

Guidelines for Pitch Critique Session Participants

This opportunity is designed to help you improve and strengthen your pitch so it will make your query package stronger.

NOTE: Specific instructions will be discussed during the FREE pre-conference webinars on July 25 and August 29, 2026. When you check in at the conference, your personalized schedule will include the time of your pitch session and other details. If you are only observing the pitches, these guidelines do not apply to you.

To prepare for your time in front of an industry professional at the upcoming conference, keep the following guidelines in mind:

FORMATTING YOUR PITCH: Your pitch should consist of 1-3 paragraphs, no more than 200 words. (What you would write in the plot section of your query letter.)

BRING: Only one (1) pitch for one (1) manuscript. Bring two (2) printed copies of your pitch (12-point Arial or Times New Roman font or larger and double-spaced for ease of reading). Also bring a pen/pencil and paper to jot notes. (**NOTE:** You do not submit your pitch before the conference.)

AT THE SESSION: This is a tightly timed event that will begin at the designated start time, so please arrive five minutes early to find your seat. You will find your name on a chair in the front row upon entering the pitch room. Pitches will be presented in this order. Please do not ask the assigning volunteer to give you another number, but you are welcome to see if another participant is willing to swap.

Silence your phone. If you'd like, ask someone else in the group to take notes for you when it's your turn and you can do the same for them. Please wait until after the session ends to exchange notes.

WHEN IT'S YOUR TURN:

- You'll hand one copy of your pitch to the volunteer timer, who will hand it to the agent. Keep the other copy of your pitch with you to read from.
- You'll be handed a microphone and the volunteer will start a 5-minute timer.
- You will then read your pitch aloud for the agent and the entire group to hear. You may stand while reading the pitch or remain seated. (If you need accessibility

accommodations, please contact Laura Ayo at midsouth-ra@scbwi.org as soon as possible.)

- The agent will then provide feedback. They may ask you some questions, suggest places you need more information, or sections you could strengthen.
- The timer will raise their hand when there is one minute left. When your timer goes off, your time is over. Timers will sometimes interrupt the conversation or might even catch someone mid-sentence! You may finish your sentence if it's no more than a few seconds. This can feel awkward, but this is the nature of timed pitch events – the timer always gets the final word! Thank the agent and take your seat. To keep things moving and fair for everyone, it's best to try to lean into the experience, keep your sense of humor, and pass the ball when your time is up.
- You will then pass the microphone to the next person in line to pitch or return it to the volunteer.

Additional Notes:

- You do not need to memorize your pitch, but we recommend practicing in front of a mirror or with a friend to become comfortable with sharing it. Time those practice sessions. The quicker you read your pitch, the more time you have for the feedback portion. The FREE Pitch Practice webinar on August 29 is a great way to test out your pitch among peers.
- A pitch is not a query letter. Keep your pitch short. Attend the FREE Pitch Perfect webinar on July 25 to learn what makes a solid pitch. This webinar will be recorded and the recording will be available for review through September 29 for you to revisit as often as you need. But we encourage you to attend the live event so you can ask your questions in real time.
- You are welcome to take notes throughout the pitch session, even when it isn't your turn, and apply what the industry pro tells other participants to your own work. If you'd like to share those notes, or offer your own feedback to someone else about their work, please do so privately and only after the session ends.
- Please do NOT put the agent on the spot by asking whether they'd like to see your manuscript in their submission inbox. All conference faculty agents will be open to submissions after the conference and you will have an opportunity to send your work to them per their guidelines at that time.

Questions? Email Laura Ayo at midsouth-ra@scbwi.org before **Wednesday, Sept.**

23, 2026. After that, we'll be traveling and may not see your email in a timely manner.