# Factory floor Producing constructive visual stories

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**Handout**

**Tips on pitching a story**

To sell a story idea, reporters need to present it to the editor in a way that sparks interest, shows a solid reporting plan, and is succinct and to the point. Below are some tips to help your pitch succeed.

**Cold pitching:** Most freelancers will at some point cold pitch stories to editors they don’t know. Beyond selling the story idea, they must present themselves as credible journalists. Below are some international standards for pitching. Standards in national media might differ from country to country.

* **Pitching guidelines:** Often, pitching guidelines are on media outlets’ websites. If not, check out editors’ Twitter feeds. They might have put tips there.
* **New story or new angles?** See if the story has already been run at the outlet. If so, highlight a new angle in the pitch. Point out any direct or exclusive access you have to people, communities or organizations relevant to the story.
* **Proper research:** Journalists often underestimate how much research is needed before pitching a story. Be up to date on developments. The story might have changed, which could have made it less worthy of coverage or even more interesting.
* **What’s being pitched?** A feature? A documentary? An opinion piece? A TV report? This will determine who you’ll send the pitch to.
* **Keep it brief:** Editors are busy. Short pitches that are to the point are more likely to be read. Grab their attention immediately.
* **Pitching via email/social media:** You can find email addresses of many editors on LinkedIn, Twitter or their outlet’s website. If not, and only then, you can send a message via LinkedIn or Twitter introducing yourself and asking for an e-mail address. Messages on social media should remain professional.
* **Work samples**: Include a work sample if it’s in the same language as the targeted publication or is of the same or higher quality that the publication will be expecting. A reputable media outlet won’t commission a first timer without seeing proof of his or her work. The outlet may ask you to file as a test or “on spec”, which means it’s only paid for if accepted for publication.

**Pitching to an editor you know:** This can be easier depending on the editor-journalist relationship. The journalist might even discuss the story informally with the editor and to get an idea about its chances or how it might be improved.

**Pitching as a staff member:** Pitching internally is easier and more informal because you can talk to the editor at work. If pitching to another department, get tips from a colleague who works there about the best approach. If not possible, the standard pitch via email is better.

**Pitching a series/program:** A series or a program can involve a substantial commitment from the outlet, so the pitch is more like a proposal that argues why an investment of time and resources should be made. Consider the outlet’s editorial strategy and priorities. If the priority is getting more subscribers, focus on how this series or program will do that.

**Build a professional social media persona:** Journalists should be active on social media. Facebook, Instagram and TikTok are important platforms to promote work, while Twitter and LinkedIn remain the main platforms to build industry connections. Twitter lists are useful to keep track of editors’ calls for pitches.

**Newsletters about pitching opportunities:** There are newsletters that collect calls for pitches on the internet and send a collection out by email to subscribers. Many have free shorter versions or trial periods, after which it’ll cost a few dollars a month for the full versions. If you don’t want to do regular searches yourself, it’s worth subscribing to one or two of these. *(Examples: Sonia Weiser’s “Opportunities of the Week” and Alasdair Lane’s “Write at Home”.)*

**Decisions to make before pitching:** Think about the story structure, its length, visuals, etc.Who will be the main audience? What is the audience’s level of literacy? What is the intended impact? Where can the story be shown or shared?

**General pitching tips:**

* Know the story well before pitching it.
* Know who you’ll be pitching it to.
* Know what they’re looking for.
* Don’t abuse your relationship with an editor; keep communications professional.
* Keep examples of all your published stories. They are your CV.
* Strive to produce high-quality pieces, even if it’s for a small media outlet or the pay is not very good.
* Join journalism networks/groups, etc.
* Subscribe to newsletters for journalism opportunities.
* Follow and connect with journalists and editors on LinkedIn and Twitter.
* Look online for other pitching resources.