

THE POCKET EDITOR



# QUERY LETTER TEMPLATE

Must-Knows & Do-Nots  
for Agent Pitching



So you've finished your manuscript. Now comes the hard part. It's query-letter-writing time! (Cue groans.) We know. Queries are tough. But don't get lost in the query rabbit hole. If you can remember to keep focused on the query's sole purpose, you'll do all right. And what is that? Simply to spark an agent's or editor's interest so they request your manuscript for review.

## How to Start—All Queries, Fiction or Non

Do your research before querying. Sending a letter to an agent or publisher who doesn't represent your genre or work in your subject area is a waste of your time and theirs. If you're unsure, many agents and editors include their manuscript wish list (#MSWL) on their personal blogs or agency pages. So head over to Twitter and search the agent's or editor's profile for their #MSWL.

Carefully read the submission guidelines for each agent or editor to whom you send a query letter—and follow them down to the last detail. Agents and editors expect you to research the industry standards for what your query letter needs, right down to formatting the document. The best way to stand out is to show the agent how your work fulfills their manuscript wish list.

### Formatting Tips:

- Format the letter as a business letter (two hard returns between paragraphs, no indenting).
- Use standard one-inch margins and a sensible font, like Times New Roman.
- Single-space your letter and stick to one page.
- Include genre, title, and word count.
- Many agents and publishers are now using Query Manager (an online submission system); the system requires you to copy and paste your submission materials into the fields. It's still good practice to format your letter using the tips above for any queries you'll email directly and to help guide you to adjust your text when you copy and paste it into Query Manager.

### Salutation and Personalization

Dear Agent,

I saw on your agency's website that you gravitate toward books that feature heroines who break rules, not hearts, and that you're interested in a dystopian world you've never seen before. Because of that, I thought you might be interested in my young adult fantasy, RED PERSUASION.



Fiction

Personalize your letter for the agent or editor. Make sure you research what kinds of books they specialize in, and tailor your query letter accordingly. Address the letter to the agent or editor, not to a generic "to whom it may concern."

## Hook

In a world where Persuaders brainwash the population and laws are not meant to be broken, seventeen-year-old Jane Jones manages to shatter them to pieces.

## The Setup

Jane has no intention of following any of the laws, especially because she believes her sister's death was caused by the Persuaders. After committing her tenth crime (walking in the park after sunset with a boy—oh no!), Jane is taken to the Reds, a group of Persuaders who control Bonville. She's deemed "unchangeable" and exiled to Maldell—until she demonstrates her brainwashing abilities. That earns her a one-way trip to appear before the Court of Leaders.

## What's at Stake

She's put in prison, but she has no intention of being controlled by the Persuaders. Instead, she busts out of jail with the hot bad boy in the next cell, John Black, who also has no intention of fulfilling his lame sentence. Dodging Reds and airships, dealing with absent-father issues, and coming to terms with her feelings for an ex-boyfriend—and John as a possible new one—leaves Jane little time for much else.

## Conflict

Which is too bad because she's more important than she realizes. When secrets about her "dead" sister and "missing" father hit the fan, Jane must make a choice: Persuade or be Persuaded.

You must **hook** your reader, otherwise they will have no reason to read. It has two purposes: it sums up your book in one sentence and propels the reader through the rest of the letter.

Background information:

- Provide a few details about your main character—what do they want, or what drives them?
- Include the **catalyst** that will move them into **conflict**.
- Include world-building info, if pertinent, and secondary characters only if critical.
- Only include important details that build character or setting.

You must tell what will happen if the main character doesn't overcome the conflict. You can leave the ending on a cliffhanger, but you have to state the **consequences**. Don't ask questions—use only strong statements.

Without conflict, there is no story, so don't neglect this part! This is what your entire book is about.

- Identify what the main character wants.
- Expound on what's keeping them from getting what they want. What's in their way?
- Stick to the main conflict (subplots aren't necessarily important right now).

## Market Comparisons

A dystopian novel for young adults, RED PERSUASION is complete at 75,000 words. Fans of Lois Lowry's *The Giver* and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* will enjoy dystopian elements, and fans of Victoria Aveyard's Red Queen series will appreciate a similar strong teen voice.

Explain how your book would appeal to an audience similar to that of another popular book/author and be specific as to **why**. Don't explain the market to the agent ("these people want these books") or claim to be the next blockbuster in your genre (we can't all be the next J.K. Rowling).

## Bio & Closing

I'm a contributing writer to *Writing Is Hard* magazine and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. My short fiction has appeared in *Speculative Fiction* and *Romance Fiction*.

My manuscript is on multiple submission. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Mary Smith

[mary@janerocks.com](mailto:mary@janerocks.com)  
801-123-4567

Facebook: @MarySmithAuthor

Twitter: @M\_Smith\_Writes

Instagram: @mary\_smith

Include a brief personal bio that shows what qualifies you to write this book—like education, publishing history, any previous experience, publications, or contests or awards you've won. Remember to include your contact info—name, phone number, and email—so they can reach you.

That's not so bad, is it? For more details and to go a little deeper, see our blog on [writing killer query letters](#).

## Final Tips:

- Five paragraphs aren't absolutely necessary. That's just to help you break down each section. If your paragraphs are really short, five is fine, but you'll likely be combining a couple of the sections above into one short paragraph in order to stay within your one-page limit. Some of the "paragraph" topics above may only take a sentence or two to cover.
- Don't tell them who else you've submitted to. A list of rejections won't entice them to accept your book, and simultaneous submissions are standard. We've politely added, "This manuscript is on multiple submission at this time." You also want to invite—not ask (or beg!)—the agent or editor to contact you or to request your manuscript: "If you are interested, the full manuscript is available upon request."
- Always add your social media handles. Agents will be looking to see if you're growing your platform and interacting with the online writing community.
- Take a look at these [fiction query letters](#) that actually worked.



Nonfiction queries differ slightly from fiction. With nonfiction, you're hoping to get the agent to ask for your proposal and sample chapters rather than a full manuscript. Your query, then, can be thought of as a whittled-down version of your [book proposal](#). You also have to convince the agent or editor you're qualified to write this book. How? List your education, publishing history, expertise in your subject, any research you've conducted, professional recognitions, and press you've received. You can also include previous experience, publications, or writing contests or awards you've won.

In the past, nonfiction books were accepted based on the proposal and sample chapters, but many nonfiction genres—especially memoir—now require the book to be complete and submitted for review before the publisher will accept it, so make sure you're not too far off from completing the book before you query.

### Salutation and Personalization

Dear Agent,

I saw on your agency's website that you're interested in books that help parents who are struggling with raising rebellious children. While my book explores that topic, I have a unique view: I was the rebellious child and am now parenting three teenagers. I thought you might be interested in reviewing my proposal for PARENTING THE AMERICAN REBELLIOUS.

Personalize your letter for the agent or editor. Make sure you research what kinds of books they specialize in, and tailor your query letter accordingly. Address the letter to the agent or editor, not to a generic "to whom it may concern."

### Hook, Sizzle, & Stats

When I was fifteen, I found myself on the streets after going head-to-head with my parents for the final time. Now an adult, I'm parenting three teenagers who have my same stubborn streak, and I've had to ask myself: What do I tame, and what do I nurture? PARENTING THE AMERICAN REBELLIOUS is my 59,000-word part memoir, part how-to of my trial-and-error, heart-versus-head account of parenting three very different children who, in more ways than one, mirror my rebellious soul. Through personal, and sometimes irreverent, stories, I share my experiences, adventures, frustrations, and most of all, the love it takes to parent not just a rebellious child, but for that child to knock some sense into an equally stubborn parent.

The hook isn't just a description of your title and what your book is about—it's a sample of your writing skill. It also shows how your book is salable and unique and how readers will benefit from it. "Unique" doesn't just mean "different"—it includes what is known as "[sizzle](#)." Include the answers to the following questions:

- Which nonfiction genre does your book fit into?
- What are the title and approximate final word count (if the manuscript is done; if not, include the length of your proposal)?

## Target Audience

My book is directed toward parents who are currently raising a rebellious child and are at their wit's end as to what to do with them. If you're a fan of laughing at—or learning from—other parents' epic fails, you'll appreciate all of the failures I've chronicled in my book, as well as the successes that led me to being able to keep my teens in the house at fifteen, seventeen, and, now, joyfully sending the first one out to be a successful adult at age eighteen. I'm still in the trenches with current parents, but I have found strategies to convince my teenagers that not all is lost if the smartphone is missing, and that Sunday dinners with their old folks can be just as awesome—in their own way—as Saturday nights out with friends.

## Market Comparisons

My book could easily sit on the shelf with books such as *#ParentsAreLameButNecessary*, as my book shares a similar voice, and audiences who are searching for modern and successful ways to raise kids in today's world will appreciate my current culture strategies, such as those found in the bestselling book, *Parenting in the 21st Century*.

## Platform & Promotion Plan

I write a blog called *I Was Once a Rebellious Teen* that has over ten thousand followers. I've been asked to speak at several churches, schools, and universities in my community. I recently booked three speaking engagements at an upcoming parenting conference in New York. I am eager to continue speaking to both parents and teens about my trials, troubles, and tremendous success at overcoming rebellion and finding a common ingredient for parents and children: love. I've also hired Melissa Dalton Martinez of Eschler Editing to help me promote my blog, speaking engagements, and book. We've already scheduled several radio and podcast interviews.

When the book is published, I plan to promote and sell it at the different conferences and events I attend as well as list it for sale on my blog. I also plan on conducting a book tour and reaching out to bookstores for book signings and speaking engagements.

Be specific as to who your target audience is. Avoid broad statements, such as “parents of rebellious children.” Rather, be explicit.

Give the agent or editor an idea of the other books yours would sit next to on a store or library shelf. A word of caution: you don't want to say you or your book are the “next big thing”—agents and editors know how rare a breakout success like that is, and comparing your book to such titles will look amateurish. Instead, find some popular titles your book would realistically be shelved by, or whose readers would realistically and specifically find your content similarly interesting.

Publishers want to know you can sell your book. More often than not, you'll need established followers for a publisher to consider publishing your book. What this means is that before you query your book, you've begun gathering followers who are primed to buy your book. And this isn't just those who follow you online—you'll want to let the agent or editor know what you're doing offline to gain visibility, too. Include some sort of promotion plan—a strategy for selling your book. Include details on what you may have already done as well as what you'll do both on- and offline.

## Who Are You?

I'm a tax accountant as well as a taxed parent. I also have degrees in psychology and child development. I write daily on my blog and have a reach with each post of at least one thousand readers. My blog won the Best of State Parenting Site in 2019.

My manuscript is on multiple submission. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Zoe Turner  
[zoe@rebelliosteens.com](mailto:zoe@rebelliosteens.com)  
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765-432-1098  
Facebook: @ZoeTurnerRebels  
Twitter: @Zoe\_Writes\_Rebellion  
Instagram: @zoe\_turner

Include a brief personal bio that shows what qualifies you to write this book—like education, publishing history, previous experience, publications, or contests or awards you've won. Remember to include your contact info—name, phone number, and email—so they can reach you.

Not as painful as you thought, right? For more details and to go a little deeper, see our blog on [how to write a nonfiction query letter](#).

### Additional Nonfiction Query Tips:

- You can also include information about a self-published edition of your book if you have one—if it will help sell the edition you're proposing to publish traditionally (if it sold well—meaning over 10,000 copies in most cases—it may help your cause; a publisher will eventually find out about your sales, so be prepared to discuss it and have accurate sales data on hand).
- You can mention if you're proposing a series and include additional information, such as the names of people who will provide the foreword, blurb, or cover quotes if those people are well-known, influential, or have big platforms in your field and/or genre.
- Take a look at these successful [nonfiction query letters](#), which include self-help, how-to, and business books. There are also examples of memoir and narrative nonfiction, and if you're writing in those genres, take a look at this [list of topics](#) agents and editors get tired of seeing. You'll want to figure out a unique angle if you're writing about these.
- Nonfiction genres such as memoir and narrative nonfiction also need to include brief info on the conflict and character arc, similar to a fiction query, so you'll want to take a page (or sentence or three) out of the fiction query writer's book.

# Want an editor to look over your query?



## **Fine Print:**

**These example queries are completely made up or loosely based on real queries (used with permission). To see further examples of actual queries that succeeded in getting agents, the links we included allow you to view published versions of query letters that worked.**

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