

From idea to green light: How do you pitch a story to Radio Ambulante?

If you have a story that you'd like to produce with Radio Ambulante, this guide can help you write a strong, engaging, and successful pitch.

The term "pitch" started in TV and film, where it's a quick verbal rundown of an idea for a show or movie. Usually, the writer or director pitches it to the executive producer to sell the concept. These days, you hear it a lot in the radio world too.

Sometimes a pitch is given as an oral presentation, but other times it's a short written piece aimed at convincing the reader that your idea has the potential to become a full narrative. At Radio Ambulante, we use written pitches, so this guide will focus on providing instructions for that specific format. We use the word "sell" intentionally—the pitch should be compelling, leaving the reader thinking, "I want to know more!" This approach brings certain structural and aesthetic implications, aiming to convey what the story is about in the most concise and engaging way possible.

For now, remember: a pitch isn't just a summary of your story's facts—it's your story's cover letter. The goal is to make a strong first impression.

Not everything is a story for radio

The biggest challenge when crafting a pitch is mistaking a topic for a story. We frequently receive pitches from people saying they want to create an episode about topics like "immigration in the US," "obstetric violence in Latin America," or "the gentrification of Mexico City," among other hypothetical examples. These are great topics—interesting, complex, and relevant—but on their own, they don't make a story.

The topics mentioned earlier—or ones like “climate change and its effects in the Amazon” or “forced disappearances during military regimes in Guatemala”—are excellent starting points. However, they are just that: a starting point for finding the story.

A story will always have the following elements:

1. **The Characters:** The protagonists of the story you’re telling. Who will narrate your episode? These are the people who experienced the events you’re going to recount.
2. **The Action:** The facts. In a story, things need to happen. These could range from a person embarking on a journey or conducting research to find something, a group of people escaping a situation, someone inventing a device or system to solve a personal problem, or a community coming together to defend a river.
3. **The Conflict:** Everything in a story happens for a reason—typically to resolve, or attempt to resolve, a conflict. A conflict involves two or more parties with opposing interests. The narrative tension, what keeps us engaged, stems from these conflicts: we want to know how the protagonist will face the challenges and opposing forces around them.
4. **The Question:** Every story aims to answer a central question. For example: What does it mean to migrate when your country decides you are no longer welcome? The question arises from the conflict, and by the end of the episode, we strive to provide an answer.
5. **The Ending:** For a story to be effective, the conflict must have a resolution—there needs to be an end. In this resolution, the protagonist either achieves something—or doesn’t—and learns from the experience, leading to a change in their perspective.

Finally, certain elements distinguish a good story from a great one. A great story surprises you, expands your perspective, or introduces a way of seeing life you’ve never considered before. We’re always looking for something fresh—something that excites and moves us.

On the other hand, Radio Ambulante aims to reflect the unique complexities of Latin America in stories that are universal. We start with a specific reality to tell an experience

that anyone can understand, empathize with, and relate to. Ask yourself: What does the story I want to tell say about life or about being human?

If you're still unsure whether your story is a good fit for Radio Ambulante, we recommend watching the video "How to Identify a Good Story for Radio?" at [this link](#).

Pitch writing 🖋️

So, let's say you've got a story with all the key elements: charismatic characters who are articulate, interesting, and facing conflict; a narrative arc with a surprising twist; and a resolution, a solid ending. Now it's time to pitch the story.

Give your pitch the love and care it deserves. Use your creativity to make it sound fresh and stand out. Remember, you're selling something—you need to captivate and persuade the person you're pitching to.

A good exercise is to imagine how you'd tell this story to your friends. To keep their interest, you'd likely highlight details that excite or surprise them. If there's something funny or particularly poignant, make sure to include it.

But beyond that, a pitch always:

1. **Introduce the main characters:** Who are the protagonists of the story, and what voices will narrate the events? At this stage, you should have confirmed access and be able to interview them.
2. **Explain the conflict and narrative arc of the story:** What problem are the protagonists facing? What actions do they take, and what difficulties do they encounter? Highlight the moments of tension. Additionally, outline what the resolution will be and how the conflict is resolved.
3. **Describe the context:** No story exists in a vacuum. It might unfold within a specific political, social, or economic situation, or in unique conditions that make it particularly compelling. The key is to explain to editors why this story is unique and important, highlighting the context that makes it significant.
4. **Include the treatment you plan to give to the story:** This means describing how you intend to present the chronicle, including its structure and narrative style. While the

details of the structure will be discussed more thoroughly with the editors at *Radio Ambulante* if your pitch is approved, it's important to show from the outset that you have a clear vision for how the story will be told. This will also help you focus and organize the story, both on paper and in your mind, before conducting interviews. It will make it easier to sit down and write the pitch.

A tip: Start by introducing the main character—or characters—and the conflict, as these are the core of the story. After outlining the conflict, immediately follow with the context to explain why the chronicle is relevant and significant.

A pitch for Radio Ambulante should never exceed one or two pages in length.

If the story is accepted, you will be assigned a Radio Ambulante editor who will work closely with you throughout the process.

If you want to learn more about writing a pitch, you can watch [these videos](#).

Here's an example of a successful pitch: the episode "[The Aliens](#)," produced by Lisette Arévalo in 2020.

The aliens

In 1949, in Quito, Radio Quito adapted H.G. Wells' science fiction novel *War of the Worlds* into a radio script. The broadcasters interrupted the day's broadcast to announce to Quito that they were being attacked by Martians. [Here is a recreation of what they heard](#). The police and military mobilized north of the city to confront the supposed Martians. Many Quiteños fled with baskets, clothes, and anything they could carry. My grandfather recounts seeing a liberal politician in downtown Quito, pleading with God for forgiveness.

When the announcer, Leonardo Páez, declared that the Martian invasion was not real, the Quiteños took to the streets in anger. They threw stones and bricks at the building of the newspaper *El Comercio*, where the radio station operated, and someone set fire to the building. With all the paper inside, the flames spread quickly. Journalists, artists,

and radio workers fled the scene as the building was destroyed, resulting in five fatalities. Those who witnessed the events remember it as a night of disaster and tragedy.

The episode would recount that day through the voices of people who were there or who remember listening to the radio and believing they were under attack by Martians. Many who recall the event now laugh and view it as a joke. However, this phenomenon of believing "fake news" persists today with WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter. We continue to believe in fake news or rumors, which, although they might seem funny or ridiculous, are taken seriously by many. Recently in Ecuador, two men were murdered in Posorja due to a rumor that they were child kidnappers. During Rafael Correa's presidency, fake news sometimes carried more weight than what was reported in the media.

Those who remember the War of the Worlds broadcast in Quito are now around 88 years old, such as Jorge Ribadeneira, a journalist for *El Comercio*. At the time, he was 19 years old and wasn't inside the radio station or the newspaper, but he has since shared his recollections on various radio and TV shows. I spoke with him on the phone, and he is now older than he was during those past interviews. He mentioned that he is 88 years old and can't offer much time, so I should call him to arrange a specific day and time for an interview. His voice sounds quite aged and measured, but he is willing to speak with me. He has also detailed this event in a book.

The announcer and author of the Wells adaptation in Quito, Leonardo Páez, has since passed away. After the incident, he went into exile in Venezuela, as he was despised in Quito and struggled to find work. He wrote a book detailing everything that happened and included a part of the script he used (the original was lost in the fire). This book could be a valuable resource, and contacting his family in Venezuela is also a possibility. I have the phone number of his daughter's home, but she hasn't answered yet.

Other potential voices include, generally, the grandparents of people from Quito (such as my grandfather, who remembers and enjoys sharing stories like this). Additionally, the director of *El Comercio*, Carlos Mantilla, could be a valuable source, as there is a plaque in the newspaper's editorial office honoring those who died that day.

Why did this work? 🤔

The pitch presents the surprising fact right from the start. Additionally, since it's a story with multiple voices, it introduces these voices as the events unfold. Importantly, it links a historical event to the present by referencing fake news, bringing the story into contemporary relevance. It turns the narrative into more than just a curious anecdote, emphasizing its significance today.