

Querying, Getting an Agent and Working with an Agent

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Things to Think about Before Querying

- Is your manuscript truly ready?
- Consider using a professional editor (make sure they are reputable).
 - Some do only content editing, which is the big picture stuff like suggestions on plot, pacing, continuity, character development, chapter breaks, etc.
 - Others offer line editing, which goes into the little things like spelling, grammar, and proper dialogue formatting
 - A good editor will tell you where you need to change things and possibly give a suggestion, but will leave the writing up to you.
- Or use beta readers/critique partners (a mix of writers and non-writers is good).
 - Guild members, writer's groups, Twitter.
- Feedback is great practice for working with agents and editors.
- When you get feedback/edits back, think about them for a few days before responding.

The Query letter

- There is no one right way to write a query letter.
- They are meant to give an agent an idea of what the hook of your book is, introduce the basic plot (but leave the agent wanting to know more) and introduce you.
- 3 paragraph formula:
 - First paragraph establishes the hook and catches agent's attention.
 - Second (and maybe third) is a summary of the plot (don't reveal the ending)
 - Last is a brief bio.

Query Dos

- Always personalize your letter in the "dear" section and mention in the letter why you chose to query that agent.
- Follow their submission guidelines. Check agency web site for specifics.
- Be sure to include the genre and word count.
- Revise your query letter, if needed.
- Take advantage of query critiques if you find them.
- Be professional, both in your letter and after. Don't respond to rejections.
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Query Don'ts

- Don't query if your manuscript isn't complete. For fiction writing, your book must be finished before you send it to an agent.
- Don't address the letter as "Dear agent."
- Don't use funky fonts, colors or other visual tricks to try to stand out.
- Don't send multiple queries in one email. Write a separate letter for each person.
- Don't send attachments unless they ask for them.
- Definitely don't harass an agent. All that will do is get you a bad reputation, and agents talk.

Finding Agents to Query

- Your favorite author's agents (they will likely thank them in acknowledgements or will be on their web site)
- Writer's Digest features new and established agents
- *Guide to Literary Agents*
- QueryShark and Query Tracker web sites
- Twitter
- Query contests on Twitter and blogs
- If in doubt of reputation, look them on Absolute Write and/or Writer Beware web sites.

The Call

- Listen closely to the agent and take notes so you can remember later.
- Then ask questions. There are lots of lists of questions to ask on the web.
 1. Are you an editorial agent? What type of editorial feedback do you provide?
 2. How close is the book to being ready for submission? Will there be a lot of editing and rewriting first?
 3. If we agree to work together, what will happen next?
 4. What happens if one of us wants to end the relationship?
 5. How long have you been an agent? How long have you been in publishing, and what other positions have you held?
 6. What are the last few titles you've sold?
 7. May I contact some of your current clients?
 8. Do you or someone at the agency handle film rights, foreign rights, audio rights?
 9. How do you keep clients informed about your activities? What's your preferred method of communication?
 10. What percentage of advances/royalties do you take?
 11. What publishers do you think would be appropriate for my book?
 12. Do you help with career planning?

Tips for working with your agent:

- Be honest with them about everything, your future book plans, how things are going, what you expect.
- Keep in touch. Communication is key. If you aren't getting enough information, say so.
- Be open to their edits. While your agent isn't perfect, he or she is an expert in the publishing field and knows what it takes to get a book to sell.
- Remember that even if you become friends, they are ultimately your business partner. While sometimes it is your agent's job to talk you down, they aren't your therapist.
- Be patient! Publishing is a very slow process.

"Don't count the 'nos' because it only takes one 'yes'." - Alyson Noel.