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# Publishing Stories to Build an Audience

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# Program Overview

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Discuss the importance of leveraging essays and other storytelling in building a platform (aka "audience")

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Discover ways to get published

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Practice pitching!



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# What is an Essay?

An essay is a story  
with a narrative arc (beginning, middle, and end)  
designed to bring readers into your experience  
and ultimately share a transformation.



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## What are the various formats?

Personal, narrative – 1500 words

Micro-memoir – 200 words

First-person reported (aka “hybrid” or “service”) –  
tying an experience with expert advice

Opinion/argumentative – persuading the reader

More!

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# Honing Your Topic

1

## FOCUS ON YOU

- Anything that is unique to YOU
- Things that piss you off
- Eavesdropping on conversations
- Childhood incidents or recollections
- Stories you tell your friends
- Your obsessions

2

## READ THE NEWS

- What's happening in the news cycle?
- What's are the new trending series on Netflix, Hulu, etc.?
- Who's on the cover of every magazine?

3

## STAY CONNECTED

- Sign up for Google Alerts
- Subscribe to publications and newsletters
- Seek out the latest research studies

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# The Power of Essays

## Why Essays?

- Provides an opportunity to find your voice
- Builds authority positioning you as a thought leader in your field
- Creates name recognition
- Generates reader (and editor) feedback
- Increases chances of signing a book deal



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# Poetry – Fiction – Nonfiction

**Poetry** – micro, short, experimental

**Fiction** – micro, flash, short story, experimental

**Nonfiction** – micro, flash, personal essay



**It's all in the pitch...**

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# Identifying your Audience

Understanding  
Your Niche:

Identifying topics that resonate with your interests and expertise

Researching  
Your Target  
Audience:

Using tools to find the demographics and preferences of potential readers.

Tailoring  
Content:

Adjusting your writing style and topics to engage your specific audience effectively.

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# Targeting Publications

- **Traditional vs. Digital Platforms**
  - Overview of journals, magazines, and online platforms (Medium, Substack, personal blogs).
- **Guest Posting**
  - Strategies for writing guest essays for established websites to tap into their audiences; or as a podcast guest



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# Targeting Publications - continued

## *LITERARY JOURNALS*

- Use databases for print/online journals
- **Do your research** – read target journals, read editor's work
  - “Reading” period and fees
  - Simultaneous submissions
- **Details, details (formatting, grammar)**
- Cover letter/email (PITCH)

## *CONTESTS*

- Use databases, vet contest sponsor
- **Do your research** – read previous winners & contest advice
- Assess entry fees against potential gains and volume, publishing
- Submission guidelines
- **Details, details (formatting, grammar)**



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# Setting the Stage

Who's the editor or do they have a generic submission email box / portal?

What to include in the pitch? Draft essay or an overview?

Why this story?

Why now?

Why you?

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# Nailing the Story Headline

## Ten Ideas

Keep it short  
and sweet

Use keywords

Play on words

Don't be too  
clever

Be succinct /  
concise

Make it easy to  
scan and  
understand

Create a  
reaction

Maintain the  
"voice" in the  
story in the  
headline

Pique curiosity

Leverage  
fanciful verbs

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# HEADLINE EXAMPLES

- 17 Social Media Books That Will Make You a Smarter Marketer
- How to Increase Conversion Rates by 529%
- 101 Ways to Write Top 10 Lists that Increase Traffic By 21%
- Why Do Dogs Bark at Night? 5 Dog Trainers Offer Tips for Quiet Canines.
- Which Superhero Are You? Take This Short Quiz and Find Out....
- [How to Research Keywords: A Step-by-Step Process \(with video\)](#)
- [Neuromarketing Web Design: 15 Ways to Connect with Visitors' Brains](#)
- [3 Internal Linking Strategies for SEO and Conversions](#)

## Or Clickbait Examples:

- "X Beauty Secrets that'll Change Your Life"
- "Bruce Willis non-verbal..."

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# Crafting the Pitch



Personalize the email



Cite the Pitch and Story Headline in your Subject Line



Start out friendly and complimentary



Describe your pitch or attach, depending on editor preference / submission guidelines



Explain how you will cover the story (personal essay, reported with experts)



Provide helpful links to new research, as applicable



Close with bio, clips (if available), and “thank you”

**Keep Pitches to 2-3 paragraphs**

Pitch to Business Insider  
Sheryl Stillman

# PITCH EXAMPLE(S)

**I hid in a closet with my elderly mom during Hurricane Ian. Here's what I discovered about the shifting roles of motherhood.**

Over the last month, I became an empty nester, moved to Fort Myers to care for my mother, and survived Ian. Whether pet, child, or elderly loved one, parenting requires incredible patience, unconditional love, and a level of responsibility that never seems to sleep.

Subject Line: Timely Pitch: I hid in a closet with my elderly mom during Hurricane Ian...

Hi Conz,

I appreciated you taking the time to participate in the Parenting Conference earlier this year and I've enjoyed seeing you in Sue Shapiro's classes as well. I hoped you would consider a parenting essay on my recent experience in surviving Hurricane Ian with my 81-year-old by my side. Going through a natural disaster with someone who suffers from dementia is a lot like taking a road trip with a toddler--"are we there yet?" "can we look?" "why are the lights out?" To the greatest gift of a terrible disease, a faded memory of the event altogether.

As a single mom to two young adult children, this 700-word story will address the adult child becoming the parent, when and how it happens (over time and not suddenly), and regardless of which role you are playing, how love wins in the end.

I am an ongoing contributor with Next Avenue and I have clips in WIRED, Eat, Darling, Eat, and Minnesota Good Age--see several links below for reference. You can find more on my Web Site as well.

•Next Avenue -

<https://www.nextavenue.org/the-perks-of-coffee-health-benefits> -

<https://www.nextavenue.org/younger-faces-of-alzheimers-and-other-dementias>/<https://www.startribune.com/the-younger-faces-of-alzheimers-and-other-dementias/600191613/>

- <https://www.nextavenue.org/self-care-tips-for-managing-joint-pain/> <https://www.eatdarlingeat.net/post/the-familiar-taste-of-tradition> <https://www.wired.com/story/what-to-know-new-job-hybrid-workplace-remote-work/>

I have included a draft intro below for your review.

Thank you for your time!

Best,



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# Ways to Promote Your Writing and the Benefits

## Social Media

- Utilize LinkedIn, Twitter/X, and Facebook to share and promote essays.

## Networking

- Build relationships with other writers and influencers for cross-promotion.

## Utilize Email Newsletters / Substack

- Create a mailing list to share new essays and updates with subscribers.

## Encourage Interaction

- Invite comments, questions, and discussions on your essays.

## Respond to Feedback

- Engage positively with readers and critics alike.

## Benefits

- Builds your personal brand
- Creates a Community
- Fosters reader engagement
- Drives traffic to your website / portfolio



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# Resources

- Poets & Writers [www.pw.org](http://www.pw.org)
  - PW Writing Contest, Grants and Awards <https://www.pw.org/grants>
  - PW Literary Magazines [https://www.pw.org/literary\\_magazines](https://www.pw.org/literary_magazines)
- The Writer <https://www.writermag.com>
  - Flash fiction article by Jack Smith <https://www.writermag.com/improve-your-writing/fiction/best-flash-fiction/>
- Writers Digest <https://www.writersdigest.com/>
- Brevity Literary Magazine (Flash Nonfiction) <https://brevitymag.com/>
  - The Brevity Blog <https://brevity.wordpress.com/>
- Pitching Books
  - [Susan Shaprio: The Byline Bible](#)
  - [Estelle Erasmus: Writing that Gets Noticed](#)