

FICTION + MEMOIR

The Query Letter Builder

A four-page worksheet for shaping a clear, professional query that makes an agent want to read the pages.

ONE LETTER. ONE JOB.

A query does not prove that your book is brilliant. It creates enough clarity, tension, and confidence for the agent to request more.

THE SEVEN WORKING PARTS**1 GREETING**

Address the agent by name. Check the spelling.

2 BOOK FACTS

Title, category or genre, rounded word count, and whether the manuscript is complete.

3 HOOK

The sharpest version of the premise: who, what changes, and why it matters.

4 STORY PITCH

The protagonist, desire, obstacle, escalating stakes, and the hard choice ahead.

5 POSITIONING

One or two useful comparison titles or a concise statement of readership.

6 AUTHOR NOTE

A brief bio that includes relevant experience, publications, or lived connection when it matters.

7 CLOSE

Thank the agent, state what materials are included, and provide contact information.

THE RULE THAT OVERRIDES THIS TOOL

Always follow the individual agent's submission instructions. Some want pages pasted into the email, some use forms, and some permit attachments. Their guidelines win.

BUILD THE PITCH

Find the Load-Bearing Sentence

Do not draft the letter yet. First make sure the book can be described clearly.

BOOK FACTS

Title:

Word count:

Category / genre:

Complete?

THE ONE-SENTENCE HOOK

Use this pressure test: When [inciting change] happens, [protagonist] must [central action] before [consequence], but [central obstacle or impossible choice].

WHO IS THE STORY ABOUT?

Name the protagonist and the one defining pressure that matters here.

WHAT DO THEY WANT?

State the visible goal, not a vague emotional journey.

WHAT STANDS IN THE WAY?

Name the central force, person, system, secret, or contradiction.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY FAIL?

Name the cost, then the choice that makes the story specific.

POSITIONING + BIO

Comp title 1:

Comp title 2:

Why these comps are useful:

The one author detail that belongs in this query:

DRAFT

A Clean Query Template

Replace every bracket. Keep the final letter to about one page unless the recipient requests otherwise.

Dear [Agent First Name],

[Optional personalization: one concise sentence explaining why this agent is a fit.]

[TITLE] is a complete [rounded word count]-word [category/genre]. [One-sentence hook or positioning line.]

[Pitch paragraph one: introduce the protagonist, their world, and the disruption that makes the story begin.]

[Pitch paragraph two: show what the protagonist does next, the central obstacle, and how pressure escalates.]

[Pitch paragraph three: reveal the stakes and the impossible choice without giving away the ending.]

[Positioning: one or two comparison titles and the specific reason they help place the book.]

[Brief bio: relevant writing credentials, professional expertise, lived connection, or publication history. Keep it short.]

Thank you for your time and consideration. Per your guidelines, I have included [requested materials].

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Email] | [Phone, optional] | [Website, optional]

FINAL AUDIT

Before You Press Send

A query is finished when it is accurate, specific, clean, and matched to the recipient.

ACCURACY

- ☐ The agent's name and agency are correct.
- ☐ The agent is currently open to this category.
- ☐ Title, genre or category, and word count match the manuscript.
- ☐ Every placeholder has been replaced.
- ☐ The manuscript is complete and ready for fiction submission.

STORY

- ☐ The protagonist appears early.
- ☐ The pitch names a clear desire and obstacle.
- ☐ The stakes are specific, not generic.
- ☐ The pitch ends on pressure or choice, not a full synopsis.
- ☐ The query voice sounds like the book.

PROFESSIONAL FINISH

- ☐ The query is concise and easy to scan.
- ☐ Claims about awards, publications, credentials, and representation are accurate.
- ☐ Comparison titles are doing market work, not simply naming favorite books.
- ☐ Only the materials requested are included.
- ☐ Attachments are used only when the submission guidelines allow them.
- ☐ The email subject line follows the agent's requested format.
- ☐ The letter has been read aloud and proofread one last time.

A SIMPLE SUBJECT LINE WHEN NO FORMAT IS GIVEN

QUERY: [TITLE] – [CATEGORY / GENRE] – [YOUR NAME]

KEEP YOUR OWN RECORD

Track the agent, agency, date sent, materials included, response policy, and result. Never rely on your inbox as your submission system.