



Writing an Amazing Query Letter

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What is a query letter?



- A query letter is a way to introduce yourself and your work to a literary agent or editor.
- It pitches article ideas to magazine editors or book ideas to agents and publishers.
- It's a one-page letter used to get an editor or agent interested in the work you'd like to send them.
- It is a letter you send to convince agents or editors you have a project that not only will interest them but also make them money.

Why bother?



- Editors take queries seriously, and they do read them.
- Agents actually respond to ones that spark their interest.
- You can make connections with agents and editors and garner interest in your work.
- It's your chance to possibly get your work published.

Why is it important?



- It's your sales pitch and your chance to impress an editor or agent with your idea.
- It's your way to stand out from the competition.
- It helps them determine if your idea or story is worth knowing more about or not worth their time.
- A professional, intelligent, concise, intriguing query will not only entice an agent to ask for more, but also move yourself one step closer to a book or magazine sale.

Do your homework.



- Study the most current *Christian Writer's Market Guide* and/or the *Writers Market*. You'll find detailed listings of agents and publishers with more.
- Learn what they are looking for, how quickly they respond, how much they pay, what type of writing they are currently accepting, and if they accept unsolicited queries.
- Know the publication or publishing house well.
- Know who are querying and why. Target the right editor or agent.

You're not done yet.



- Search your topic and know your competition.
- Check Amazon for similar books (or article ideas).
- Check blogs that may be similar and cover your topic.
- Discern how your book or article is different than all the others. What's unique? That's your hook!
- Review an agency's or publication's submission guidelines and following them completely.

The query format



- A query letter is a single page cover letter, introducing you and your book or magazine. Nothing more, nothing less.
- Email or snail mail? Know what they prefer. If there are no specific guidelines available, here are some general formatting tips for query letters:
 1. If you query via e-mail, be sure your e-mail address is professional.
 2. If querying by mail, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). This way an editor or agent can notify you when the work has been accepted or rejected.
 3. Keep it to one page. **ONE PAGE!** Agents and editors are very busy and are looking for a lot of information in a small amount of space.

More formatting



- Use industry standard—white paper, black ink, and Times New Roman 12 point font.
- If you both attended the same writing conference, mention how you met or reference any information you learned about them.
- Include the date, the editor's/agent's name and title, the magazine or agency name and address, and your name and contact information (address, phone, and email).
- Address your query to the right editor or agent. When in doubt, call the publisher or magazine and find out who to send it to.
- Spell all names correctly and have an accurate address. Sometimes companies have multiple addresses or locations, so know where your contact works.

KISS

(keep it simple sweetie)



A query letter has three concise paragraphs:

1. The hook
2. The mini-synopsis
3. Your bio

Stick to this format. You won't catch an editor's attention by inventing a creative new query format.

Don't show off how clever you can be by breaking formatting rules and going against the grain.

Paragraph One The Hook



A hook is a concise, one-sentence tagline for your book. It's meant to hook your reader's interest, and pull them in. It's your elevator speech. Memorize it.

Example: "An 1850s Irish immigrant and a 21st-century single mom are connected by faith, family, and a quilt."

Paragraph Two The Mini-synopsis



- Distill your entire 300-page novel into one paragraph or to give a summary of your article in two sentences. Expand on your hook, and include the basic information about your proposed story or idea.
- Read the back flaps of your favorite novels and try to copy how the conflict of the book is described in a single, interesting paragraph. Then cut, paste, trim, revise, and reshape.
- For fiction, mention the title and genre. Focus on your protagonist, the conflict, and the setting—where and when does it take place? Mention your main characters, their problems and conflicts, and the way in which adversity changes their lives. Mention a couple major story lines, but do not give away the ending. Don't mention minor plots or characters.
- For nonfiction, discuss your proposed title or category. Include a one-sentence summary of your story and your proposed word count. Mention the subject matter, your unique approach, and your intended audience.
- For both nonfiction and fiction writers, tell your particular story or idea is different from other books on the same topic. Make sure your unique selling proposition is compelling.

Paragraph Three Your Bio



- Keep your bio short and related to writing. Editors don't care what your day job is unless it directly relates to your book or article. What makes you an authority on your subject?
- List your education only if you're offering a nonfiction book or article about something you are directly related to your education.
- List a few things you've published—in your local newspaper or a magazine, or if you've won any writing awards or contests. Don't go crazy, but don't be too modest either.
- Mention your platform, and include how many Facebook, Twitter, or blog followers you may have because editors and agents want to see the ways in which you connect with your audience and how people know you and your work.

Paragraph Four Your Closing



1. Thank the editor for his/her time and consideration.
2. Make them aware that you are prepared to send the appropriate additional materials at their request.

Fiction: Tell the editor the full manuscript is available upon request. (Editors will want to read the whole novel before they consider your book.)

Nonfiction: Tell them you've included an outline, table of contents, and sample chapters for their review.

3. Sign your query and include your contact information at the bottom of the letter.

DO review:



- Do address your query specifically to an editor. Address it: Attn. Ms. Smith or Dear Ann Smith
- Do state the title of your book or article, preferably in your hook. (BTW, if you're sending an email query, include your title in the subject line.) Remember, the catcher your title, the better chance your query will be opened and glanced over before those other 99-email queries.
- Do mention the word count and genre of your book at the end of your first "hook" paragraph. Check the writers guidelines. (On average, an article is between 800-1600 words. Novels are about 80,000-100,000 words.)
- Do let the editor know you've done some research, looked at the website, read the blog, checked out the submission guidelines, etc. If you met the editor at a conference or are responding to a specific call for submissions that Ms. Editor posted on Twitter or her blog, then definitely mention it.

More Dos



- Do keep your query to one-page only. ONE page!
- Do use a professional tone for your query letter. Show your writing voice and match the tone of your writing.
- Do format your query using standard business letter alignment and spacing. Single spaced, 12-point font. No color. No bold. No italics. Everything aligned along the left margin. No paragraph indentations with a space between each paragraph. For email queries, send the draft to yourself and check it before you send it to the editor.
- Do list your phone number, mailing address, (and email address if you're sending a snail mail query).
- Do include a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE) with all snail mail submissions.
- Do have a pair of "fresh eyes" proofread for typos and grammar mistakes. Be sure someone proofreads all your work.

Do NOTs



- Do NOT start off your query by saying, "I am querying you because..." It's the sign of an amateur.
- Do NOT refer to your novel as a fictional novel.
- Do NOT sing the praises of your book or compare it with other best selling books.
- Do NOT send gifts or other bribes with your query.
- Do NOT print your query on colored paper. Use plain business stationery.
- Do NOT shrink your font down to 9 point so it all fits on one page. 12 point is standard.

More Do NOTs



- Do NOT FedEx or mail your query in a lavish, signature-required fashion in order to make your query stand out. That's annoying, over-zealous, and makes a bad first impression.
- Do NOT apologize in your query for being a newbie writer. Your goal is to write a tight, alluring, eye-catching query, and sound like a professional.
- Do NOT include sample chapters. Never send more than the first 5 pages with your query unless the guidelines tell you to.
- Do NOT forget to give your email address or contact phone number on your query.
- Do NOT forget to enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE).

Good Query Example #1



Annotations on the left side of the query letter include:

- Full contact information
- Demonstrating that you have researched and happened this agent
- An entertaining but professional tone
- A quick, catchy hook or "elevator pitch"
- An author bio that demonstrates why you're the right author for this project
- Short and simple
- Signature
- Best wishes.
- Thanks again.

Questions?????



"So, what did you think of my story? Keep in mind that I didn't have much time to proofread it and it's really rough and I wrote it in one go and there was a lot of noise from construction going on next door and I was drunk at the time. But you can be upfront with me...what did you think of my story?"

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A split second later, Roger was suddenly struck with the horrifying thought: what if the term "pitching a query letter to an editor" wasn't meant to be taken literally?