

# WRITING PITCHES

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# A SIMPLE FORMULA FOR A PITCH

- Attention grabbing lede or first line
  - News peg + scope
  - Implications: angle/ uniqueness
  - What you want to do – Reporting plan
  - Why you – Lay out work done
  - Timeline
- 
- Of interest? You-are-the-boss.
  - A little about me

# EXAMPLE 1: 900-word news feature

- In his Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Modi made a key

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recommended minimum of 1 doctor per 1000 people.

- I will speak to leading companies in the sector about opportunities for digital healthcare, and to health professionals about challenges of maintaining privacy and quality of diagnosis.

# EXAMPLE 1: EDITOR RESPONSE

- Thanks. But I don't yet see things that would excite the XX audience. Independence Day speech is too old now, and I don't feel excited about the new policy. The privacy angle, etc are not consequential to this audience at this point.

# EXAMPLE 1: Reworked

India's digital healthcare is among the only sectors seeing a fillip during the pandemic. The Indian government has gone from almost banning telemedicine to promoting it. Now, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi announcing a national health ID for citizens, the fledgling e-healthcare start-ups gearing up for massive and rapid expansion. A technical infrastructure for electronic health records on the anvil. The govt will have to get over 800,000 doctors, and a million chemists online. In a country where the government spends only 1% of its GDP on public healthcare, and has severe doctor shortages, companies say digital health is the only way to universalise health coverage. But the Indians that most need remote healthcare - the elderly, the uneducated, and rural poor - are also the most digitally unsavvy. It poses questions of scale, diagnosis quality and privacy of health data.

I will speak to the leading players in the sector, tech developers involved and medical professionals about digitising the crucial but unorganised Indian health sector. I have already been speaking to some key players, and can offer a piece in two days.

Attention  
grabber

News peg +  
scope

Implications

- India's digital healthcare is among the only sectors seeing a fillip during the pandemic.
- The Indian govt has gone from almost banning telemedicine to promoting it. Now, with PM Modi announcing a national health ID for citizens, the fledgling e-healthcare start-ups gearing up for massive and rapid expansion.
- A tech infrastructure for electronic health records on the anvil. The govt will have to get over 800,000 doctors, and a million chemists online. In a country where the government spends only 1% of its GDP on public healthcare, and has severe doctor shortages, companies say digital health is the only way to universalise health coverage. But the Indians that most need remote healthcare - the elderly, the uneducated, and rural poor - are also the most digitally unsavvy. It poses questions of scale, diagnosis quality and privacy of health data.

## Reporting plan

- I will speak to the leading players in the sector, tech developers involved and medical professionals about digitising the crucial but unorganised Indian health sector.

## Why me

## Timeline

- I have already been speaking to some key players,
- and can offer a piece in two days.

## You are the boss

- Is this of interest? Do let me know if you have any questions.

## AVOID

- How many words you'll write – editors like to say it
- You've already written it – annoys editors + commissioned pieces more likely to be carried
- Statistics unless HUGE, GAME CHANGING
- Telling the whole story or giving away any scoop



# EXAMPLE 2: Checking interest with mini pitch

Dear *Editor Name*,

How are you? The XX interview didn't happen finally?

Personal follow-up,  
to ease into email

I'm writing now to ask if you want a story from New Delhi about a massive farmers' rally on Nov 29-30.

Get right to business

They are going to march to the parliament and ask for a month-long special session to discuss the farm crisis and drought. Thousands are coming from across the country on trains and buses, and will walk through the capital. Lots of university students, doctors, artists, and scientists have formed volunteer groups, in a remarkable and rare joining of purposes between urban and rural India.

Why it's new,  
Why it's **exciting**,  
Why it's unique

Let me know if this is of interest? You are the boss

Best,



# EXAMPLE 2: Editor response

No response.

My email, 2 days after 1<sup>st</sup> email:

Hi *Editor Name*, -- **Avoided Hello** *Editor Name*,  
Hope you got this email?



Editor:

Hello! Sorry - was a bit snowed under. We have various end of year special issues so I'm not commissioning at the moment - but thank you!

Me:

All right, thanks for letting me know.  
Do keep me in mind whenever you're commissioning next! And although it's a couple of weeks away, happy holidays!

Editor:

Thank you! Definitely will do – and happy holidays to you too!

# EXAMPLE 2: Same story, new approach

Decided to go report anyway. Invited a wonderful artist along.

She sent this email to a culture editor:

Dear XX,

Yesterday, me and the [*praise*] Indian journalist Rohini ran all around the Delhi farmers march drawing and interviewing farmers. In this march, tens of thousands of farmers from every corner of India converged on the parliament in protest of climate change that was wrecking their harvests, forcing them to accumulate crippling debts and driving them to suicide.

We wanted to pitch the idea of a short piece, with art by me and words by Rohini, on the march and how the world's poor will be leading the fight against climate apocalypse.



# EXAMPLE 3: For in-depth magazine story

Last year, Mohammad Akhlaq, an ironsmith in northern India was dragged out of his home by a mob and beaten to death because of rumours that his family was eating beef. It was a polarising debate in India, and it swung from doubts about whether the meat was beef or mutton, to if he should have been killed for eating it. While the mob that killed him is unpunished still, a court has now ordered a police complaint against Akhlaq's family, including his mother and widow, on charges of cow slaughter.

Keeping Akhlaq and his family at the centre of the narrative, I propose a reported story to examine through a personal lens the issue of “cow politics” in India. It seems like an emotive issue or one of animal rights, but is in fact one of the ways in which majoritarianism is taking and changing shape in India. This involves both “ordinary citizens” — like the Akhlaq family and the people who attacked them — as well as the state, which is making an example of this family for political ends.

To show the underlying complexity of this story, I'd first look into the political economy around cow slaughter. The tension is sharpest in agrarian, cattle-rearing regions. Let me give you an example. The law that bans cow slaughter is capped at 14 years in Akhlaq's state, which means cows can be killed after 14 years - this has turned into a vehicle of extortion for so-called cow protection groups that 'abduct' cows, forcing owners to go to court to release them, and as the case drags on in court, the kidnappers offer to release the cows in exchange for a princely sum. When told through the voices of cattle merchants, and through a scene in the enormous Sultanpur cattle market, it will be powerful.

Another polarising element is identity: those who sell beef or slaughter cows in Uttar Pradesh are largely Muslim. As the state sees increasing communalisation, this traditional trade becomes even more fraught. Largely from the lower middle income group, these Muslims live in ghettos and have been easily targeted by mobs. Interestingly, Akhlaq's family was relatively well-off, and lived in a Hindu-dominated village. They were attacked for eating beef, not killing cow.

I'm in touch with Mohammad Akhlaq's son Sartaj, who has otherwise stopped talking to journalists. He told me that he felt it was his family's growing prosperity that was being targeted.

- Lede

Last year, Mohammad Akhlaq, an ironsmith in northern India was dragged out of his home by a mob and beaten to death because of rumours that his family was eating beef.

- News peg + scope

It was a polarising debate in India, and it swung from doubts about whether the meat was beef or mutton, to if he should have been killed for eating it. While the mob that killed him is unpunished still, a court has now ordered a police complaint against Akhlaq's family, including his mother and widow, on charges of cow slaughter.

- Reporting plan + Implications

Keeping Akhlaq and his family at the centre of the narrative, I propose a reported story to examine through a personal lens the issue of “cow politics” in India. It seems like an emotive issue or one of animal rights, but is in fact one of the ways in which majoritarianism is taking and changing shape in India. This involves both “ordinary citizens” — like the Akhlaq family and the people who attacked them — as well as the state, which is making an example of this family for political ends.

Implications  
(+ narrative  
promise)

- To show the underlying complexity of this story, I'd first look into the political economy around cow slaughter. The tension is sharpest in agrarian, cattle-rearing regions. Let me give you an example. The law that bans cow slaughter is capped at 14 years in Akhlaq's state... When told through the voices of cattle merchants, and through a scene in the enormous Sultanpur cattle market, it will be powerful.
- Another polarising element is identity: those who sell beef or slaughter cows in Uttar Pradesh are largely Muslim... They were attacked for eating beef, not killing cow.

Why me

- I'm in touch with Mohammad Akhlaq's son *Name*, who has otherwise stopped talking to journalists. He told me that he felt it was his family's growing prosperity that was being targeted.

You are the boss

- If this is of interest, I'm happy to discuss it further, and explore other angles too.



# EXAMPLE 4: For a web story on developing news

Hello *Editor Name*,

*I know you're busy*

Would you like a quick web story on the two women who entered the Sabarimala temple in Kerala for the first time in decades, perhaps even a century?

*Attention grabber*

The Supreme Court recently ordered that the Hindu temple's practice of not allowing women between the age of 10 and 50 was unconstitutional. Women across the country celebrated the judgement that upheld gender equality but Hindutva groups, the ruling BJP and even regular male devotees were literally up in arms. For months now, they have blocked women devotees attempting to trek up to the temple, saying they would defile and pollute the sanctity of the shrine. They beat up women journalists.

*News peg*

As the Sabarimala verdict and the violence became part of living room debates, on Jan 2, the two women managed to enter the temple quietly at 3am. Many say it's a victory for gender equality. But there are also women who are against it, and one such group calls itself "Ready to Wait" (to enter the temple as older women).

*Drama, excitement*

*Scope, implications*

This is all happening as the MeToo movement continues in India, and the parliament sits on a crucial law for women's representation in politics.

*Scope, implications*

*New info*

*Reporting plan, Why me*

The women are in hiding now, but I have one of the women's numbers, and I speak Malayalam, their mother tongue. I'm also trying meet them in a safe house they are in with friends.

*Uniqueness, drama*

## EXAMPLE 5:

### Video story for Indian publication

Less context

Local specificity

Sharper focus on  
news point and  
uniqueness

Much shorter

There are at least 50,000 bonded labourers in coffee plantations in the Coorg belt, which supplies coffee to most of India.

The labourers, mostly local adivasis, are bought and sold by coffee estate owners and are trapped in a money-lending cycle.

In the past year, hundreds are rebelling & leaving the estates, causing a labour crisis. The trigger, workers say, is a recent case of an employer torturing his worker with dogs, and the security that forest rights give them, via land pattas.

I will shoot these rebel labourers, interview estate owners, and get responses from major companies like Tata and Coffee Day, who source their beans from these estates.

I'm happy to discuss the treatment further if you're interested.

A bit about me: I have been a television journalist for 5 years, and live in Bangalore, a few hours from Coorg. You can find more of my work on my website [blahblah.com](http://blahblah.com)



Onions are an integral part of Indian cuisine, culture and politics too. While, the edible bulb is used in most of the Indian curries, Rig Veda has the mention of Onions and even Mughals were fond of it.

Additionally, Onions have been a political too for the politicians since the pre-Independence era.

Sardar Patel and Mahatma Gandhi become close associates through the 1918 Satyagraha in Kheda, Gujarat. It was Gandhi's first Satyagraha in India and it was with support of Onion farmers to resist the land tax despite failure of crops which, in that area, included onions.

In 1981, Indira Gandhi, on her comeback trail, after her post-emergency election debacle, shrewdly used the price rise in onions to drive home how uncaring of the ordinary person and how incompetent, the government of then Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh had become. This clicked and the Congress won.

In 1998, a sharp price rise in onions, dethroned the BJP government of Chief Minister, Madanlal Khurana in Delhi thereby establishing a new metric for good governance – the price of onions.

This month, the onion prices have come down to 0.021USD per kilogramme from an average selling price of 0.389USD. Two farmers in Nashik, where 50 per cent country's onion is produced, have already committed suicide and many are clueless on what to do with tonnes of produce lying in the sheds.

And according to the Indian government data itself, debts are the main reason behind the suicides of farmers. Maharashtra is the state, which tops the list of farmers' suicide.

The agrarian crisis has pushed farmers to commit suicide. As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, between 1995 and 2016, 3,33,398 farmers committed suicide. The data shows that over 15,000 suicides take place every year, 1,200 suicides each month and 42 suicides per day.

Onion prices fell in Maharashtra because of huge arrival of both stored onions as well as fresh kharif crop at a time.

Majority of these onion farmers are already tangled in the vicious circle of debt too. It was them who walked first this year more than 180 kilometres southwest to Mumbai to press for their demands ranging from a **complete waiver of farm loans** to a higher support price.

Reuters report says that there are 4 trillion rupees (\$56.5 billion) in loans to be written off.

However, a junior agriculture minister in the parliament had said that there is no plan to waive off the loans.

### Work Plan

Will travel to Nashik, Maharashtra, which is some 1,800kms from where I stay.  
Will meet the famers, family of the farmers who committed suicide and traders at one of the biggest onion trading markets, Laslagaon, and get voices.

Will get voices from Indian trade unionists in farming sector, experts and activists.

### Why Maharashtra?

It tops the list of states where maximum number of farmers have committed suicide in the country.

**Text**  
3,000

### Visuals

Will get a few good pictures.

### What will story tell.

Story will tell the past, present and hopes of the famers who are now in despair. It will also be backed by data from government.

It will also touch upon the agrarian crisis in India, which is worsening day by day.

**EXAMPLE 6:**  
Farmers in the region that produces half of India's onions are committing suicide...

# EXAMPLE 7: Via cold email to submissions id

I'd like to do a story for XYZ's Dispatches section on the present escalating situation on the border villages along the Line of Control in Indian-administered Kashmir region. I would like to do this story along with a fellow journalist, XX.

Here's the pitch:

Ever since the Indian govt stripped Kashmir of its autonomous status on Aug 5, the border villages along the Line of Control in Indian administered Kashmir have witnessed continuous mortar shelling by Pakistan army for over two months. **News peg** **Attention grabber**

The escalation has killed many and damaged houses along the de-facto border that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan. People are forced to flee to safer locations, leaving behind their livestock, the only source of livelihood for these border residents. **Crucial events unfolding**

Unexploded mortar shells have landed inside homes in at least four villages of Uri, a border town. The local administration has written to the Indian Army to defuse the unexploded shells, but the army has asked families to give in writing that they would not demand compensation in case the houses suffered damage during the clearing of the shells from the houses. **New info, uniqueness**

Each time the relations deteriorate between India and Pakistan these border villages bear the brunt of the hostilities. Their demands for the construction of safe bunkers haven't been met for almost a decade now. **Scope, implications**

We are based in Kashmir, and plan to visit some of these border villages in Uri sector to piece together life on the borders amid the growing hostilities between India and Pakistan for the past more than two months. **Reporting plan, Why me**

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