

CULTURE COMMS

JOURNALIST CHEAT SHEET

Dea Birkett, Journalist, writer, Director of Kids in Museums

What do you think about working with PRs and press officers?

Good – especially if have a personal relationship. But I do wish PRs would stop sending me irrelevant stories, because then I won't listen the one time they send me something good

How do you prefer being pitched to? Phone, email, tweet...

Email. If you phone me, I'm bound to be distracted and not listening. Can also alert me with a tweet

Is there a better time of the day or week to get in touch?

Probably not. It's a 24 hour job

What are your lead times?

Depends who I'm writing for. With web stuff, one hour. With magazines, three months

Do stories have to be exclusive?

No

How do you plan your day?

If only ... I usually scour emails first things, write, scour emails, write. Coffee. Emails. Write. Coffee. Eat. Wine. Bed.

Why do you do this job?

Because I'm shy. And journalism gives you the best excuse in the world to ask people questions that no one else can. 'What did you feel like when you killed your mother ...?' It's taken me to other worlds, both nearby and far away

Other than arts and culture what areas interest you most?

Bad people. Or people we presume are bad. I've always been more interested in writing about the bully than the bullied, the abuser than the abused

Are you interested in being invited to press views, previews or launches? What times tend to work best for you (evening, morning)?

Yes, I do. But don't expect a piece immediately afterwards. Sometimes events and previews stir up idea, which appear in another context. I often find PRs are very narrow in what they want from us. 'Are you doing a review?' will be the standard question. To which I almost always answer, 'No.' But I will do something. For example, I'm doing the weekly review for BBC World Service this weekend and will chat about a film I saw this week in preview. But didn't know I was doing that when I went to see it

What gives you the biggest job satisfaction?

Changing things. Causing people to see something differently. Just reporting doesn't give me the same thrill anymore

If you could swap jobs with anyone, in any sector who would it be and why?

I would be a burlesque artist. But it's a bit late for that. And I'm not a natural performer. But I love spectacle and love entertainment that appeals to the sensual, not the cerebral. I'd love to experience that every night

Emily Beament, Environment and Heritage Correspondent, Press Association

What do you think about working with PRs and press officers?

It's good when you can build up relationships with individuals, but often journalists end up getting bombarded by stuff from PRs/press officers

How do you prefer being pitched to? Phone, email, tweet...

Email, though I'm not adverse to a brief follow-up call just to check I've seen the email

Is there a better time of the day or week to get in touch?

Earlier in the day is better. Friday after 3pm is a massive no-no!

What are your lead times?

Usually only a couple of days or even on the day itself, although I can work on a story longer in advance

Do stories have to be exclusive?

No

How do you plan your day?

I come in, see what's on, and crack on with it, either in the order of importance of stories, or the speed with which I can get through them (so I might do a couple of quick stories before tackling the major piece I've got, which I know is going to take me longer)

Why do you do this job?

Because I find it endlessly interesting, and I think its important people are informed

Within arts and culture what areas interest you the most?

I find archaeology and archaeological finds really interesting, and new ways of interpreting our heritage. I also love fine art but that's a personal interest, not something I cover

Are you interested in being invited to press views, previews or launches? What times tend to work best for you (evening, morning)?

Yes, evenings aren't ideal, as I get many invites and they eat into my personal life. Late afternoons, as long as I have time to write the story before it goes live (so a day or so in advance of an embargo, for example) probably works best

What gives you the biggest job satisfaction?

Seeing my story well used

If you could swap jobs with anyone, in any sector, who would it be and why?

I'd like to be a ranger on a nature reserve – for a little while at least – as it'd be great to get closer to nature and actually do the things that I currently write about!

Janet Lee, Editor, BBC Two's Artsnight and The Culture Show**What do you think about working with PRs and press officers?**

PR's and press officers are essential to what we do

How do you prefer being pitched to? Phone, email, tweet...

Email

Is there a better time of the day or week to get in touch?

No, any day of the week is good

What are your lead times?

If possible it's good to be sent an email 6 months in advance and then to be reminded at 3 months and again a month before the event

Do stories have to be exclusive?

They don't have to be exclusive but if an exclusive can be offered on a big name or event that's always of interest

How do you plan your day?

Each day is different but most will involve talking to the team about the various things that are being made, having ideas meetings, reading scripts, going into edit suites to see how programmes or parts of programmes are coming along and eventually signing them off for broadcast. Email checking happens throughout the day

Why do you do this job?

I really care about the Arts and feel everyone should have access to them and tv is one way of offering that. As a job it's enormously creative and stimulating and often fun!

Within arts and culture what areas interest you the most?

All of it interests me

Are you interested in being invited to press views, previews or launches? What times tend to work best for you (evening, morning)?

I am invited to a lot of events and simply cannot go to them all. Evenings are the best

What gives you the biggest job satisfaction?

Having a brilliant idea for a programme that when made turns out to be as good and as engaging as the idea

If you could swap jobs with anyone, in any sector, who would it be and why?

I would be a Consultant in an A&E department of a big London teaching hospital because I absolutely love 24 hours in A&E and I imagine there can be nothing more satisfying than saving a life

Rebecca Atkinson, Online Publications Editor, Museums Journal

What do you think about working with PRs and press officers?

The challenge is ensuring that the PR or press officer really understands my publication and what I need from them. It's no good pitching a story that isn't something we would ever cover – the story needs to be tailored for the publication

How do you prefer being pitched to? Phone, email, tweet...

Email is the best way, but if I'm honest a follow-up phone call will often draw my attention to the press release

Is there a better time of the day or week to get in touch?

Earlier in the week for news stories

What are your lead times?

It really depends – and the thing about online publications is that the lead time is pretty flexible

Do stories have to be exclusive?

No

How do you plan your day?

I have a very detailed to do list, because my job involves working on events as well as publications

Why do you do this job?

I have always enjoyed the writing part of the job, and talking to people. More recently, as my job has expanded, I find the opportunity to share information and support people really rewarding

Within arts and culture what areas interest you the most?

I am interested in people, so I find projects that are really breaking barriers to create inclusion the most interesting. I am interested in how culture can be used to create a better society – for example, arts projects in prisons or helping people who have experienced homelessness take on volunteer roles

Are you interested in being invited to press views, previews or launches? What times tend to work best for you (evening, morning)?

Yes, but not just for exhibition openings. I would like to see more press conferences for projects and behind-the-scenes work. The time of day doesn't really make much difference

What gives you the biggest job satisfaction?

Coming across really interesting stories and having the opportunity to share them more widely

If you could swap jobs with anyone, in any sector, who would it be and why?

I would like to organise late-night events at a large museum – I'm not sure it's a full-time job, but it looks fun!

Roya Nikkhah, Arts and Royal Correspondent

What do you think about working with PRs and press officers?

I am happy to work with PRs and press officers who I have built up longstanding working relationships with. When a PR or press officer really understands what you need from a story, it can make life/work much easier

How do you prefer being pitched to? Phone, email, tweet...

By email first and then phone call to follow up if the story is of interest to me

Is there a better time of the day or week to get in touch?

Not really

What are your lead times?

For the BBC, lead times can be anything from 1-2 weeks to 2 days, for The Sunday Times, I tend to work on stories for publication that same week

Do stories have to be exclusive?

Yes

How do you plan your day?

As a freelance, every day is different, depending on what I'm writing/filming

Why do you do this job?

Because I enjoy it and find it interesting to tell stories about culture and the arts

Within arts and culture what areas interest you the most?

Visual art and works of art, art history, literature, film, theatre, fashion

Are you interested in being invited to press views, previews or launches? What times tend to work best for you (evening, morning)?

Yes, and either works fine, depending on my schedule during the week

What gives you the biggest job satisfaction?

At the moment, seeing one of my finished packages run on a main news bulletin at the BBC, and getting a front page on The Sunday Times

If you could swap jobs with anyone, in any sector, who would it be and why?

Probably Fiona Bruce or Kirsty Young, as both of their roles at the BBC have a good mix of current affairs and culture

Tom Rowley, Special Correspondent, The Daily Telegraph and The Sunday Telegraph

What do you think about working with PRs and press officers?

I'm always keen to hear good exclusive ideas, wherever they come from. A PR who truly understands the publication is invaluable and I have developed long and mutually beneficial relationships with several such PRs

Journalists moan far too much about press officers filling up our inboxes. It is too easy to forget the stories that started with unsolicited emails from PRs and the number of times subs have saved us from exactly the same typos we bemoan

How do you prefer being pitched to? Phone, email, tweet...

Always by email

Is there a better time of the day or week to get in touch?

Early in the morning, early in the week

What are your lead times?

For a news feature, a week's notice is helpful. For a more in depth project, a month or more

Do stories have to be exclusive?

It will often be the crucial factor in my decision whether or not to pitch your idea to my editor. Plus, if we do something, it is much more likely to get a better show if it's exclusive

How do you plan your day?

It varies enormously. I try to work as much as possible on long-term projects or big features for the weekend but inevitably am often side-tracked by breaking news

Why do you do this job?

It's a great excuse to meet people and see places, and I'm professionally nosy.

Within arts and culture what areas interest you the most?

Anything heritage related is great. More generally, something with a story that needs a bit of telling, full of quirky and unexpected vignettes

Are you interested in being invited to press views, previews or launches? What times tend to work best for you (evening, morning)?

No. We'd need to plan a feature further in advance

What gives you the biggest job satisfaction?

Getting an email from a reader who enjoyed a story

If you could swap jobs with anyone, in any sector, who would it be and why?

I'm terribly squeamish and was really bad at biology, but I'd love to be a doctor. Far more useful than my trade