

A Few Resources for Writing Query Letters

Wendy Call / www.wendycall.com / May 2010

Allen, Moira. *The Writer's Guide to Queries, Pitches & Proposals* (Allworth Press, 2001)

A good place to start in the query-writing world.

Brewer, Robert. *The Writer's Market* (Writer's Digest Books, published annually)

And to whom shall you address all those query letters? Here's the Big Guide. Best to get this one at the library; it's expensive.

Burrell, Diana, and Linda Formichelli. *The Renegade Writer's Query Letters That Rock: The Freelance Writer's Guide to Selling More Work Faster* (Marion Street Press, 2006)

A query-letter how-to for freelance writers, along with sound advice on selling short works. This book is part of a full "renegade writer" book series.

Deval, Jacqueline. *Publicize Your Book! An Insider's Guide to Getting Your Book the Attention It Deserves* (Perigree, 2008)

The tone is heavy on the cheerleading, but isn't that what you want in a promoter? A good, basic intro.

Fulton, Len. *The International Directory of Little Magazines & Small Presses* (Dust Books, biennial)

At \$40, it might be better to find this at the library, but it's one-stop shopping for places to submit your work.

Herman, Jeff. *The Writer's Guide to Book Editors, Publishers, and Literary Agents: Who They Are! What They Want! How to Win Them Over!* (Three Dog Press, 2007, 18th edition)

Though most of this info is available on the internet, it might be worth looking at this book – which comes with a handy CD that has a (rather clunky, but functional) database of all the info.

Katz, Christina. *Get Known Before the Book Deal: Use Your Personal Strengths to Grow an Author Platform* (Writer's Digest Books, 2008)

Lots of helpful ideas – even before you reach the query-letter writing stage.

Levinson, Jay Conrad, Rick Frishman and Michael Larsen. *Guerrilla Marketing for Writers: 100 Weapons for Selling Your Work* (Writer's Digest Books, 2000)

Lots of good ideas and easy to browse through quickly.

And a few online resources:

<http://www.writing-world.com/basics/query.shtml>

A good intro to the topic by Moira Allen.

<http://www.agentquery.com>

Agent Query is the best online source I've found for gathering information on potential agents.

They also have a good overview of the query letter: http://www.agentquery.com/writer_hq.aspx

<http://www.sfw.org/2005/01/the-complete-nobodys-guide-to-query-letters/>

A good overview of writing a query letter for a novel, by Lynn Flewelling.

www.google.com/alerts

Set up a Google alert in your own name to receive an email when your name appears on the web.

What to Put in Your Agent/Editor Query Letter

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The letter should fit on one page. Period. This outline is designed for a query letter to an agent or editor, offering a nonfiction book proposal. The drill is only slightly different for book-length fiction and poetry.

Here's the basic recipe:

PARAGRAPH #1: CONNECTION

First sentence: Begin with whatever (in)direct connection you have to this agent/editor. If you have a personal recommendation, get it in the first paragraph, if not the first line.

Second sentence: The *most relevant* sentence from your bio.

Get your book title in the first paragraph, too.

PARAGRAPH #2: OUTSIDE EVIDENCE OF YOUR QUALIFICATIONS

If you can get a blurb for your book from an established writer/expert, *do it* – and include it near the beginning of your query letter.

PARAGRAPH #3: THE BOOK IN ONE PARAGRAPH

This is the paragraph – the longest of the query letter – in which you explain the subject matter and narrative arc and/or theme of your book.

PARAGRAPH #4: OPTIONS FOR FUTURE PROMOTION

How will you market your book once it's out in the world? This paragraph is another reminder to your potential agent / editor that you've thought about the marketing end of things.

PARAGRAPH #5: AUTHOR PLATFORM

Then, a short paragraph in which you give the most relevant parts of your resume, bio, or background. What makes you the best possible person to write your book? Having a website / professional-looking web presence of some sort is essential. Really. For the 22-year-old, hard-working interns and assistants vetting these letters, if you aren't on the web, you don't exist.

PARAGRAPH #6: LOGISTICS

In the final paragraph of your letter, give the details of how long your book will be when finished, completion date, and what you have available to send them now. Make sure to explain how they can get in touch with you!