

Query Prep Questions

Writing a query is one of the most stressful yet exciting parts of the writing process.

This 1-page document of about 250-words is the first impression you give a literary agent considering your work. Sometimes, a query letter is the only document an agent will accept to consider whether or not they're interested in reading your work.

In short—the query letter is very important.

But where to start? Do you just explain the entire story and hope it sounds interesting to someone besides yourself? No. Queries should follow a fairly consistent format. In fact, some agents specify what information should be included in a query and even where it should be included. For example, some will want the first paragraph to jump right into the story, others will want to know a brief explanation of why you're querying them.

So, keeping that in mind, it's vital that you check each agents website and make note of their query guidelines.

Besides any noted specifics, make sure your query has all the essential information. Below is a list of questions I use before I complete a query. This helps me narrow in on the core of my story and thus, which info must be included. That's the essence of query writing: what must be included to share what this story is really about. Be concise.

Once I've completed these questions, I'll work them into a few paragraphs and then send it off to 3-4 peers for feedback on clarity. I can't stress this enough! Simply email your query to a friend or two and ask : what do you think my story is about? Listen closely to their answer and see where they are confused. If you notice multiple people confused on similar pieces, tweak your query to be more clear.

Two things I hear agents complain about most often when reading queries are: 1) queries that talk more about the author than the story; and 2) queries that do not explain the story in an easy to understand way. Finishing a query letter confused won't help your chances getting a page request. So trial run it with a few others that know nothing about your story.

Let's dig in!

Answer each question concisely.

1. Why is your main character special or unique? (Include first name and age)

2. What situation is your main character in that sets the story in motion?

3. What's critically unique about the world to understand the conflict your character faces? (aim for 7-10 words or less) Try not to stress worldbuilding that isn't essential to understand the conflict/stakes of the main plot.

4. Who else is involved in this conflict in a transitional way? How are they involved? Try not to mention extra characters unless they're critical to the main plot.

5. What situation(or choices) is your main character forced into by the middle/end of the story? Do **not** give away the ending of the book. Just explain the setup.

6. What's at stake if your main character fails?

7. What genre and word count is your book? (include adult / YA / MG / etc)

8. OPTIONAL: Name 2 stories (book/movie/tv) that your book similar to? How is your story similar to those? (Answer part 2 in as few words as possible)

9. Did this agent request your material from a pitch contest? If not, what on their #MSWL or website makes you believe they'd be a good fit? (Answer part two concisely but specifically. Be intentional.)

Finally, if you have any writing related distinctions, be sure to include those.