



The first thing to do when writing a query letter or a cover letter is research. You need to sift through the lists of editors and literary agents that are a good fit for your piece. Choose several, and visit their websites. Read their blogs. Know what they publish and what they want.

You also need a completed manuscript. Editors and agents will not (usually) take on new authors without one. They need to know you can finish what you start. If you are not a celebrity, hero or have a massive platform, you need a finished manuscript.

When you have a complete manuscript and a group of editors or agents that seem the most likely to be interested in your story, pay close attention to the format in which they receive submissions. Carry those instructions out **exactly as they are given**. If you violate their formatting instructions at this step, you'll never make it to the next. If you use the format the editor or agent desires, you will set yourself apart from most of the queries they receive.

Now that you know to whom and you know what, it is time to write your letter.

In a query letter, you are asking for permission to send a proposal. In a cover letter you are introducing the proposal. The content is the same until the closing. From here on we will refer to it as a query.

The format of a query letter is the format of a business letter. Follow the basic design of heading, date, salutation, body and closing given for a formal business letter. It should be single spaced with spaces between paragraphs and no indents. Limit it to one page.

Personalize each greeting with the name of the editor or agent. Double check the spelling of their name and stick to a professional greeting, *Dear John Smith*. A colon is the correct punctuation to end the greeting.

There is no set order in what to present first, but the following components should be included in the body of the letter.

There are some editors and agents who accept simultaneous submissions, meaning that you send a letter to more than one at a time, but some do not. Some want to know if it is a simultaneous submission. This isn't the time to be cagey. Give them what they want, and tell the truth. Let them know why you've chosen them. Have you read their blog? Books they've published?

Reveal the working book title, the genre and the word count. Word count is used over page numbers in publishing because page numbers can change due to formatting and fonts. Authors with word counts in the 80,000- 100,000 range for an adult novel are most likely to catch an editor's attention. Also, use the familiar genres. Don't invent one.

To what other book in your genre does your work compare? Adding this will help the editor or agent visualize your book. It shows them you have researched and understand the market in your genre. How does yours differ? Who will read it? What is its purpose or take away value?

Pitches are thought of as long and short. The short pitch is a one sentence description that reveals the hero and his conflict. One sentence informs the editor or agent what your book is about. The long pitch is a quick summary (varies but 75-200 words maximum) that ends with a cliffhanger or teaser. Stick with the main plot. Subplots can be mentioned in the synopsis. This information is for marketing and back cover copy.

For non-fiction pitches, what problem does your book address? What is your solution? How does one apply the solution?

Mention your credentials for writing the novel. We recommend putting these after the pitches. Have you been published before? Have you lived in Sub-Saharan Africa? Do you have an English degree? Are you a scientist? Describe the research or expert who has contributed to your

work. If you have no background in anything that relates to your book or if you have never been published, say nothing.

Close the letter by thanking them for their time and consideration. Here it depends on whether you are sending a query, asking for the permission to send a proposal, or you are sending a cover letter accompanying a proposal. You can add something like *I look forward to hearing from you; The complete manuscript is available upon request; Would you like to view the proposal?* Sincerely is sufficient or use Best Regards. Under your name, give your phone number and email. If this is a letter (hard copy), include a self-addressed stamped envelope for their reply.

The query and cover letter is a place to show your professionalism, writing style and personality. If you follow the directions to writing a good letter, all obstacles will be removed so the editor or agent can concentrate on your pitch. Take the time to craft this part of the query/cover letter.