

Journalism 101: How to write a pitch



What a pitch is, what makes a good one, and how to find and use data.

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With special thanks to Enock Wanderema, Ruth Jepkemoi Singen, and Juan Pablo Arellano for their expertise throughout, and to all pilot school educators and students for their invaluable feedback.

The Empowering Youth through Environmental Storytelling is a collaboration between The Environment and Human Rights Academy (TEHRA), News Decoder and the Young Educators European Association (YEEA).

The purpose of these educational materials is to help young people understand the climate crisis on a systems level through engaging with the topics and foster agency through the skills and techniques of journalism.

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These educational resources have been developed to the best of our knowledge, using reliable and widely-recognized sources. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and clarity, we cannot guarantee that the materials are free from errors or omissions. Climate change is a field of knowledge that continues to evolve, and teachers and learners are encouraged to consult up-to-date scientific sources (e.g. IPCC, IPBES or national agencies) to complement and enrich these activities.

Published: November 2025



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



News Decoder

TEHRA
The Environment and Human Rights Academy

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1. What a pitch is

A pitch, in the context of journalism, is a short text that is either spoken aloud to an editor or sent in an email. A pitch includes all the important information of what the journalist's story is (no matter what format), in order to convince the editor that the story should be produced and published. It is a short summary of what story you're going to tell, what question you're going to answer, and why it's important for your audience.

The editor should be convinced that this story fits their publication and that their audience will want to listen to it, read it, or watch it.

A journalist will pitch their story to an editor in a newsroom or media organization, or send the pitch as an email if working as a freelance journalist.

This means that even if you're not employed by any media organizations, you can always send your excellent story idea to the editor of your favourite magazine or news channel, in an effort to convince them that you should produce this story!

A pitch is usually quite short and concise, around 200 or 300 words.

A good pitch:

- Shows that you have a strategy (what format you will choose, what data you will use, and who you will talk to);
- Reflects focus and relevance (the story is not an essay about a general topic, it will instead focus on a specific case);
- Demonstrates impartiality and objectivity (you will not share your opinion, but rather use facts and data);
- Shows that your story will answer a question.





1.1 Finding an angle

A pitch should include an angle – which might also be seen as the question that your story answers.

Think of an angle like cutting a slice from a round cake that has 100 different pieces of candy on top of the icing. It's your birthday and you get to cut the first slice. Depending on which angle you cut the first slice from will determine which slice of the cake you get and therefore which pieces of the candy you get.

If you think of a story topic like this cake, the angle will define which direction the topic will take and which pieces of candy (interesting information) it will include.

If it's difficult to find an angle for your topic, start telling people around you about your topic, about what you've discovered through your research. What kinds of questions do they ask about it? What do they seem to be interested in? Do they ask you something that makes you think, hmm, that's a good question! If so, then you've found your angle.

Another way of doing it is to imagine you're telling your parents or some friends about your topic – what one thing do you tell them so that they become interested in the the topic?

Or, think about the concept of the "elevator pitch". If you had 30 seconds in an elevator to explain to someone your idea so that they wanted to hear more about it after you leave the elevator, what would you say?

That's your angle, and the beginning of your pitch.





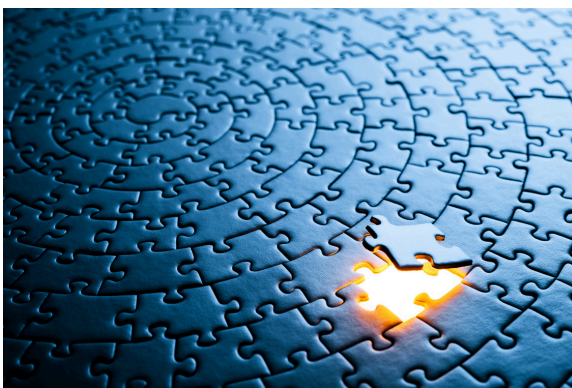
1.2 Narrowing the focus

Let's say you're interested in the question of who is being most affected by climate change. As you now know, this is an issue of global interest, with plenty of different angles. Through going through our climate units, you're hopefully getting up to speed on the facts and data of this globally.

But your story needs to go beyond generalities. Try to identify a local issue that captures the gist of the problem; by looking closely at the local issue, you can illuminate the broader picture.

What could that local issue be? You might find research that predicts some crops in your country will be affected by drought or changing weather more than others, and that one of these crops is a major crop in your country. Or, you might find that some groups of people in your country or region are likely to be more affected by any weather disasters, or that those who drink four cups of coffee a day will have to cut down due to the predicted difficulty to grow coffee beans.

Whenever there is a big topic – like climate change – there are almost always aspects of the general topic at the local level. By looking locally, you'll be able to narrow the focus to a manageable level and improve your chances of coming up with original material to make your story stand out. And often finding the local story is the angle to the bigger, overall story.





1.3 The different elements of a climate story pitch

1. State what the problem is

In your pitch you need to include what the problem is that you want to provide context to. Your problem will likely have something to do with emissions – a country not reducing their emissions enough or an industry that is emitting a large amount – or impact – a community or group that is being affected by the impacts of climate change.

2. State the main data and the important context

In order to show relevance and importance, and to ground your story in fact, it needs to include particular context.

For example, let's say you want to produce a story on how the cotton industry is causing some rivers to be polluted by pesticides.

You would then need to find any data you can to answer the following:

a) who is benefitting from this particular cotton plantation? and who is losing?
what is the difference between these two groups.

b) what is the impact of pesticides on human health?

(There's more info in the following pages about data!)

3. State why is it relevant now and who are the people we should be talking to about it

In order to make your story timely, the problem (or the solution) needs to be something that is currently ongoing. State this in your pitch. Then, make sure to mention – briefly – the “who”, where it is relevant to your story.

Who has the power to do something about this problem? Who created this problem in the first place? Who are the victims of this problem? Who is trying to do something about it? Who knows a lot about this? While you might not answer all of these in your pitch, as you want to keep it short, note this down so that you'll be able to come back to it when you're putting your story together.





2. What is data and how to find it

Data is the collection of values that convey information, describing the quantity (amount), quality (how good or bad), facts, statistics, or other units of measurement.

Journalists use data to provide meaning to their story.

Read this paragraph in a News Decoder article titled *When young girls pay the cost of climate change*

The journalist here used data to ground the story, between explaining what the data shows and providing a quote from an interview.

It's important to state when the data is from, who gathered it (and you yourself should check the credibility of the source) and what the data is.

The data is then brought to life by the following quote.

Young girls as assets

In districts like Jaffarabad and Chowki Jamali, the aftermath of the disaster has left families grappling with deepening poverty, food insecurity and crushing debt. For many, marrying off their young daughters is no longer just a tradition, it's a form of survival.

A 2023 survey by the **Provincial Disaster Management Authority** reported a 15% spike in underage marriages in flood-affected regions. Child rights activists warn that these numbers likely underestimate the scale of the crisis, as most cases go unreported.

"In flood-hit areas, families are exchanging their daughters to repay loans, buy food or simply reduce the number of mouths to feed," said Maryam Jamali, a social worker with the Madad Community organization. "We've documented girls as young as 12 being married to men in their forties or fifties. This isn't about tradition anymore, it's desperation."

2.2 Finding data

The data from the article shown above was found in a report by a government organization in Pakistan. Government bodies and institutions have a need to gather data, and often publish what they find in reports.

The first step though is to find out what kind of data you need. If you're working on a story about the impact of some recent floods on a local community, how will you show that impact?

Perhaps you'll need to find out how many people were displaced from their houses, and then what characterizes these people – finding out average income, livelihood, types of houses they lived in.

Maybe you'll need to find out what crops and farmland were impacted by the floods and how important these crops are to the local economy.



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If you're working on a story about your country's emissions you might want to find out in which sector most emissions are coming from.

You then might discover it comes from the building sector, and so then you might want to find out a) what materials are being used for buildings, b) whether this has changed in recent years, c) how well insulated buildings are, and d) how the building sector compares to other countries. From the data you might find your story!

"Google it" is a very casual way of saying "find the data". As long as you ensure that what you find from Googling comes from a verifiable source, then you're doing a good job.

Do a background search on the organization/company/institution that presents the data. Find their About page and discover what commercial or political interests they have. Use your common sense to see if they are reliable! And if you can't find any data straight away on your topic (from governments, institutions, think tanks, etc), you can always try doing a search on Our World in Data and see where they're getting their data from.



Cartoon by Betje Ton