



JUNIPER EDITING & CREATIVE

Query Letter Checklist

You've heard this from us before, and here it is again: submitting your writing for publication is like applying for a new job, and we don't just mean you have to "put your best foot forward". We mean it literally: journals, literary agents, and publishers all want to know your ~~work~~ writing history, in particular the most pertinent and noteworthy parts. They also want to feel as though they are the only people you want to ~~work for~~ publish with, even if they're your twentieth choice.

In other words, your query letter is very similar to a cover letter, in which you must ingratiate yourself to the reader, specify why you want to work with them and no one else (regardless of how many queries you've sent out), and cherry pick the experience, accolades, or details of your writing that will most speak to them. All this and you must fit it into 300 words tops.

It might not sound like fun, but we love this part! And we're here to help you succeed. Let's get started.

The Groundwork

- **Target your audience.** Do not send copies of your query letter to anyone you come across. As with any successful pairing, your future agent, publisher, or next magazine feature will be one you share similar interests, inquiries, and/or genres with. What have they published/what kind of writers have they worked with in the past? Use this information to gauge whether you will be a good match.
- **Do your research.** When you've shortlisted five recipients likely to be interested, it's time to deepen your research. If it's a journal or contest, order a copy or read some of the winning stories on their website. Is your work up to their standards? If you're researching literary agents, what is their name? What genres of books do they love to work with, and what are their special, personal interests? If it's a publisher, do they accept queries directly from authors not represented by an agent? What, *exactly*, are their submission guidelines?
- **Be realistic.** If you are a first-time author who has never so much as published a short story or poem before, do not start your search for a publisher with Random House, Harper Collins, or any of the other big-name houses—unless you have a significant public following (let's say 100,000 followers). If these are what you aspire to, start submitting small works for publication to reputable journals and magazines a.s.a.p.; seek an agent; or publish your first book with a smaller press and build your audience and desirability from there.

The Letter

- **Address your reader by name.** No “To whom it may concern” here, please! Your research should supply you with the full name of the agent, acquisitions editor, or managing editor you are writing to. Use it!

[Paragraph one]

- **Hook your reader.** Whomever you’re addressing needs to *want* to read your letter in full. Everything depends on the hook—whether they are pulled in by interest or think “Who cares,” and move on. It takes only a few seconds. If you have a personal connection to the agent or a friend or colleague in common, make it known. Otherwise, start with the moment everything changes for your protagonist, e.g.:
 - *Life is solitary for Harry until an owl brings an invitation that changes everything. In a moment he finds that the world beyond his aunt and uncle’s cul-de-sac involves rather more magic than he could have hoped possible. Though it takes a hairy giant named Hagrid to help him escape from his life as the orphan kept under the stairs, he soon finds a family of sorts has been waiting for him at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.*
- **Relate your work to their personal interests.** If your agent of choice loves gothic novels and the Deep South and you’ve written a gothic novel set in the Deep South, you’re damn right you’re gonna state that right away! If it’s easy to embed within the hook, place it there. If it’s a finer point then mention it immediately after, e.g.:
 - *I was excited to learn about your passion for strong feminist characters, both historical and fictional, since my novel is an exploration of a deep and ever-more-complicated female friendship between two girls growing up entrenched in the patriarchal social fabric of post-war Naples.*
- **State your title.** Establish the title early on so that it will remain in the reader’s mind throughout.

[Paragraph two]

- **Establish the main plot.** What is the protagonist’s goal? What obstacles are in the way of his or her goals? What will happen if she doesn’t accomplish them? Establish the conflict and high stakes in this mini-synopsis.

[Paragraph three]

- **Your bio.** What notable thing have you accomplished as a writer/ an author? If the answer is truly “nothing,” don’t fret. There are many ways you can be qualified to write your book. What life experiences have informed your writing? How are you intimate with your subject/setting/protagonist? For instance, if you are writing a murder mystery set in a rehab facility in Jamaica, you will want to mention if you spent six months in a similar facility, or are an addictions therapist, or perhaps grew up in Jamaica—or indeed the fact that it is a fictionalized version of true events. The

bio should be one to two sentences tops, so keep it to the entirely pertinent or leave it out entirely. If you do have a following—1,000 subscribers to a relevant mailing list, 20,000 followers to your bookstagram or Twitter account, a writing conference circuit you regularly speak at, and so on—mention it! You have a readymade readership they will want to know about!

[Paragraph four]

- **Close with impact.** Establish that you know your book's genre by naming it confidently. Reiterate your book's proposed title. State its word count.
- **Be gracious.** Thank your recipient for taking the time to read your letter.

[Sign off]

- **Be professional.** Use a professional sentiment and your full name.

Other Golden Rules

- Stick to 250-300 words.
- Format properly—that means letter format or email format, depending on the specific requirements of the recipient. See letter format example on next page.
- Follow all submission guidelines to the letter. If you don't, it won't get read.
- Include your contact information.
- Be interesting!
- Send to the appropriate (email) address—do not contact someone privately like a scary stalker.
- Don't waste words—every one counts and you're a wordsmith, so show them how it's done.
- PROOFREAD YOUR WORK!! Even better, have a professional proof it.
- [Call us if you need us.](#)

Want to know more about how we can help get you published? Learn more about our ASSESS, EDIT, PITCH process or set up a call to discuss your particular situation. We love hearing from you!

Good luck and happy pitching!



Kate
and the Juniper Editing & Creative Team
xo

Letter Format Example

Good Query Example #1

Full contact information

Dr. Doreen Orion
123 Author Road
Authorville, NM 21290
DoreenOrion@email.com
(212)555-2345

April 5, 2006

Demonstrating that you have researched and handpicked this agent

Dear Ms. Glick:

I am a psychiatrist, published author, and expert for the national media seeking representation for my memoir titled, *Queen of the Road: The True Tale of 47 States, 22,000 Miles, 200 Shoes, 2 Cats, 1 Poodle, a Husband, and a Bus with a Will of Its Own*. Because you are interested in unique voices, I thought we might be a good match.

An entertaining but professional tone

When Tim first announced he wanted to "chuck it all" and travel around the country in a converted bus for a year, I gave this profound and potentially life-altering notion all the thoughtful consideration it deserved. "Why can't you be like a normal husband with a midlife crisis and have an affair or buy a Corvette?" I asked, adding, "I will never, ever, EVER live on a bus." What do you get when you cram married shrinks—one in a midlife crisis, the other his materialistic, wise-cracking wife—two cats who hate each other and a Standard Poodle who loves licking them all, into a bus for a year? *Queen of the Road* is a memoir of my dysfunctional, multi-species family's travels to and travails in the 49 continental states. (Tim insisted on seeing them all, despite my assurances that there were a few we could skip.)

A quick, catchy hook or "elevator pitch"

An author bio that demonstrates your platform and why you're the right author for this project

As a psychiatrist, award-winning author (*I Know You Really Love Me*, Macmillan/Dell) and frequent media expert on psychiatric topics, (including *Larry King*, *GMA*, *48 Hours*, *The New York Times* and *People Magazine*), my life has centered on introspection, analysis and storytelling. Yet, I count among my greatest accomplishments that last year, our bus was featured as the centerfold of *Bus Conversions Magazine*, thus fulfilling my life-long ambition of becoming a Miss September. The story of our year-long adventure is already garnering interest in the media and has been mentioned in *AMA News* (circulation 250,000, and this journal of the American Medical Association has already agreed to review the book with an author interview when it comes out), *Woman's Day*, *Quick and Simple*, *Match.com* and *Best Life Magazine*. An upcoming *Parade Magazine* article on the growing phenomenon of mid-life career breaks (who knew I was a trend setter?) will include a photo of Tim and me, along with our story. My blog of our trip has also been mentioned in Andy Serwer's *Street Life* column (*Fortune Magazine*). I hope you are interested in seeing the proposal and if so, would be most happy to send it to you via e-mail or snail mail.

Short and simple

Best wishes,

Signature

Doreen Orion

Query format example from [The Writers Digest](#).