

What an Editor Looks for in a Pitch

by Kate Agar, Editorial Director at Hachette Children's Books

I imagine that one of the most frustrating things about submitting a new project is when an editor takes a long time to come back with a response. It sounds like an easy excuse to say "editors are SO busy", but one of the key aspects of a commissioning role is taking care of a large number of projects at different stages of development. This means that the pitches that have made our lives easiest are often the ones to get the quickest response. These are my suggestions for how to get noticed by a busy editor and get your book further up the submissions list.

Email Subject

A lovely clear one, containing the key details. It sounds obvious, but you'd be surprised how often things aren't labelled well.

For example: **BEST TITLE** by A. N. Author – YA fiction submission from Great Agency

In the body of the email

- **A one- or two-sentence pitch**

If we met in passing at Bologna, how would you get my attention for this book in one to two sentences? Ideally, the editor you're submitting to will be able to use this short pitch themselves when they're beginning discussions with their wider team, so it's really important to spend time getting this right.

- **A paragraph with a bit more detail about the story**

Summarise the content succinctly, giving a flavour of the writing style if possible.

- **The reader profile**

Who is this book for? Is the book for fans of **How to Train Your Dragon** or will it appeal to reluctant readers who spend more time playing **Minecraft**? Does it span a wide age-range, or is it really only for readers aged 14 and over? If you are able to give examples of similar books that are currently available in English, that will make it easier for the editor to relate to the market position of your book.

- **How the book is performing in its home market/around the world**

Has it won any awards? Did it sell out its first print-run in three days? Has it received accolades from reviewers/other authors? Have rights been sold in 20 languages? If you are also able to give some context for your market, this would be really useful. The editor you're speaking to might not know what your bestseller list looks like, or what level of sales is considered stellar for a different-sized population to the UK.

- **A short biography of the author/illustrator**

Include social media links if they are active online and also details about promotional work they have done/are happy to consider. It would be useful to know, too, what languages the author speaks so that we know from the start whether there will be any potential for events in the UK.

- **Funding opportunities**

This won't be relevant for every submission (and of course, an editor can do some research themselves) but if you have any information about relevant funding or support available for translating projects from your language into English, it is incredibly helpful to include this. If you have lot of information, this can be included as an attachment instead.

Attached to the email

- **A full synopsis**

This needs to summarise the whole story – beginning, middle and end, including any twists. Since the editor you're contacting might not be able to read the text in its original language, this could be the only opportunity they have to engage with the full plot arc before deciding whether or not to acquire, so don't be afraid to be detailed. Depending on the complexity of the book, this is likely to be several paragraphs in length. You should aim to help the editor to understand the full scope of the project: Can you provide a sense of the characters and their experiences? Can you touch on all the key points of the story? If the book is the first in the series, can you give a short introduction to the titles that follow?

- **The full text in its original language**

So that we can get a full reader report if necessary.

- **An English-language sample (if you have one)**

But it is worth noting that a bad translation sample can do more harm than good. An excellent short sample is much better than a poor long one. If you are going to invest in a sample translation, I would urge you to use somebody who is a native English speaker and familiar with English-language children's books if possible.

- **An English translation of the best review(s) currently available**

If you can give context, this is also useful. Assume we're ignorant – if the review has appeared in the most respected newspaper in your country, please tell us.

- **A note on formats**

Almost every British editor I know reads their submissions on a Kindle. This means sending material as a Word document is the preferable format, as it displays better than a PDF on the screen. That said, if you have final files and can supply a full PDF alongside, then please do. And, of course, if the project is illustrated, it's important for us to see the interior spreads as they appear in the book itself.

Don't be afraid to follow-up

It's fine to send a gentle reminder that you'd like a response. I'd suggest three to four weeks after submitting a project. (And potentially again a couple of weeks later.) If you have any new information at this time it's helpful to include it – e.g. an update on new languages sold, new sales figures, a great new quote/review.



Kate Agar is an Editorial Director at Hachette Children's Group, focusing on both young fiction and illustrated fiction for readers aged 5 up to YA.

Additional information

Finding publishers and editors to pitch your books to:

- Try starting with the publishers you regularly buy rights from. You will know those publishers' lists better and be able to consider which of your titles will be the best fit.
- Check directories with publisher listings. This includes looking at who attended book fairs (Bologna Children's Book Fair, Frankfurt Book Fair and London Book Fair being the biggest), and also **The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook** published by Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Consider using a rights agency. There are some companies that specialise in selling rights to UK publishers.

Note: all links are correct as of March 2019.