

## Query Critique

Writing a query is one of the most stressful yet exciting parts of the writing process. And I am certainly not an expert, however I have had my own queries critiqued by several authors and a few agents. Additionally, I've sent out my fair share of successful and unsuccessful queries. Including the one that landed me several agent offers.

I'll share a few bits of what I've learned along the way!

In short—the query letter is very important. It's a tough balance between finding the right words that are specific enough to convey what's happening in your story and giving away every spoiler. Queries do not contain the ending of your story, so that's easy to remember. But how much detail do you go into with the rest of it? It's tricky! And there's not a definitive line you can draw for every query. Each is unique. However, there are a few things you can look for to ensure your query is coming across clear and concise.

>>1. Aim for 250-300 words

>>2. Most of the query should focus on the story— not your writing accomplishments.

>>3. While it's really nice to hear why you wrote the story, unless an agent's website expressly asks for it, keep that information out or minimal, 1-2 sentences at most.

>>4. Two formats that work well:

### **[OPTION A]**

Blurb + MS Essentials + Bio/Writing Experience/Reason for Querying

### **[OPTION B]**

Reason for Querying +Blurb + MS Essentials/Bio/Writing Experience

Let's look closer at these and then dive into an actual example below.

// **The Blurb** — This is a short summary of how the tension builds in your story, minus the ending. This is the meat of your query and should take up the most word count.

// **MS Essentials** — This includes story title, word count, genre and comp titles (if you have them).

// **Bio/Writing Experience** — Include details here that are relevant to your writing. This is not a place to spend a ton of time talking about your biography. Keep it concise. You

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can include 1-2 details about you personally that are unique. However, that's not at all necessary. I'm not even certain it's entirely common but it's definitely done and if concise, it's okay. Just don't force it! Be succinct and be you.

// **Reason for Querying** — There's no need to state the obvious. The agent knows that you're seeking rep. However, including why you specifically chose to query them in particular is often very helpful. Include the reason as 1 sentence, no more.

Let me dig in here for a second>>>Use google to search #MSWL + agents name for information on what kinds of stories they'd like to see. There's **no use** querying an agent outside of the things they represent. It's just a waste of your time, because they won't read it. Research each agent you query thoroughly and **do not** batch copy queries to multiple agents. Take time to personalize each one. I know that sounds time consuming. It is. It's also important. Choosing the right agent to query can be the difference between a partial page request and simply having the query deleted unread. It's worth doing research on the types of stories an agent is drawn to before querying them. Don't sell yourself short by skipping this step.

Now, let's dig into an actual example.



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## QUERY | BEFORE

Dear Agent First Name Last Name, [This query is 400+ words. Aim for 250-300.]

I am seeking representation for my #ownvoices YA fantasy story DAUGHTER OF WAR AND MOONLIGHT. At 87,000 words, it is comparable as THE VALIANT meets WONDER WOMAN in a world based on Philippine mythology. [I suggest putting these details later. Lead with either the hook of your query or a single sentence explaining why you're querying them.]

Seventeen-year-old Hana mourns the loss of her cousin. [Your first sentence is your hook. Try to introduce your character in a way that shows who they are in a fresh, intriguing way. Add a bit of voice to make it really pop!] Trained in martial arts, she blames herself for not being the protector she vowed to be, and contemplates her purpose in life. [End your first paragraph on a dilemma, some point of tension/conflict that makes the reader HAVE to read the next paragraph. I find this is often the inciting incident or something equally transitional for the character.]

While on vacation in the Philippines, she stumbles into a passageway to an ancient world called Kaluwalhatian. [Keep your explanations tight. You want the blurb to read like an exciting back of the book copy, just a bit more specific. So pay attention to how long winded your sentences are. Read them aloud. Can you combine concepts? Is there a tighter way to say something? Be choosy on what you spend lengthy words on because you want to stick as close to 250-300.] Hana is claimed as a kampeon, or champion, by Datu Caylao, son to the paramount ruler of the land, [Only include details that are immediately relevant to understanding the building conflict/tension.] who reigns supreme amongst those with divine blood, The Divines. He holds the power to command the will of all his people, [Try to keep the explanations of the story from your main character's perspective. How do these events impact them specifically?

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What does it lead them to do?] and Hana incurs his ire when she refuses to kill. But while fighting in the arena, she discovers she has powers of her own.

With the help of her friends, and fellow kampeons, [Something I like to do is revisit the opening dilemma in the query and add a sort of “bookend” to it later in the query.] Hana discovers she is descendant to the goddess of war, and a new life’s purpose begins. [Avoid cliché phrases. What purpose does Hana find, specifically? It’s important that the reader fully understand what’s happening when reading your query. Vague or generic mentions don’t convey any meaning we can hold on to. And we want our query to show how different and fresh our story is—we need story specifics to do that.] The Divines of this world tire of Caylao’s rule. The people yearn to be released from his control. Hana and her friends wish to return home. And there’s only one way for them all to break free: defeat the god of gods.

Now Hana must hone her newfound powers, gain allies, and lead a rebellion that will turn Kaluwalhatian upside down. But how do you defeat a god with the immutable power to control the world? Garnering an army of kampeons, natives, fellow Divines, and mythical creatures is a viable start. Hana may yet become the protector she swore to be.

Born in Manila but raised in California, I grew up wishing I was white, because I thought only they could be heroes. There were no stories of little brown girls saving the world. This story is my response, so that the next generation knows they can be heroes too. [This is great. But try to communicate the same idea concisely.] I am an avid reader of YA. [Details like this aren’t needed. Can cut in favor of lower word count.] I am a member of SCBWI. And I work for the Michelle Obama Library in Long Beach, CA where I assist in teen programming and book acquisitions. Below, I have pasted the first ten pages of my story. [This is implied, no need to mention.] I thank you for your time and look forward to hearing from you. [Again, it’s no problem to be concise here as well, for sake of word count.]

Sincerely,  
Writer First & Last Name  
Writer’s Email Address

[BELOW IS A REWRITE BASED ON THESE CHANGES]

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## QUERY | AFTER

Dear Agent First Name Last Name, [This version is 262 words which is more on target.]

Seventeen-year-old Hana studied martial arts for one reason--to protect people who can't protect themselves. But when her cousin dies and she fails to stop it, she can't help but blame herself.

In mourning, she retreats to her homeland, the Philippines, and stumbles upon a passageway to Kaluwalhatian, an ancient world ruled by Datu Caylao, a power hungry god. Enslaved by his power to command the will of all he controls, she's forced to kill. But when she channels every ounce of strength within her to resist, she discovers she has Divine powers of her own.

To break free of Caylao's capture and end what should have been a peaceful vacation, she seeks out fellow kampeons, natives with divine blood, and a herd of mythical creatures to form an army and destroy the evil dictator once and for all. Hana may yet become the protector she so desperately yearns to be.

DAUGHTER OF WAR AND MOONLIGHT is an #ownvoices YA fantasy story complete 87,000 words. It's comparable to THE VALIANT meets WONDER WOMAN in a world based on Philippine mythology.

I'm a member of SCBWI and work for the Michelle Obama Library in Long Beach, CA where I assist in teen programming and book acquisitions. Born in Manila but raised in California, I grew up wishing I was white, because there were no stories of little brown girls saving the world. I'm going to change that. I am querying you because of your passion for #ownvoices stories grounded in cultural mythology and strong female leads. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Writer First & Last Name

Writer's Twitter Handle [Optional]

A few final notes: Use Times New Roman. Font size: 12. Do **not** indent or double space paragraphs. Use block paragraphs. Most queries will be copied into the body of an email. Do **not** send attachments to an agent unless they specifically ask or mention that on their website. If you do, they'll delete it unread. Below the query, simply copy/paste your double spaced manuscript sample pages in the amount they've asked for. GOOD LUCK!