

Advice From Pro Screenwriters on Pitching

[Scott Myers](#)

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Four writers provide the low-down on how to prepare and pitch in Hollywood.



Twitter is a perfect social medium for screenwriters. To waste time, of course, but the impulse to dash off a thought here or there is pretty common to writers who traffic in words pretty much all the time. Occasionally something wonderful happens: A professional writer will go off on a tweetstorm, taking on a subject at some depth, albeit in 280 characters bites.

Those are great, however, they tend to disappear down the relentless and unending Twitter feed rabbit hole, so I decided to create an archive for them at Go Into The Story. [To date, I have archived 75 tweetstorms.](#)

These tweet threads come in handy. Take this from the other day:

I went to the Screenwriting Tweetstorm archive and sent a few archived articles Monica's way. That got me thinking: Why not put all of those tweetstorms on pitching into one blog post? Here you go!

Selwyn Seyfu Hinds is a producer and writer, known for Washington Black, The Twilight Zone (2019) and Prince of Cats.

ON PITCHING

1/24 — So if you been following me you know I took big feature pitch out last week. And I promised to do a thread on my thoughts as relates to pitching a feature. This isn't a "how to do it," this is "how Selwyn does it."

2/24 — Some folks aren't fond of pitching. Some are terrified of it. Regardless, it's a huge part of what we do so you gotta get good at it, and continue to work on it, same you work on mastering your craft on the page.

3/24 — Hopefully there's something useful for you in here. This stuff has all been part of my process. And while I

haven't landed every assignment I've pitched a take for, I've probably sold 90% of the projects I've developed and taken out to pitch.

4/24 — This latest project came my way months ago. It took a while to develop the pitch. Both because my showrunner day job on Wash Black is a kinda hectic, and because this was a tough movie to get my arms around. It wasn't gonna be ready until I found the emotional center.

5/24 — That's my first tidbit. You're ready to pitch when you find the emotional center of the story & your connection to it. The story has to turn emotional gears in you. When they turn in you they're gonna turn in your listener. Embrace being vulnerable and you'll pull 'em in

6/24 — So we're ready to pitch, let's set meetings. I think of meetings in 3 tiers. First, the warm ups. A good room for you to get comfortable. Maybe execs you already know. Buyers who you, your reps and producers don't think might be at the front of the line to buy the pitch

7/24 — Middle tier, the folks you think will buy. After your warm up pitches you're gonna smash these. Then round it out with a final tier. Often buyers who asked to hear late. A lot of times word about a pitch gets around and folks wanna hear cuz everyone in Hollywood has FOMO

8/24 — Good reps help stoke the anticipation. Think, Bad Boy party in the 90s. We throwing the hit event that no one wants to miss. The ability and connections to really prime

the pump for your pitch before you go out is one of the attributes you want from your feature agents.

9/24 — Tweak your pitch between meetings. Pay attention to what's landing in the room. Ask your producers to pay attention as well. Smart execs will ask you questions after a pitch that will also make you tweak and refine things. Your pitch is a living document. Let it evolve.

10/24 — A thought for those who write TV and features (or want to), cuz this one hit me this time out. In pitching a TV series we get great mileage from digging super deep into character, the world, and the engine that's driving things along ...

11/24 — Hopping back over to features will require a bit more granularity on story and structure. It's really the difference between the closed loop journey and a broader exploration where, even if we know the eventual destination, that ending is a ways off.

12/24 — Not gonna spend a bunch of time on the composition of a feature pitch, cuz we touched on the most important piece for me (emotion). In the most basic form, my feature pitches begin with a prologue that centers my connection, then lays out the world, stakes, characters...

13/24 — ...and structural approach. That's the first half. Second half of the pitch plunges into the film, act by act, as I tell the tale. I call it being macro with intention: we're just using key beats, high points for emotion, story and

character as we move through the pitch

14/24 — I do wanna spend time on the “pitching” part of a feature pitch. So, few years back I wrote a Joker stand-alone script for Jared Leto. After I was done pitching him and the DC folks to get the job, Jared, who’d been grinning throughout, asked if I’d had actor training...

15/24 — Nah. I just love telling stories on some “once upon a time” vibe. Like when my daughter was little, I had to keep her riveted when reading a book. I think of that. So my pitches are full of inflections, dramatic pauses and mood and emotional swings. Campfire tales shit

16/24 — Audio/visual assets help me. When we sold Prince of Cats to Legendary I used a hip-hop score and when the right beat dropped — conference room turned into club. I’d hop up, stalk back and forth, pitching what the characters FELT as a Mobb Deep beat rocked. (Emotion!!!)

17/24 — When we sold Washington Black that was dominated by big and beautiful imagery: props, locales, potential actors. Making the experience more immersive. Hard to do all this on Zoom these days, so on this last pitch we played a dope sizzle that set the tone before I pitched

18/24 — Another tool I used a lot in the “real world” that works on Zoom: I pull people into the pitch. “I know you been waiting for this part, Jan.. What would you do in that situation, John?” I mean, not that lame, but you get what I’m saying. Make them part of the experience

19/24 — So you're an introverted writer. Where are you gonna get the confidence to do all this? If talking to a group of people staring at you is terrifying, you gotta figure out how to flip that. Public speaking course. Acting class. One of my faves is just pitching...

20/24 ...to yourself in the mirror, cuz looking at yourself for long is weird. It'll force you to get comfortable. Mostly, relax. You're telling a tale to the homies, not an oral PHD defense. Have fun. Laugh. I'm serious. Laughter warms every room up, makes folks comfortable

21/24 — Please, please take care of your throat/voice as much as you do your laptop. For me that means vocal warmups. Tea. Spoonfuls of honey between multiple pitches. Water. Lozenges. Throat spray. I do a lot cuz I get hoarse without tons of pre and post pitch work on my throat

22/24 — So you finished your pitch, what now? You're excited, tired, and anxious as hell. First off, congratulate yourself. And then let it go. Emotionally that is. You left it all on the court and it is out of your hands...

23/24 — The good news, even if it doesn't sell (which is the most likely fate of a pitch), you'll have been exposed to a bunch of buyers and execs who will no doubt be impressed with your brilliance. You got some new fans and that's real currency in this town.

24/24 — Oh this is long! Ok thx for hanging out! :) Hope something in here proves valuable to ya. I'll check back in,

hopefully soon, to tell you the final fate of my recent pitch and to reveal the identity of this very cool movie. Best of luck on your writing/pitching journey.

Original post [here](#).

Carter Blanchard has sold multiple spec scripts over a decades-long screenwriting career including Glimmer which sold in a bidding war and made the annual Black List in 2021.

SOME TIPS ON PITCHING

Original post [here](#).

Eric Heisserer has written multiple movies including Hours, Lights Out, and Arrival, as well as the TV series Shadow and Bone.

ON PITCHING

All right, folks, who're my writers out there now? I'm at the mic for a bit and feel like talking about the dragon that is pitching.

All right, I'm going to be tossing around lessons learned. When I use the word "you" I mean "me" as it's what I've discovered. YMMV.

Let's make some delineations. There are pitches of original material you invented, and pitches on properties/assignments, two diff beasts.

If it's your own idea and you're pitching it, that is a crazy steep climb. Because the buyers will wonder why you don't just write it. What you need to get in the room with anyone at that point is a super strong script of something else they've already loved. Even then, pitching your own ideas first and hoping to get paid to write them is leaving money on the table. Specs = always bigger \$\$.

So with that out of the way, let's focus on what 90+% of pitching will be for you: Writing assignments.

So there is a writing gig up for grabs out there and you want it. Your agent or manager or friend at the front desk can get you in the room. Or maybe you have a general meeting with the producer and you use that opportunity to say you're crazy about X and want to pitch them.

Sounds silly to mention, but you have to really care about it. You have to know why you want to write this thing vs your own stuff. Even if one of the big reasons is, "I'm terrified someone else will screw it up. I'd rather be the one, if it comes to that."

But what will be your guide from the start is your motivation for this story. What do you want to say through this particular voice/world? That's a huge help going into the pitch. The next step is to share how that motivation is personal to you. How it connects to your

life. That's what you lead with. Why is this personal to you, and how does it connect to the character(s) of this property? What is its soul?

This means being able to talk about yourself, sometimes sharing traumatic experiences, with a room full of strangers. Tough.

But binding yourself and your passions or fears to a thing increases both your purpose and its value. Producers want that connection.

Now I'm going to keep going by talking about the particular beast of movie pitching, but I've done TV dev for 8 years and that's tough too.

If you're swinging for something even halfway cool in this town, expect it to be a "bake-off" (lots of writers pitching). You are not really in the game with the other writers. That is the tragic mistake I used to make. Your big opponent is yourself. Not them. Focus on what you love about the property, be it an adaptation, remake, or sequel. Share what it means to you; what it does so well.

Now here are some really crazy specifics, based on tragic blunders by yours truly.

All the preamble talk can be about how you identify with the story, and how that translates, but when you get into the actual pitch...Hit the milestone at around

five minutes in and declare it. For me that's the "end of act one" moment, but it can be the big sequence, etc.

The thing that launches the rest of the movie, whatever that is, gets announced. "That's our engine for act two." And here's why you say it: Producers/execs have sat through pitches for 20 minutes only to hear the writer say at the end, "That's the backstory. Now, we open on..."

This is one of their horrible fears: That you don't know where to start pitching.

Seed some "mile markers" in your pitch to help everyone know where in the story they are. It's a great relief to them, trust me. Next: visual aids. Cards. Posterboard. Maps. Diagrams. All workable. Keep something in mind when using material like this in a pitch...

If you put too much on them for your buyers to read, they'll be reading and not listening to your story. So be visual, not wordy.

Characters in a pitch. Often tricky describing them. Some people love it when you offer casting ideas, so they see the actor in the movie. I can tell you I had a pitch completely crumble on me only because the studio exec HATED an actor I used as my template for the lead. Pow.

Try to avoid: Physical description, unless it's germane to the story. Don't bother with that crap, it's superficial 99% of the time. Instead, think of one behavioral trait that paints a bigger picture of a person. A bad habit. A cute sentimentality. What real people do. "He's the kind of guy who rants about the president but never voted." "Birthdays and holidays are a big deal to her."

That sort of thing.

More hard lessons I've the scars to prove: Make it a discussion. Don't feel it's a stand-up routine. Let them ask questions. Ask them ones. I spent way too long making my pitch simply "here are the beats of the story." That's not what they want to hear. Crazy, I know.

They want the story — they really do — but have you ever managed to pay attention to someone telling you the events that happen in a film? It can be really... dry. Sadly. Even if the events are really cool.

GARY WHITTA INTERJECTS: @HIGHzurrer I'll often break out of the story at certain moments to talk about why something is important, goes to theme/character etc.

You gotta keep thinking to yourself, "How does this moment make me FEEL?" And share THAT with your buyers in the room. So in a weird way, it's almost like telling someone about a crazy thing you just lived through. Yourself.

To get all chart-y, it helps to go between very specific details and broadstrokes. Give me two mental photographs then talk subtext.

Show me the plumbing of the pitch. Don't go into detail the HOW of that epic shootout, but the WHY of it. The more I understand what's in the walls of the house you're describing, the less I worry about the decorations. Just dip into some really great bit of description now and then so I get eye candy, and feel the movie you see. A little goes a long way.

And the more you talk about the main characters, the better. If it's a sequel, the question in their minds is "Will [star] love this?"

Something a few of you have already mentioned: This is a multi-tier process. You don't start by pitching to the top decision-maker. You will be pitching the same thing again and again to people at increasingly higher levels, all who want to hear what you told the others. You're like Bruce Lee in GAME OF DEATH pitching to get to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

And because you'll be pitching it a lot, practice it a lot. Get it down to fifteen minutes or less. Leave a ton of room for Q&A. Annnnd I see some of you already just said that. But yeah. Make it shorter than you think it should be, they can always ask you follow-ups.

Sometimes you'll get the sense that the people you

pitch to will simply re-pitch your story to their boss. Try to avoid that. How? End the meetings by saying you'd love to get back in the room and pitch to anyone else who needs to hear it. Be direct with them. Won't always work but if you ask that to their faces you can come back and help keep the pitch's integrity vs a bad translation by execs.

Does your pitch have a villain? Find a way to say "Here's why I agree with the villain" and mean it. Make us feel s/he could be a hero....in some other version of the movie.

Next up: References and inside language. You know what can save your hide? A little homework on what movies/TV/lit the exec loves. Find out (thru your reps or your own questions in a call/mtg) what posters they hang on their walls. What they couldn't put down at home. That helps you to know what shorthand to build into your pitch. Not to pander to them, but to give them emotional anchors to your story.

And finally, a reminder: It's a scary, exhausting, nerve-wracking thing, to pitch for a story you love. It's tough. It's also the job.

Don't be hard on yourself afterward. Practice pushing through social awkwardness in non-pitch scenarios. At parties. With friends.

As scary as it may be to put your heart on your sleeve

and say, "This is me, this is my heart in this story," talent does this all the time. We are the first to do it, but then we're telling people to follow our footsteps. The director does the same dance, to slightly diff music. Actors REALLY do it, in an all-in kind of way that still boggles my mind. And they're relying on your commitment from way back.

Okay, with those trial-by-fire lessons learned, I'll end with this, my worst pitching horror stories.

I once pitched to an exec who got up mid-pitch to use his private adjacent restroom, but left the door cracked for me to "keep pitching."

Yeah, that was a moment of humiliation right there.

I once pitched on a comic book adaptation using other successful CB movies as touchstones. Their reply at end: "That won't win us Oscars."

I once pitched to someone at Smokehouse Pics and mid-pitch was interrupted by GEORGE EFFING CLOONEY, totally wiped my brain.

Once, my only way to crack a tough property and make it personal was by putting it in a very different setting.

So I start my windup...

ME: "We open in [setting]."

*EXEC: "I hate that setting. Next?" ME: *crushed silence**

And let me reiterate: There are as many ways to work in this business as there are writers. But these are my lessons based on my path. And in my experience, feature pitching is all about writing assignments. (TV writing is a different ballgame.)

*Some studios (be it TV or feature) love original ideas and buy those pitches, to make it their own. TO MAKE IT THEIR OWN *spooky music**

I pitched and sold an original idea to a studio that then got warped and twisted into something else.

That can happen. It has happened. It will happen. You have to keep swinging and act as if it won't happen again to you.

Okay I just gave myself PTSD from those horror stories and have to go lie down for a spell. Have a great day, you gorgeous monsters.

Original post [here](#).

Ed Solomon's movie credits include *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, *Men In Black*, *Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey*, *Now You See Me*, and *Bill & Ted Face the Music*.

ON PITCHING

Original post [here](#).

There you go! Tons of advice from Hollywood screenwriters

about the crafty craft of pitching!

Twitter: [@ed_solomon](#), @HIGHzurrer, [@cartblanch](#),
@selwynhinds.