

PitchFest FAQ — Not all of this information is available for Virtual PitchFest, but it is included as background for the event.

PitchFest and ConsultFest: Two of the Best Investments in your Writing Career



Sandra Brannan
PitchFest Director

Dear PitchFest and ConsultFest Attendees,

I can't wait to meet you in person this July!

I'm **Sandra Brannan**, (Sandra@SandraBrannan.com) PitchFest and ConsultFest Director, and I'm here to answer your questions and guide you through two of the best tracks that ITW ThrillerFest has to offer. Whether you're a writer aspiring to become a published author or a published author seeking a new agent or wanting to meet editors (or even producers), each program is designed to assist both novice and experienced writers.

If You Are A:

Then You Should Attend:

	<u>PitchFest</u>	<u>ConsultFest</u>
Writer with Completed Polished Manuscript to Sell	X	
Writer Not Yet Ready to Sell a MS and want Advice		X
Writer Wondering if the MS is Ready to Pitch		X
Writer Seeking Help on Query Letter	X	X
Writer Wanting to Check Out the Process Before Pitching Next Year	X	X

Self-Published Author Seeking Traditional Publisher	X	X
Self-Published Author Seeking Advice on What to Do with Self-Published Work	X	X
Self-Published Author Seeking A Sale of Movie Rights (Producers don't always attend PF. Check website for confirmations)	X	
Self-Published Author Seeking Career Advice		X
Published Author Looking for A New Agent or Editor	X	X
Published Author Seeking Advice on a New Manuscript		X
Published Author Seeking A Sale of Movie Rights (Producers don't always attend PF. Check website for confirmations)	X	
Published Author Seeking Career Advice		X

Like you, I wanted to invest my money in a writing conference to make every penny count. PitchFest and ConsultFest make that happen. Uniquely designed to bring writers to NYC—the major hub of the American publishing industry—PitchFest is designed for writers with completed polished manuscripts and offers the best agents and acquiring publishing-house editors who are ready to listen to you pitch that novel you just wrote. I found my wonderful agent at PitchFest, and I'm here to help you find yours.

If you're a novice writer who may not be ready to pitch, or an experienced writer who might need advice with their career paths as established authors, ConsultFest is for you. Editors and agents are available to review a sample of your work—either a query letter or first 2-pages—and offer you personalized advice on how to improve your chances of getting published. These 15-minute sessions can also help better prepare you for PitchFest, improving your chances of making a best 'first impression' on that agent or publishing house you've been eager to meet. Or take the opportunity to express how your work has improved since the last time you met with that agent or editor and seek further advice on next steps.

We are here to answer questions, allay your fears, and pass on suggestions to conference organizers under the guidance of our lovely ThrillerFest Director, **Kimberley Howe**, at KimberleyHowe@ThrillerWriters.org.

To familiarize yourself with both events, please refer to PitchFest FAQs or ConsultFest FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions). If you can't find answers to your questions in either FAQs, we have a team here to help you.

For questions from writers, my Assistant Director for PitchFest and ConsultFest, **Jennifer Kreischer** can be contacted at JenKreischer@comcast.net.

Michael Bradley, Technical Assistant, has volunteered to help me behind the scenes, and his efforts will also benefit you during the events. michael@mbradleyonline.com

And I, **Sandra Brannan**, will be focused on finding the best agents and editors in the industry for you to meet at both events. I'm at Sandra@SandraBrannan.com.

Our team hopes to make your journey to success an easier one, so please know we're here to help. We'll do our best to find you an answer or connect you with the appropriate expert who can answer your questions. Let us know how we can help you!

Sandra Brannan, PitchFest and ConsultFest Director

PITCHFEST

Q: What exactly is PitchFest and when is it?

A: On Thursday afternoon following CraftFest and Practice PitchFest, we will host PitchFest, where you can pitch your novel to some of the best agents and acquiring editors in the business. Each year, we have over 50 agents and editors attending this special event with movie producers attending the event from time to time. Read about the incredible tales of success under the Success Stories tab. PitchFest has become the world's largest gathering of top agents and acquiring publishing-house editors looking for the next bestseller. More specifically, it is a three-and-a-half-hour opportunity for writers to pitch their manuscripts to as many agents as they have the time and energy to meet.

Q: Can I really find an agent for my manuscript?

A: A number of authors have gotten representation from this event, including our very own PitchFest Director, Sandra Brannan, who found her agent through pitching. Several writers' manuscripts have become real, published works, as evidenced by a few sharing their Success Stories. PitchFest, held every year on the Thursday afternoon following CraftFest in the morning and Practice PitchFest after noon, is designed for authors who want to pitch their work to the agents and acquiring publishing-house editors who volunteer to hear the pitches.

Q: Are these real agents and editors or the kind that say they are the real deal but charge me to read my manuscript and then steer me into vanity presses?

A: Our agents and editors are the real deal. They are part of or sell to major publishers around the world, and they are highly respected in the field. They do not charge a fee to read your work, and they do not steer you toward vanity presses. (Which, for those unfamiliar with the term, are companies that will "publish" your book only if you pay them.) Our agents only work with publishers who pay YOU for your writing. All agents who attend PitchFest are either members

of the Association of Authors' Representatives (AAR), or they have sold to an ITW-approved publisher. Only editor from ITW-approved publishers are invited.

Q: Why do you have agents AND editors at PitchFest? What's the difference?

A: Because most publishing houses require that work from new authors be submitted through agents, the most common route to publication is for you to secure a contract with an agent who sells the work on your behalf to an editor at a publishing house. However, if you can get an editor interested in publishing your work at PitchFest, agents might take notice and request to see your work. Some editors at the event don't require an agent and you have an opportunity to sell directly to them, although this is an exception, not the rule.

Q: Are the agents and editors really taking new clients?

A: Every agent and editor who attends is actively seeking thriller manuscripts, and many are looking for other things in addition: mystery, suspense, romance, non-fiction, supernatural, and other genres. Review the participating bios and photos on the ThrillerFest website for what each is looking for and what they are not looking for. This is a numbers game and without PitchFest, you are much less likely to secure an agent.

Q: How does PitchFest work? – the process is different on-line, but you should be ready to have the same discussion described below.

A: We recommend you study the bios of the agents and editors before arriving at the PitchFest event and prioritize whom you would like to visit based on the best fit for you and your manuscript. Once you have your prioritized list, you will find the four rooms are arranged alphabetically from A-Z or Z-A. The tables are arranged around all four walls in each room. Stand in the line of an agent or editor to whom you would like to pitch and when they are free, have a seat, relax, and pitch your manuscript. They want to know about you too, and why you feel best qualified to write the story you did. This process may take 30 seconds or 5 minutes, but normally you will be done in 3 minutes. We've asked the agents and editors to limit your time to 3 minutes so there's time for all writers. The 3 minutes are designed for you to have a conversation with the agent or editor, so please don't plan for a monologue, either from you or by them. Start with a quick, succinct high-level pitch, then answer questions from the agent or editor. Be prepared to continue the discussion if asked.

Just like speed dating, it serves you best to be prepared, concise, and succinct with your pitch. They may or may not ask questions, but normally they either give you instructions to send them a sample of your work if they are interested, or they will tell you they are not interested. Either way, thank them for their time, then move to the next name on your list and make your next pitch. The main event is two-and-a-half hours, with an additional PowerHour immediately afterward, for a total of three-and-a-half hours of pitching time.

Q: Is there anything besides PitchFest in which I can participate?

A: ConsultFest, a new event has been added to ThrillerFest week to complement PitchFest. Because so many writers wanted more time with experts to ask advice, rather than pitch a completed, polished manuscript, we created ConsultFest where pitches are highly discouraged. PitchFest is about making connections whereas ConsultFest is more about preparing the writer for an eventual opportunity to pitch. ConsultFest will be available throughout CraftFest and ThrillerFest where attendees can invest \$100 to meet with one-on-one with an industry leading expert for 15 minutes. Recruiting the top acquiring editors and agents for this opportunity, ThrillerFest organizers are excited to offer one of the most valuable opportunities in any writer's career to get instant feedback on his or her query letter or first two pages of a manuscript. By mid-June, the writer will be notified of an assigned date and time with the expert who will read the writer's work (see required submittal), provide comments about first impressions, and offer feedback for improvements. Even with the overwhelming popularity of ConsultFest, we don't limit the number of sessions you want to purchase, but you will only be allowed a maximum of two sessions with the same agent or editor. Eligibility for ConsultFest requires registration to CraftFest, MasterClass, or ThrillerFest. We have a limited number of experts and will confirm sessions on a first-come-first-serve basis. And of course, schedules may need to be adjusted through the event.

Q: Do I have to have a completed manuscript, or can I just pitch what I have written so far or throw out an idea I have for a novel?

A: We strongly recommend you have a completed and polished manuscript to sign up for PitchFest, unless you have a non-fiction project. Having a completed manuscript is not mandatory to participate in PitchFest but do your best to have one completed before the event. We know from experience that if agents like what they see, they want to sign you as a client and sell your book immediately to a publisher. You want that, too. They can't sell your book unless it's finished. And they may not be as interested months from now when you do finish. So, do your best to type THE END before coming to PitchFest. Pitch your best book. Mentioning to an agent that you have written other books is perfectly appropriate if they ask, and use that when they ask about what other ideas you have considered writing as a follow-up to the completed manuscript you are pitching. Also, feel free to pitch a self-published book although you're better off pitching a fresh, new idea. The agents and editors love unique voices, new concepts, and books that haven't already been out on the market. This pitching session is not 'practice'. This is business. If you want advice on how to complete your novel or whether or not you're headed in the right direction, please sign up for ConsultFest instead.

Q: Do you assign me to agents, or do I pick?

A: Whom you pitch to is entirely up to you. Over the main event and PowerHour, you will have time to pitch to numerous industry experts. The number depends upon the length of the lines and how you prioritized the experts you would like to see. Keep in mind, pitching traditionally to a dozen agents or editors through a query letter or email would take months. At PitchFest, you accomplish that in one afternoon. Plus they get to meet the writer behind the work, which should be a bonus in selling your manuscript.

Q: Do I have to stay the whole three-and-a-half hours?

A: We do not take attendance. You can stay for one pitch, one hour, two hours, or the whole three-and-a-half. It's entirely up to you. Some authors have their list of six or twelve agents and editors, and when they're done, they leave. Many more stay the entire time and see as many as they can. Pitching is a numbers game—the more you see, the more likely someone is to say 'yes'. Also, just because a few told you to send them a partial or the first few pages does not mean they'll ultimately take you on as a client. So, your chances improve with getting more experts to say they are interested.

Q: Are the agents and editors paid to be there?

A: Absolutely not. They are volunteers. They are investing their time hoping to find great stories written by decent people. The more passionate they are about the manuscript, the easier it will be for agents to sell to editors, publishers to sell to the public. Don't be discouraged if one of your top priority agents isn't interested in your story. That does not mean you don't have the right story. It's just not the right story for them. Move to the next one on your list.

Q: Whom do we turn to if we have a more specific question about PitchFest?

A: The organizers have assigned me, Sandra Brannan, as the PitchFest and ConsultFest Director. I am a volunteer author who has assembled a team of experts who can help you with any questions or concerns you might have about PitchFest or ConsultFest. And if someone from my team of experts can't help, contact me at Sandra@SandraBrannan.com or #SandraBrannanAuthor for FaceBook communications or @SandraBrannan on Twitter. I've been through PitchFest several times, finding my agent the second year I attended. And like most of us, I am a thriller author who volunteers my time to help you, to pay it forward. So please know I'm truly here to help you. My whole team is here to help. I've asked Jen Kreischer to be your 'Writers' Resource' specifically assigned to answer any questions you might have throughout the process. She's an awesome Assistant for both PitchFest and ConsultFest and can be reached at JenKreischer@comcast.net.

Yet be warned: I've been PitchFest Director for years and have seen how writers who take short cuts or aren't willing to do the work tend to wash out quickly. The business of writing is hard and takes stick-to-it-tiveness and elbow grease to be successful. And a little luck, of course. I know it's important to guide you through – not do – the work for you, so please read through the FAQs first, peruse this website, and educate yourself before emailing folks with questions. ITW staff and ThrillerFest event volunteers work hard to provide you with the information in advance, but we have other jobs (writing and otherwise) and responsibilities that limit the time we can commit to answer questions. Respectfulness and courtesy are appreciated.

Q: If everyone is a volunteer, why am I charged to attend?

A: The cost to reserve the conference rooms, the pitch rooms, the book room, help from hotel staff, refreshments, air-conditioning, and keeping the bathrooms fresh and breezy is why we charge for the event. Although our main purpose is to help writers make the necessary

connections with people in the industry who can help them advance their careers, it takes money to provide the venue. Even the board of directors pay to attend the conference, just like you, which helps keep the costs down for everyone.

Q: Do people who attend PitchFest actually get representation?

A: Sometimes, but not always. Some of those who have gotten representation have shared their success stories with us. While there's NO GUARANTEE REAL OR IMPLIED that any agent will like your work—I made that all-caps to impress upon you the fact that you might not get even a single solitary nibble—the opposite is equally true: they may all love your work. Some get representation but never a publishing deal. There is no definitive outcome here other than one: if you don't attend [PitchFest](#), those agents will miss an opportunity to hear you pitch.

Q: What's the worst that can happen at PitchFest?

A: Even if you have not one single agent interested in your story (which is incredibly rare), going through the process of pitching is still an enormously valuable experience. You will have met the top agents in the business, gone through the pitching experience, made valuable contacts, gotten feedback on your presentations, and learned a lot of things about the business. And, you'll have the inspiration you need to strengthen your book and come back next year.

Q: How do they let me know if they like my pitch?

A: The agent says yes, no, or send me a partial or, in rare cases, the entire manuscript to read, then takes the next person standing in line. You then go into another line and make your next pitch.

Q: How long is each pitch?

A: Three minutes, more or less. Occasionally, an agent or editor will take longer with a writer and, although we encourage them to limit time to three minutes by providing them with egg-timers, we do appreciate when a match is being made that may require more time. Listen and learn, rather than get upset at another writer's success. Agents and editors appreciate your patience and so do I as an organizer. This is all about match-making, and your time will come.

Q: Should I have a website?

A: A website is not needed at all for pitching. You may want to consider having one anyway, so people can find you easily. If you're not ready to build a website, at least reserve the domain name you'll want to use as a writer. That way it's there when you're ready to unveil yourself to the digital world. Again, having a website as a writer is not necessary at this stage of your career trajectory, yet it will be needed eventually when you become a published author.

Q: In past years, some writers brought one-page summaries of their books to hand to the agents. Do you still recommend doing that?

A: What we've heard from the agents and editors lately is that they generally prefer to take nothing from the writer so they can limit what they carry during their commute home. If they ask for anything, they may want a simple business card. We had created a 'suggested template' years ago but have removed the example from the website. The agents and editors are no longer interested in a one-page summary at this event. Instead, focus on preparing a one-page synopsis, in case an expert asks you to email them a synopsis along with sample pages for them to read. But you do not need copies of that at the event. If you want to learn how to write a synopsis, check out [Writer's Digest Synopsis Writing Basics](#) or advice from one of our agents, such as blogs by [Jessica Faust](#) or [Janet Reid](#). Some agents may request a synopsis along with a partial manuscript. Most don't. You may want to print up a dozen and bring them along, in case any of your agents ask for one. Although it is doubtful many – if any – will ask, it never hurts to be prepared.

Q: I want to thank the agents and editors but I don't want to appear desperate or as a suck up.

A: By all means, thank them, and do so sincerely. It's not sucking up. And it doesn't sound desperate. It sounds courteous. Everyone likes to feel valued and appreciated, and they are going out of their way to help you sell your book. They could just as easily stay in their offices and work.

Q: How do I contact someone if I have questions about PitchFest?

A: As the PitchFest and ConsultFest Director, I, Sandra Brannan, am a volunteer author who has assembled a [team of experts](#) who can help you with any questions or concerns you might have about PitchFest or ConsultFest. And if someone from the team of experts can't help, contact me at Sandra@SandraBrannan.com or #SandraBrannanAuthor for FaceBook communications or @SandraBrannan on Twitter. Contact my team members or me directly and someone will get back to you as quickly as possible.

Pitching Advice

The countdown to PitchFest is on. As the anticipation and excitement builds, you might want to start honing your pitch. You'll have three minutes to interact with your favorite agents, and you'll want to make every second count.

The good news is that help is on its way. Kathleen Antrim and Jon Land host a fabulous workshop on pitching during CraftFest, and they have been kind enough to share a few of their thoughts with you today.

Kathleen Antrim, former Co-President of ITW and talented author, has mastered the art of pitching. Here is Kathleen's advice on how to create a pitch that will make agents sit up and take notice:

What if . . . So What? Method of Pitching.

The “What if . . . So What?” strategy of pitching means that you must be able to sum up your major plot line in 25 words or less. It often helps to start with the words: “What if...” The “So What” must also be answered in this pitch, because it tells us why we should care, and that helps readers connect emotionally with your story.

(If an idea can't be narrowed down to this single sentence then it is not focused enough.)

The elements of the “What if . . . So What?” pitch include:

- It must be 25 words, or less—the best tend to be 17 words.
- It must convey the major conflict (plotline) of the story.
- It must reveal the protagonist.
- It must answer the question, “So What?” Tell us why we should care, and why we should be compelled to read the story.

This is an invaluable tool, because not only will you use this when you're trying to hook an agent, you will also use your pitch in the following situations:

- Your agent will use it when trying to sell your book to an editor.
- The editor will use it when explaining your book to the sales/marketing team.
- The sales/marketing team will use it to sell your book into the stores.
- You will use your pitch again and again, when you're sitting at a book signing and when someone asks you what your book is about.

Here are a few examples:

What if a cyborg is sent back through time to kill the mother of the future savior of mankind?
“Terminator” 19 words

What if a cowboy stumbles on a drug deal gone bad, takes the money, only to find that he’s
being hunted by a relentless killer? “No Country For Old Men”

-by Cormac Macarthy 25 words

What if the first lady is plotting to overthrow the president? “Capital Offense”

-by Kathleen Antrim 11 words

What if a young girl risks her soul to love a vampire boyfriend? “Twilight”

-by Stephanie Meyer 13 words

Getting Ready

To help prepare for PitchFest, prioritize the agents you would like to see before the event begins. The agents and their bios will be posted on the ThrillerFest website prior to the event. Become familiar with each agent and their agency so that you can make informed choices.

Be professional at all times. This is a business setting, and you want to present a professional image and make a good impression on the agents.

Work on crafting your pitch immediately. This is a difficult task and takes time to perfect.

Practice your pitch the night before PitchFest. Get comfortable with what you want to say to the agent or editor before you get into the room.

Another way to look at the task is to imagine that your book is being turned into a television movie. What would TV Guide write about your movie/story? That is your pitch. You need to be comfortable with your pitch.

When pitching, make sure that you allow time for a response from the agent within your three allotted minutes. A good guideline is to stop speaking and let the agent talk after you complete your pitch.

Fabulous advice, Kathleen. Thanks for sharing those helpful tips. Next up is the insightful Jon Land who has perfected his pitching skills through his screenwriting experience. Take it away, Jon:

Okay, so a lot of people have been asking me what the new book I’m working on, BLOOD STRONG is about. Here’s what I tell them:

“Female Texas Ranger Caitlin Strong takes on homegrown terrorists as she races to solve the one mystery that eluded her legendary Ranger father and grandfather.”

BOOM! Short, sweet and to the point!

Now let’s see how it fits the MacDonald Rule. What’s the MacDonald rule? Well, when asked once by a young writer what a story is, MacDonald replied, “**Stuff happens to people you care about.**”

I like to apply the MacDonald Rule to all of my pitches and loglines. In other words, even though it’s only a few lines, a pitch should explain who is trying to do what and why. Remember, the initial pitch is only the bait to hook the agents, make them want to hear more. A good pitch gets them leaning forward and listening, even at the end of the afternoon. A not-so-good pitch, well, they may tune out the rest of what you have to say even if you have a great idea for a book.

What I recommend strongly, and this is something you won’t always hear when it comes to pitching, is to **make your pitch character driven** in the same way your book will be.

Example:

NOT “A burning skyscraper threatens the lives of thousands, including a pregnant woman trapped on the top floor.”

INSTEAD “A former firefighter, fired for insubordination, races to save the lives of thousands of people in a burning skyscraper, including his pregnant wife.”

See what I’m getting at here? Let’s try another.

NOT “High school students turned zombies seek vengeance on the town officials who closed their school for budget reasons.”

INSTEAD “A high school prom queen and the bad boy she secretly loves lead their friends-turned-zombies in a battle to get their school reopened.”

And one more:

NOT “A man falsely imprisoned on death row will die at dawn if the governor doesn’t pardon him.”

INSTEAD “An intrepid reporter has only 24 hours to save the innocent man she’s fallen in love with from execution.”

In each case, we know who the hero is and what their quest is. **You have not only told the agent what your book is about, you have engaged him or her emotionally in the action.** Do that, and your pitch will be a winner.

See you all in July where I look forward to hearing as many of your pitches as I can possibly listen to and help refine.

Thanks, Jon! Both you and Kathleen have emphasized the importance of stressing the emotional component of the novel, focusing on the main character and why we should care about him/her. Readers want to invest in an intriguing character—got it! Also, take advantage of attending Practice PitchFest to receive more advice on your pitch at Noon on Thursday. We've added a new event called ConsultFest to allow you 15 minutes of personalized time with a leading acquiring editor or agent in the industry who will help you with your craft or query.