Pitch Perfect
STORY WORKSHEET

Fill out your worksheet elements, then string them together in a "pitch paragraph." Don't be afraid to experiment with different combinations of elements, then try out your favorites on a friend. (See subsequent pages for explanations of terms and examples.)

Story Elements for Pitch Paragraph:

1. Main character: _____

2. Main character's primary goal: _____

3. Obstacles to goal: _____

4. Stakes: _____

5. Genre indicators: _____

6. Voice of the story (in third person, present tense)

7. Hook: _____

Pitch Paragraph:

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A pitch paragraph succinctly communicates what your story is about. It's a "teaser," similar to the description on the back of a published book, *not* a synopsis of the entire story. When you're pitching your story via a query letter, it's the "meat" of the letter. When you pitch verbally, this paragraph encapsulates what you might say after delivering your logline.

The pitch paragraph presents your main character, his/her/their goals, some obstacles, and the stakes, plus provides genre indicators, without revealing how the story ends. It should be conveyed in the voice or tone of the story, and when in written form should be third person, present tense. The most important function of the pitch paragraph is to hook the reader into wanting to know more.

Breaking this down, a pitch paragraph should:
1. introduce the **main character**;
2. convey the plot via the **main character's primary goal**;
3. include some of the **obstacles** in the character's way;
4. show what's at **stake** if they fail;
5. provide indicators of the story's **genre**;
6. demonstrate the **voice** of the story; and
7. **hook** the reader into wanting more.

1. Main character:
Create a snapshot of your main character that indicates what "type" of character they are for the reader to latch onto for the purposes of reading the pitch paragraph. This should not include a physical rundown, a recap of their backstory, or their thoughts on global warming! Start with the "dominant impression" you use in your logline, then add their name to make the paragraph easier to digest. If you have multiple POV characters in your story, pick the primary one. Exception: for romance, include both "love interest" POV characters—if this is too cumbersome for one paragraph, give each character their own short pitch paragraph like you see on the back of romance novels.

2. Main character's primary goal:
By sharing your character's primary goal you convey your plot in a way that's easy to grasp. Think about what your character wants—this is the BIG want, their overarching goal for the story. While your character likely has multiple goals, both internal and external, for the pitch paragraph boil it down to the biggest, most important goal. If your character's main goal changes over the course of the story, go with the initial one. Add the new goal only if you can do so without making the paragraph too complicated or confusing.

3. Obstacles to goal:
It's important that your pitch paragraph includes a few things that impede your character from reaching their goal. This shows that achieving their goal won't be easy, and gives a sense of what the course of the story will be like. To begin, I suggest making a

comprehensive list of all the obstacles in your character's way. (Keep in mind that the antagonist is often the main character's biggest obstacle, and can be a great addition to your pitch paragraph.) Next, delete from your list any obstacles that are unimportant, boring, or too complicated to explain succinctly. After narrowing it down, pick a few favorites and see how they sound together.

4. Stakes:

It should *matter* whether or not your character reaches their goal, so share what's at stake if they fail. Showing stakes is important because it lets the reader know the gravity of the situation. The bigger the stakes, the more tension, so when you reveal big stakes in your pitch paragraph, you indicate a tension-filled story. Depending on the genre, there are some stakes that are typically implicit: for romance, it's "will the main character lose the love of their life;" for thrillers, there are usually *actual lives* at stake. If your story has implicit stakes, don't use it as a free pass when writing your pitch paragraph. Include what *else* is at stake—does your character stand to lose the family business as well as true love? Is your detective's job on the line, as well as her life? When readers understand the stakes, they become more invested in finding out if the character will be successful, and then are more likely to want to continue reading.

5. Genre indicators

"Genre indicators" are elements that telegraph the flavor of your story, and they're essential in a pitch paragraph. If your story is a crime mystery, the pitch paragraph should contain words like "clue," "investigate," "crime," and "suspect." If it's a fantasy quest with magic and dragons, there'd better be magic and/or dragons and/or a quest in your pitch paragraph. By including "genre indicator" keywords and phrases, you demonstrate an understanding of your story's genre, and show the reader that your story actually belongs in the genre you've identified.

6. Voice of the story (in third person, present tense):

Voice is important in the pitch paragraph because it's an implied promise of the voice in the story. When you infuse your pitch paragraph with the voice of your story, you'll attract readers who will like the voice in your narrative. In written form (e.g. a query letter or the description on the back of a published novel) a pitch paragraph is traditionally in third person, present tense, no mater what perspective and tense the narrative uses.

7. Hook :

A hook is what makes a reader want to know what happens next. When pitching to an editor or agent, a good hook will hopefully entice them to ask to see your story. Importantly, it also demonstrates an ability to hook readers if the story is published.

EXAMPLE:

The description or "blurb" on the back of a published novel is a great example of a pitch paragraph, and can show what it looks like to combine story elements in an effective way. Below are story elements for *The Hunger Games*, followed by the book's actual back cover description (i.e. pitch paragraph), so you can see how it all comes together.

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Pitch Paragraph Elements in *The Hunger Games*

1. **Main character**: Katniss, a brave, desperate sixteen-year-old who loves her sister more than anything
2. **Main character's goal**: to be the sole survivor in a fight to the death with other teens
3. **Obstacles**: arena dangers, other players trying to kill her
4. **Stakes**: her life and her humanity
5. **Genre indicators**:
   Speculative Fiction: ruins of North America, Nation of Panem, TV death games
   Young Adult: ages of characters
6. **Voice**: should be the same tone as the narrative
7. **Hook**: Katniss volunteers to enter a fight to the death on live TV to save her sister. She's the underdog—will she survive? Will she sacrifice her humanity in order to win?

Back Cover Description from *The Hunger Games*

In the ruins of a place once known as North America lies the nation of Panem, a shining Capitol surrounded by twelve outlying districts. The Capitol is harsh and cruel and keeps the districts in line by forcing them all to send one boy and one girl between the ages of twelve and eighteen to participate in the annual Hunger Games, a fight to the death on live TV. Sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen regards it as a death sentence when she steps forward to take her sister's place in the Games. But Katniss has been close to dead before—and survival, for her, is second nature. Without really meaning to, she becomes a contender. But if she is to win, she will have to start making choices that weigh survival against humanity and life against love.