

How to Write a Killer Query Letter

From someone who's been in your shoes.

Terry Ibele

<https://octotea.wordpress.com>

[click here for the rest](#)

Writing A Killer Query Letter

This is THE MOST IMPORTANT part of finding an agent. In 99% of the cases, this is all any agent is going to read. If your query isn't engaging in the first two sentences, you're going to get a reject. Agents have hundreds of backlogged emails and they simply don't have time to read everyone's full request.

Before you write your query, make sure you've polished your synopsis first, it'll make it easier to write your query.

This is an excerpt from The Ultimate Guide on How to Publish Your First Novel.

[click here for the full guide](#)

Here's your query letter layout.

Notes:

- Each agent has very specific instructions on what they want to see and how they want to see it. Not following these rules will get you an automatic reject, so it's very important to do exactly as they say. Think of this as the cover letter when applying to a job posting.
- Don't beg, or sound super amateur (like, "I wrote this quickly and I'm not sure if it's good") - these are red flags for agents. It's always best to sound polite and professional.
- Go to twitter and lookup **#10queries**. This is a # that many agents use to critique the queries they receive. You can find many, many useful tips there.
- If you're looking for some example query letters, check out some successful query letters here: <http://agentqueryconnect.com/index.php?/forum/25-aq-connect-examples-of-successful-queries/>

[click here for the rest](#)

Your query letter is usually only 3 paragraphs:

Paragraph 1:

The hook of your novel - why should someone care about the plot and the character

Paragraph 2:

The meat of your story. Be extremely cheesy here. Don't talk about themes. If you have two characters who are developing a timid romance, just say, Joe and Jane are deeply in love. Whatever you can do to get the point across immediately works best. And remember, don't reveal the ending of your novel, but leave a cliff-hanger! The purpose of this section is to get the agent thinking, "Yeah, this is totally exciting, I can't wait to find out how it ends!" - then they'll read the synopsis.

Paragraph 3:

Congratulations if the agent has made it this far. It means that they were interested in the hook, they liked the meat, now they want to know how commercial your book is.

Here's what you need to include:

- Word count
- Genre and audience
- Similar recently-published novels
- One sentence on who you are and if you've published anything before

Tips:

- Bold and capitalize all main characters and places
- Re-write, re-write, re-write! This is purely sales copy, 100% different than writing a novel. Every word must be calculated here.

If you have something interesting to say about yourself, what you've accomplished, or why your novel is truly unique, it may be a good idea to add an extra paragraph at the beginning about who you are.

Bonus: Contacting Agents

This is an excerpt from The Ultimate Guide on How to Publish Your First Novel.

[click here for the full guide](#)

Querying an agent

The easiest way to find an agent is to go to <http://www.agentquery.com>

Search for the genre of your book and begin reading through agent profiles.



The screenshot shows the AgentQuery.com interface. On the left is a sidebar with navigation links: QUICK AGENT SEARCH, FULL SEARCH, SEARCH TIPS, AQ SUCCESS STORIES, SUCCESSFUL QUERIES, JOIN AGENTQUERY CONNECT, BLOG ROLL, FORMATTING TIPS, GENRE DESCRIPTIONS, and AGENT LIST. The main content area is titled 'Results: Agent Search' and displays the profile for Jessica Faust. The profile includes her name, agency (BookEnds Literary Agency), email (JFSubmissions@bookendsliterary.com), and a list of fiction genres (Crime, Mystery, Commercial Fiction, Women's Fiction, Romance, Young Adult, Thrillers/Suspense) and nonfiction genres (Parenting, How-To, Business, Women's Issues, Psychology, Cultural/Social Issues). A note at the bottom states 'This agent accepts queries'. A 'Full Profile' button with an eye icon is visible next to her name.

QUICK AGENT SEARCH

Keywords (name, book title, etc.)

Select a Nonfiction Genre...

Select a Fiction Genre...

QUICK SEARCH

FULL SEARCH

SEARCH TIPS

AQ SUCCESS STORIES

SUCCESSFUL QUERIES

JOIN AGENTQUERY CONNECT

BLOG ROLL

FORMATTING TIPS

GENRE DESCRIPTIONS

AGENT LIST

Results: Agent Search

NAME
[Jessica Faust](#)

AGENCY
[BookEnds Literary Agency](#)

EMAIL
JFSubmissions@bookendsliterary.com

FICTION GENRES
Crime | Mystery | Commercial Fiction | Women's Fiction | Romance | Young Adult | Thrillers/Suspense

NONFICTION GENRES
Parenting | How-To | Business | Women's Issues | Psychology | Cultural/Social Issues

▪ This agent accepts queries

Full Profile

Above is a sample screenshot from agentquery.com. Search results will show an overview of agents. Click on the Full Profile button (eye) on agents you're interested in to discover their unique submission guidelines.

[click here for the rest](#)

NAME	Kim Lionetti
AGENCY	BookEnds, LLC
AAR MEMBER	Yes
EMAIL	klionetti@bookendsliterary.com
AGENCY WEB SITE	http://www.bookendsliterary.com
FICTION GENRES	Mystery Women's Fiction Romance Young Adult
NONFICTION GENRES	
CURRENT STATUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ This agent accepts queries
MORE INFORMATION	
SPECIAL INTERESTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Kim is currently only considering romance, women's fiction, cozy mysteries, and young adult (excluding YA fantasy/science fiction).
DOES NOT REPRESENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ She is not representing middle grade, children's books, or any science fiction/fantasy.
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ http://bookendsliterary.com/index.php/submissions/▪ Please include the word "query" or "submission" in your subject heading of your email queries.

Above is the full profile view. I've highlighted this particular agent's submission guideline's link in red.

You should know that:

Every agent has a different set of rules in contacting them. Some only accept snail mail queries, but most accept email queries.

Another thing to note is that each agent will want a different length of sample of your work. These are the most common"

- first 5 pages
- first 10 pages
- first 3 chapters
- first 10 chapters
- first 50 pages

It's also a good idea to set up a different, professional email address for querying, or at least set up filters in your current inbox. It's easier to keep track of responses this way.

Learn About the Agent

Taking a few minutes to learn about an agent can help your query letter stand out. Here are some things you should look for:

- Have they published similar books to yours
- Do they have any specific requests about novels they're looking for
- Does your novel have any similarities with something they've already published?

Keeping Track

The easiest way to keep track of who you've contacted, and who's contacted you back is by using a free website called, <https://querytracker.net>

Believe me, I started keeping track in excel and that was just a pain. Querytracker.net has a searchable database of every agent, plus it's easy to keep track of who you've contacted and who's contacted you back.

[click here for the rest](#)

There's still so much more to learn

Don't stop here. This isn't even the start!

There's so many more steps to take after you've written your query letter.

In fact, there are two critical steps you need to take EVEN BEFORE you begin to write your query letter.

This guide is just an excerpt from my [Ultimate Guide on How to Publish Your First Novel](#).

From the time that I'm writing this, I have 2 contract offers from different publishers for my first fantasy novel, The Moon King.

In my Ultimate Guide on How to Publish Your First Novel, I teach you everything you need to know:

- How to determine if you need to get professionally edited and how much you can expect it to cost.
- How to write a synopsis. What you should and shouldn't include, and how to format your synopsis.
- And more!

I spent half a year learning everything I could about the publishing process: talking with publishers, authors, reading everything I could, testing out my query letters, and consulting my writing friends who were going through the same stage as me.

In my full [Ultimate Guide on How to Publish Your First Novel](#), I give you everything you need to know. I wish I had stumbled across something like this guide when I first started my journey and so I've compiled it myself.

[click here for the full guide](#)

All the best, and happy writing!

-Terry

