



# From Pitch to publish

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GETTING YOUR STORIES ON AIR: IDIL MUSSA

## Finding Stories: **Source: BBC Academy**

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Social media and internet tools

Twitter

Facebook

Reddit

Google advanced search

Social media sites can help you find original stories, new case studies, contacts, interesting videos and photos. But, they can present journalistic challenges.

The information may be easy to access, but you need to ensure it's genuine and the people are authentic.

Verify that the information being posted and shared is legitimate.

# Curiosity is the key

## Ideas can come from:

Advertisements

Classified and small ads (Billionaire George Soros once advertised in the classified columns of the Economist to buy an entire, fully equipped hospital)

Community notice boards (planned protests, discussions, film screenings, book launches, etc.)

Notifications of bankruptcy and ads for liquidation sales. (When a big local name goes bankrupt, that's a story -- i.e. Zellers)

Get a life! It's important to talk to people who don't work in the media and hear what's going on in their lives. Get out of your bubble. Venture someplace you've not been before; tune into the sounds, people and scenes around you.

# Curiosity is the key

Listen carefully. People only take in a small percentage of what someone is saying. They make assumptions and finish their thoughts for them. By doing this, you will occasionally miss out on a big story.

Develop a beat. Make a list of who knows a lot in your field (academics, regulators, activists, industry people). Call everyone on that list weekly to catch up on what they're working on, what they're watching for, what they're debating and wondering about.

When done interviewing people about a specific topic, ask if there's anything else they're working on.

Read books, magazines and newspapers (including community publications), listen to mainstream radio stations, community and university stations and podcasts, watch newscasts and videos posted by news agencies.

Research and consume news stories in other countries.

# PITCHING STORIES

Source: Kathryn  
Gretsinger, CBC



Pitching is a key part of your job as a journalist. Doing it well ensures your stories get on air.



Your ideas are your currency in journalism. If you can generate great ideas and deliver them, you're golden! You will always get work.



Normally, pitching happens during story meetings in the morning -- around a table to 2-10 people.



Every journalist is trying to sell their story, so it's important to make yours stand out.



"The best story meetings are where ideas can grow. You can tap into the knowledge, curiosity and skills of your colleagues and make your stories better." -- Kathryn Gretsinger

# PITCHING STORIES

**Source:** Kathryn  
Gretsinger, CBC



Create pitches that are:



CLEAR



CONCISE



DESCRIPTIVE



Convince your colleagues why they should care!



Producers often ask: “Why should I care?” A good pitch answers that question.

**PITCHING STORIES**

**Source: Kathryn Gretsinger,  
CBC**

**There are 4 key things to remember with a great pitch.**

**Preparation:**

- Read up on the story.
- Do your homework.
- Understand what the backstory is.
- Identify the key characters.
- Have a focus in mind.
- Figure out who's doing what and why?

Be prepared to briefly tell your story and sell it.

Have a focus statement: Someone doing something for a reason (use the word BECAUSE)

## PITCHING STORIES

Source: Kathryn Gretsinger,  
CBC

### **Precision:**

- Provide specific details that allow people to imagine the story you want to share.
- Describe the treatment.
- Make sure the story fits with the program you're pitching to.
- Keep your oral pitch brief. Just a couple of minutes. Remember: you don't have to tell the WHOLE story.
- Set it up, offer some details and describe why it makes sense on the show.



## PITCHING STORIES

Source: Kathryn Gretsinger,  
CBC

### Passion

- Don't list off a slew of ideas.
- Show your colleagues what makes you connect to the story.
- Explain why the audience might care.

### Persistence

- You're competing to have your story heard.
- You need to push for the stories you believe in (but be cautious of pushing too hard -- especially if people have checked out)
- Don't keep going on and on when you know they're rejecting your idea.
- If your stories are routinely rejected, it's your job to find out why?
- Ask a producer or colleague for a critique of your pitches.
- Be open to their feedback.

## PITCHING STORIES

Source: Kathryn Gretsinger,  
CBC

### Email Pitches

- When you pitch via email, give your pitch a name or title (i.e. PITCH: HOCKEY HEROS)
- Write a concise, well-crafted paragraph.
- Use telling details.
- Use active verbs.
- Briefly write the story out and explain how you imagine hearing or seeing it on the air.
- Be polite and positive.
- Ask for feedback and explain you'd be happy to provide more information.
- Don't attach pages and pages of background documents.
- Distill the story for your potential producer/editor.

## PITCHING STORIES

Source: **Kathryn Gretsinger,**  
**CBC**

When pitching remember: The best stories are about people and a good, focused pitch contains 3 key elements: a compelling character, exciting action, and deep motivation.

## PITCHING STORIES

Source: Kathryn Greisinger, CBC

### Compelling Character:

- A student
- More interesting character: a student drowning in debt
- Compelling character: Maria Garcia-Jones, a desperate unemployed PhD student carrying a \$70,000 debt load

### Exciting Action:

- Going on a canoe trip
- More interesting action: canoeing Canada's deepest river canyons
- Specific and exciting action: battling the rapids of Canada's deepest river canyons, 30 years after your father did it

### Deep Motivation:

- Motivation: because he wants to make the world a better place
- Deeper motivation: because he wants to leave a legacy for his children
- Even deeper motivation: because he regrets missing so many of his son's baseball games

The ingredients to a good story

Source: Ian Sanders, BBC  
Academy

### Be human-centred

- It can be a challenge in the daily news cycle because some stories don't lend themselves to creative angles, especially if it's a story about a policy or funding.

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**Stories are driven by emotion, not data.** Radio and video can be great at communicating emotion. Audiences won't remember facts and data; they will remember people. "So lose the bar charts, shine a light on people."

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**Take your audience on a journey.** Every story should involve an element of transformation. So ask yourself, have you opened your audience's eyes to new possibilities and challenged their world view? Take them on a journey across the threshold from how they see things now to how things could be. That's powerful.

**Useful websites:**

**NPR Training: Storytelling tips and best practices**

<https://training.npr.org/topics/>

**BBC Academy**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy>

**Al Tompkins Storytelling Workshops -- “Aim For the Heart”**

Senior Faculty for Broadcast and Online at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, teaches communication students at Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, Indiana - November 15, 2013.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQ3st0h\\_oWk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQ3st0h_oWk)

**Pitch directly to a CBC Radio show**

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/docmakers/pitch-directly-to-a-cbc-radio-show-1.4776140>