



## The Art of the Pitch

by Julie H. Ferguson

*Author and professional speaker, Julie H. Ferguson leads workshops that provide aspiring authors with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to approach publishers and succeed. Her workshops are available as e-books and paperbacks through Beacon Literary Services at [www.beaconlit.com](http://www.beaconlit.com), then click on Writers' Tools.*

A query letter sits on my desk from a first-time author of non-fiction who has hired me to whip it into shape. At least two pages long, 50% of the text is consumed in explaining why the writer wrote her first book. Acquisition editors are not interested in an author's motivation – all they want to know is what the book is about, if the book has a market that is panting for it, and if the author has a following.

Pitches, aka concept statements, can be as short as one sentence or as long as a paragraph of about 200 words. The single sentence is harder to write and answers the question: "What is your book about?" I usually tackle this after I have written the paragraph. Here is the single sentence I used for my latest book: *Sing a New Song is about four Canadian bishops who pushed the envelope and changed the world.* This short pitch is more suited to conversations than written communications, but it also generates the book's theme or mission statement. Once you have pinned down this sentence, you can measure everything you plan to include in the book against it. Very useful...!

The longer version of a pitch is a brief summary of a query letter. It includes a description of the book, its slant, the market, why the book is needed, hints about why you are ideal to write it, and highlights some of the benefits and features of the book. To get all this into such a short piece takes tight writing, elegant word choices, and much revision. This pitch must also begin with a compelling hook. Here's an example, with my thanks to Elizabeth Lyon:

*Too many good Canadian writers are rejected by editors, simply because they lack the necessary insiders' knowledge. Get Published on Your First Try! answers the plight of these writers by teaching them how to develop winning non-fiction book proposals. This how-to guide is written "writer-up" instead of "editor-down," showing as much as it tells by integrating examples of successful proposals into the text. As the most instructional book on the subject in this country, it features simplicity, step-by-step directions, and offers a template for the best proposal format. Written by author and speaker, Julie Ferguson, Get Published on Your First Try! makes liberal use of examples, exercises, and checklists to guide the aspiring author from inspiration through to a publisher's acceptance of their first non-fiction manuscript.*  
(126 words)

The pitch is not enough for a query letter; it needs to be fleshed out more. However, it can be used as the opening paragraph in a proposal. With a little tweaking, a pitch is ideal for a publisher's catalogue blurb and the copy for the back cover. Phew!!!