't gotten paid yet, but it also hasn't been posted. Is this typical? At this point I want to give them a call, but I'm getting the impression that they're a lazy company. How do you two deal with lazy or otherwise..." There it goes, it's gone. "...lazy or otherwise crappy companies that you've worked for?"

I mean, definitely, I hope you have a contract that says when you're going to get paid, and hopefully it's not upon publication. God, I'm going to think especially with a blog sometimes they get a post. I've done it. When I hire somebody to do a blog post I pay them, but then I end up not running it because I've changed direction or whatever reason. So a lot of times blog posts just don't run.

So you want to make sure that you have a contract that says when you're going to get paid, and hopefully it's pay on acceptance. Obviously it hasn't been accepted yet because you haven't heard back from them, but I would definitely follow up. Carol, what do you think? I mean, if the contract says you're going to be paid four weeks after acceptance and you haven't heard from them at all in six weeks, I mean, I'd be following up, asking questions.

**Carol Tice:**

I actually follow up the day after it was due, not a couple weeks later. I used to keep a payment calendar of when payments were supposed to come in, and I would just check and be like, "Oh yeah, that check hasn't shown up," the day after it was supposed to show up. "Gee, I haven't seen your check. When is it supposed to come?" But I find the main thing you get with this is people say, "Oh, contract, what's that? I don't have one." So you need a contract and it needs to define payment terms, particularly final payment terms.

A lot of people really fall down on that, and then they can basically pay the last payment never, or the whole payment, if you haven't gotten an upfront. But I want to get to Judy who says here she has a pre-interview tomorrow with a psychology expert who has a column in Psychology Today.

“I’m developing my questions reading her columns. Any other guidance you can share?” I don’t know, what’s your topic? What are you going to be asking her about? I have lots and lots of interview tips. Let me give you a tag you can go to with...

**Linda Formichelli:**

Oh, me too.

**Carol Tice:**

...of interview tips in it. I’m a real student of the art of the interview. Listen a lot and let questions flow out of that, would be one of my big tips. But I don’t know what information you’re trying to elicit. I have 20 articles on interviewing here, so let me send you this tag as well.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Oh my God, my blog is slow today.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, I mean, in general be quiet a lot and let them talk, and listen to what they’re saying, and see where that leads you. And now we sent you some resources for learning about interviews.

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yes, well, I can give a tip. It’s not a tip on what questions to ask, but it’s on what not to ask, I guess. Have a general list of questions that you know you want to ask, but be open to having a conversation because you know other questions will come up during that conversation. Don’t stick to your questions, like shotgun them at him, like one, two, three, four. It’s a conversation, let it flow. Sometimes the best stuff comes up not in response to a question you asked but on some slightly off-topic tangent they went on.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, Mike says, “Listen to Terry Gross from Fresh Air on NPR.” That’s actually advice a lot of people give. She’s considered really the queen interviewer, though she doesn’t do that many of her own interviews any more. Go through the archives and find something where she is interviewing someone. So yeah, she’s a great example. Listen to anyone who does live interview and you’ll learn a lot, Larry King, or anybody who does a lot of in-person interviewing.

I like to bring a questions list, and then I write more questions. As they’re talking I’m scribbling down more things I want to ask about that are suggested by what they’re saying. Okay, everybody keeps posting, and then our chat just keeps flipping on around. If people could not post just sort of comments right now and just post if you have a question that will allow us to see your questions. Tori yeah, we have yours, don’t worry.

Okay, so Mike had said, “When it comes to news I’m not very good at being the first one to know things.” Yeah, none of us are, it’s really hard to be that first one to know things.

The only way you get that is by having an exclusive on something, and you need to build really deep relationships with contacts to get those usually or be writing for a really prominent news outlet where they'll approach you. I get approached all the time, like, "I'm going to offer you this exclusively for Forbes" or something.

Ozzy Osborne's people hit me like that once, but they only wanted to do it if it was the cover, so we were like, "Yeah, no." But he says, "I'm good at reading in between the lines and coming up with something that hasn't been said, and in a way that feels like news. Is this a good approach?"

And I asked him for an example of what he meant, and he said he wrote a story about a section 8 housing complex. Instead of focusing on the same old story about poverty in the US he wrote about the outdatedness of the HUD program, and the editors liked it so much it became a feature story. That I wouldn't think of as reading between the lines so much as peeling off a tiny slice.

It's like writing a topic in microcosm where instead of writing about big homelessness, some giant issue, yeah, you come down to, "I'm going to spend a night in The Jungle in downtown Seattle," which is a homeless encampment that is the subject of much controversy, there was a recent murder there, "and write an article about it." Absolutely, it's localizing a national story.

What I like to do with news, because I can't be the first one to know it, is to collect string and see relationships between pieces of news, and that's pretty easy to do. It's like I'm reading restaurant trades and it's like, oh, here's a new restaurant that only sells grilled cheese sandwiches. Well, that's sort of interesting. I throw it in my string file. And then I find another one like that, and another one, and now I have a story.

Grilled cheese sandwich restaurants are a thing. Here are three growing little mini-chains that, they're basing their whole cuisine around that. So you can always win at detecting trends by collecting a lot of news, and I write a lot of stories that way. So what else? I think we're back to our questions that we got ahead of time. And I think we're at Sarah's thing for USAA, which Linda used to write for, so she's going to talk about it, I hope. Are you still there, Linda?

**Linda Formichelli:**

Yes, I'm here. Yes, it's for USAA magazine, which I have written for in the past. Awesome, her story ideas are "Nine Moneysaving Secrets for Military Families, From Frequent Relocations Transitioning to Civilian Life. Many money lessons can be learned by living the military lifestyle.

"I'll talk to a few families to get their favorite tips, from how to save money while moving to taking advantage of career resources, all tips that can be used by all families, military and civilian alike." I really like that idea, but the tips I would work on, because they each sound like a book on their own. Like saving money while moving and taking advantage of career resources, those are huge, so I would try to rein those in a little bit.



The next idea is “Money Managing Strategies for Adults with ADHD.” I think that is an excellent idea. You mentioned you have pre-interviews underway. And “Six Reasons 30-somethings Can’t Afford to Overlook Life Insurance. I would cover the importance of buying health insurance,” I think you meant life insurance,” when you’re still young and healthy.

“Why you should look at more than your annual salary when deciding how much life insurance to buy, and more.” I think this is good, just make sure it’s mostly service, not just why you should be doing this but also the how. But I think these are really good ideas.

**Carol Tice:**

Yeah, these seemed really sharply focused. I was really happy to see this. Linda says she is going to need to go, but we have a couple things left, and I’m going to just rap along on them. And I’m going to take Stacey’s, this is for Working Mother or Parenting, and Linda left us some notes for it. I’m not seeing a headline to this. We’ve actually got the whole pitch here rather than just the lead like we’d like to see for this, and there’s no headline, Stacey.

So it seems like it’s something to do with au pairs, and yeah, Linda says, “Why now? Au pairs have been around forever.” I was an au pair 30 years ago, and I ended up being one of those crappy ones who left early. Maybe there’s some research on how high childcare is now. Stacey says her headline is “Avoiding Au Pair Angst, Tips for Hiring an Au Pair.” So yeah, why now, Stacey? Tell us what’s new here. And we’re just kind of getting some background. It just seems like a very evergreen topic.

And what percent of women who read, maybe Working Mother might work for hiring an au pair, but we need something that gives it freshness. So June is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I guess it’s not super riveting as a news hook. It gives a little credence, but I would think you’d need a stat, you need something that says, “More people than ever are hiring au pairs,” and then it might start to work.

You said, “My article would touch on the benefits of hiring an au pair, including why a family might hire an au pair over other forms of childcare, before delving into important tips to remember for the hiring process.” I think it’s just like too much, it’s like we’re trying to tell the whole story of everything about au pairs. Think of what you could get done in 700 words. I think people know what an au pair is, and we need to cut to, or maybe there’s a quick sidebar that’s like, au pair basics, what you need to know.

So Lisa said, “I really struggled with this assignment.” Well, good for you for doing it even though it was difficult. That is what it takes around here to really get the pitches out there. Her target pub is Global Trade Magazine, and her lead is, “As a freelance writer with a background in international affairs and economics I enjoyed the Put a Premium on Exports article from your current issue.

Linda says, "Looks a lot like the template." It does, but I guess I feel like it works, because you have really relevant expertise that you wove right into that. She says, "Since I'm based in London I also enjoyed the piece on Brexit triggering a gold rush, on your website." This is the vote for the UK to leave the European Union. "I saw on the website that you're looking for writers. I'm a London-based freelance writer. Most recently I worked at the World Bank. I'm reliable and professional with feedback."

But there's no ideas, and there's no like, write for me. I don't know if we're just getting the top of it, but I guess I think if you know so much, if I'm the editor I'm thinking, what are your ideas for me? I would think you could at least flash them a couple of ideas. Saying things like I'm reliable and professional, I just don't think you need that if you've written for the World Bank. Instead I would give them some ideas.

So Kate says, "Below are four idea summaries with hooks and potential markets. Okay. "Cat Confidence, Five Surprising Benefits of Winning Your Cat's Trust" for someone like Catster. I'm just not seeing a news hook. She says her hook is, "Confidence can be a one-stop solution for multiple behavior problems," but that doesn't tell me why I need to know this now.

And like, doesn't my cat trust me? Has there been something in the news where like a cat attacked their owner or something because there wasn't a good trust relationship? So another one is, "Could Your Dream College Really Be Your Worst Nightmare? There's a Test to Find Out." That's kind of fun. Is there a new test for that? "At the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation, 11 sites across the nation, you take a battery of really cool tests like fitting large wiggly blocks together."

So do we think people are going to have to physically go to one of 11 sites in the country? Because the problem with that is that most of us won't live near enough to those 11 sites, so that tends to turn editors off. It's a \$900 aptitude test? I would think that this would work better as a roundup if there were several different alternative interesting ways to find your college match besides just this one. It just seems like an ad for the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation as it is.

So then we have "Winning the Battle in Our Backyard," for Army National Guard Experience, like a custom pub. And it says, "When a heavy rainstorm flooded South Carolina the Army National Guard jumped in to help," so it sounds like it's like a wrap-up of writing about what the Guard did in this particular instance. I would think they probably do stories like that all the time.

The question is, why are you the writer for that story? What's your connection to this? And also, probably haven't they already assigned it to somebody they already know? I think it's really hard to come in cold and get an assignment for like a breaking news type follow-up, because they have to assign it and they have to move immediately. They've already done it.

So “Stamina for Success. Eight Super Successful Women Share Secret Recipes for Stamina.” This is for more Women’s Health or Working Mother, places like that, Women Entrepreneur, Women in Business. It says, “You know her. She may be a bit intimidating, she’s the dynamo who’s led your company to big success in one year. She’s a perfectionist. We’re not talking about the Red Bull and latte fueled glass ceiling trajectory of a 20-something marketing assistant.” That’s a nice sentence.

“Rather she’s a savvy seasoned professional who powers through each day thanks to one simple quality, stamina. A roundup of eight successful women from various career arenas. Hook, in an increasingly competitive corporate world women need to have every possible edge, and stamina is key.”

I think it’s something we run into a lot, that folks just really aren’t understanding what we mean by a news hook. What we mean is, what is happening in the news now that relates to this topic? So what women of stamina have been crushing it in the corporate world, and they’ve admitted they only need four hours of sleep a night, or whatever? We need the real news that gives it that currency.

All right, Tori, I’m up to you. I hope you’re still on the call, really sorry it takes... There’s a lot of work to this. Yay, you still are. So she’s thinking Refinery29, Living Section. Here’s a headline that seems more like a subtitle or a deck. “Get Off the Bench with These Three Tips and How-Tos on your Rookie Fantasy Football Season.” That’s really long, ever for a deck. And I don’t know, Refinery29 is pretty women-oriented.

She says, “Women are 34 percent of fantasy football participants, up 12 percent from 2007, so it’s a growing phenomenon that women do fantasy football online, or fantasy sports.” So that’s good. And she has a couple people who are relevant to talk to, including a researcher for the Fantasy Sports Trade Association.

Oh my God, now I’ve seen it all. There’s a trade association for something that is just pretend online. That is awesome. And I guess I think that rather than How-Tos on Your Rookie Fantasy Football Season I feel like it needs another tweak, because it’s something that women don’t typically do. I’m just not sure this is the angle.

It’s like, something like, “Yes, Women Do Play Fantasy Football. Three Tips on How to Get Started,” or something like that. “Real Women Play Fantasy Football.” Or maybe instead of tips on how to get started it’s, five top women winners online tell you their secrets, or something. This sounds like something you could have fun with. That’s an interesting stat.

Okay, that gets me to the end of that. Mike says, “I just remembered that I recorded the conversation I had with the company president where we agreed on the due date and price per word. Does that count as a contract?” I don’t know if it would hold up in court if you were suing them, but you could totally use that for a social shaming strategy, like going on Twitter and saying, “Hey, just listening to my recording of our conversation where you said I’d be paid X on X date.” I might do that.

And definitely hang onto that recording. But hopefully you don't have to get too adversarial. Have you tried simply saying, "My payment is now due, please pay me now"? "Please tell me when I may expect payment," is actually the phrasing that I really like. And if you get nothing, then I tend to start looking for the accounting department person.

A lot of us who have had late payer clients, I used to have one magazine that paid on what we joked was the half-past when the Messiah comes schedule, and we would all call accounting and say, "Hey, what's the deal? My editor said this would be paid now, and it's not." And they'd say, "Oh, look, the editor never turned in the payment slip, ha, ha."

Yeah, Alice, I don't know about not having any current news hook. I think it works better if the history isn't quite so long ago. But study the magazine. If they would really do a piece just about, gee, look at this place where Gene Autry filmed 80 years ago, then maybe that works. But my experience is, people always want to know, and what happened since then, also. So not, this thing happened 80 years ago.

Someone said, "Send him a WAV file of the recording." Yeah. He said, "A friend of mine works there as a designer, and I was hoping to build a relationship." Well, it is still possible if you don't get too bent about it and just find out what's going on. I can think of a million legit reasons.

There's a lot of companies that only cut checks once a month, and maybe you sent it in a day after the day they cut checks, and now it's waiting for 30 days, or the key person is on vacation who cuts the checks. There can be real reasons why it happens. But if you're not getting a response I would just go through the steps in my post.

All right, you guys, I think we've done it, unless anyone has final questions here. I'm going to save the chat, because we did throw out some resources here, and so I'll have that to pass along. And in the coming week what's coming up is, it's just write your butt off week, basically.

We don't give you a new homework assignment, this is just your chance to pitch us more ideas, show us more leads, show us more LOI idea bullets, and get more feedback as you get ready to send fully fleshed-out queries and LOIs to our editor team. And the big thing we've noticed about having July be Pitch Month is of course that the first four days of July are a holiday weekend in the United States. And I really should have looked at a calendar when I planned that, but it's all okay.

Basically it just means you got four days more to just go ahead and write, and editors will be getting to them starting on the fifth, okay folks? And yeah, if you don't have ideas yet it's no problem, you can totally pitch us some ideas in the final Q&A. Just post them for the Pitch Challenge e-mail, I'll throw it in right now, [pitchchallenge@usefulwritingcourses.ed](mailto:pitchchallenge@usefulwritingcourses.ed) and we'll get them from there, folks.

And great questions, and great pitches, and good job to everyone who's really engaging in the tough work of starting to really find those research stats, and find those experts, and find the real news hook, and find the trend.

And I want to urge everybody to push on with that, not just go, "Gee, I don't know what the news hook is," or the news hook is, everybody really needs this all the time, or the news hook is, we always need to know this. That's not going to work. Work harder on news hooks, because it'll really pay off with editors. All right, see you guys.