

Query Letter_Template

Below are instructions for the 4-5 paragraphs that make up a query letter.

I. First paragraph:

1. Include a **one sentence pitch of the work**, aka “the elevator pitch” which gives the essence of your story, the most crucial arc of your story. *Shoot for 25 words or less.* Summarize your book in one catchy, unforgettable line that grabs the attention of a producer or agent – while taking no more time than would be required for an elevator ride. This often leads to a make-or-break decision. The important thing to remember is that **a good pitch is a description of what actually happens.** It's a one sentence description of the plot (what happens. The inciting incident/premise plus the major conflict/struggle that tests the protagonist. A great plot also implies a quest and a resolution, which is what makes the reader want to read more), not the theme (what is happening beneath the surface of the novel. It's what the novel is about.).

1.1. 3 Elements of a Good Sentence pitch:

- 1.1.1. WHO is your protagonist? And what is the opening conflict (aka Inciting Incident) that propels the protagonist on their path/quest, how does their journey begin? What is the most critical things someone would need to know about this person?
- 1.1.2. WHAT is their problem? What is the obstacle/conflict that stands in the way of their journey? If you could only pick *one* important thing/detail to tell someone, what would it be?
- 1.1.3. WHAT is the gotcha, the "oooo" factor? This can be the quest, it can be the physical or emotional journey/change—it's what happens to the character(s) between the moment when the plot begins and ends. Identify the twist in your story.
- 1.1.4. Note: As you're trying to flush out your elevator pitch, you *may* end up with the longer “logline”. If so, KEEP THIS somewhere else for later use. Loglines are one or two sentences that explain what the main characters and conflict in your novel are. **The logline explains the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW and WHY of your story in one sentence.**
<http://graemeshimmin.com/writing-a-logline-for-a-novel/>

| | |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| Who | → Protagonist, Antagonist |
| What | → Problem |
| When, Where | → Setting |
| How | → Conflict |
| Why | → Goal |

EX: A troubled teen[PROTAG] jumps into a portal to another world to save her life [SETTING], there she learns she's a healer and a light for all others [GOAL], but soon discovers she may have to turn killer to survive her destiny[PROBLEM]—vile Creature-Malices[ANTAGONIST] want to slurp the light right out of her chest [CONFLICT].

1.2. Examples with my answers:

- 1.2.1. WHO is your protagonist?: A troubled teen who jumps into a portal to another world to save herself, there she learns she's a healer and destined to protect the Universe.
- 1.2.2. WHAT is their problem/conflict?: She leaves her heart sister on Earth, and there's Creature-Malices that want to slurp the light/soul right out of her chest.
- 1.2.3. WHAT is the gotcha/twist?: She may have to become a killer to survive her destiny.
- 1.2.4. My Resulting Elevator Pitch:

1.2.4.1. A troubled teen [The protagonist] learns she's a healer [What's important] who may have to turn killer to survive her destiny[Problem]—vile creature-malices want to slurp the light right out of her chest. [The twist] [29 words]

1.3. Other elevator pitches I found online:

- 1.3.1. *Case 39 (broken down):* To save 10-year-old Lilith from abusive parents, [What's important to the story] a social worker [The protagonist] brings the girl into her own home[A second detail]—only to learn Lilith[Poss Antagonist] isn't what she seems.[The twist. I can already guess the girl is the trouble here, not the parents.]
- 1.3.2. *The mask (broken down):* A meek bank teller [protagonist] discovers a magical ancient mask that unleashes his deepest desires [What's important] --- and gives him superhuman abilities to act on them. [The twist]
- 1.3.3. *Kick Ass (broken down):* High school student Dave [protagonist] decides to transform himself into a masked crime fighter [What's important]— and becomes an Internet star [The twist].

2. Also in the 1st paragraph, **Introduce your project/book in a one line description**, giving the title and genre. In the first paragraph, you also should specify the length of the manuscript (in number of words, not number of pages). Make it clear that this is a completed, polished book.

2.1. EX: "OWL'S REVENGE, my first YA fantasy, is complete at 80,000 words."

3. Sometimes it can work well to **compare your book to another work the agent would recognize**. Say "In the tradition of X," or "Should appeal to readers of X genre."

3.1. EX: "OWL'S REVENGE should appeal to readers of both the paranormal and science fiction." OR "OWL'S REVENGE is a blend of James Cameron's Avatar and Ally Condie's Matched."

4. **Optional: State your reasons for querying this particular agent (are they seeking your genre, do you like their blog).**

4.1. EX: "Because you represent several YA realistic fiction authors with strong female protagonists, I thought you might be interested in seeing my novel."

II. Second paragraph (You may end up writing 2 paragraphs instead of 1):

5. Provide a “snapshot” of your book in the form of a “sound bite” (one or two paragraphs, similar to a back cover blurb—can employ “voice”—think of it as a teaser designed to make them want to read it!). This shouldn’t be more than 300 words. Try to summarize it as much as possible. Get very creative, and showcase your best writing skills. You build around your one sentence pitch, fleshing it out with some key details in the one paragraph pitch – such as including the character names, or the most important subplot, or a few quick images that give a sense of the sensibility of your work.

With the two paragraph pitch, you have more flexibility to add still more details and can make it a bit more of a story itself. The language you use should be vivid, specific, and dynamic. **When that agent puts down your query letter and goes off in search of more coffee, that sound bite should run through his or her mind.**

- 5.1. Describe the story setup, major disasters, and ending of the novel. Some story structures are “three disasters plus an ending.” The first disaster corresponds to the Inciting Incident and end of Act 1. The second disaster is the mid-point of Act 2. The third disaster is the end of Act 2, and forces Act 3’s Climax which wraps things up. NOTE: If you don’t know about the 3 Acts or creating a story structure, go to my site <http://www.cdhenon.com/books---writing.html> and review the ‘For WRITERS’ data. There is also a TON of stuff on the internet...find something that you can understand.
- 5.2. Ideally, if you’re creating only 1 paragraph, it will have about five sentences/sections. One entry for the backdrop and story setup. Then one entry each for your 1-3 disasters and maybe one more entry for the ending.

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- 5.3. IN THE 1ST PARAGRAPH - EXPLAIN THE WORLD, GIVE BACKSTORY/BACKDROP, AND THE SITUATION/STORY SETUP ALONG WITH ACT 1’S INCITING INCIDENT/END OF ACT 1. Maybe include the character names, or the most important subplot, or a few quick images that give a sense of the sensibility of your work.

- 5.4. IN THE 2ND PARAGRAPH – GIVE MORE OF THE CONFLICT THAT IS GOING TO UNFOLD WITH THE CHARACTER(S) YOU’VE INTRODUCED. Consider giving the mid-point of Act 2, the third disaster at the end of Act 2, and Act 3’s Climax. You’re adding more details to make it a bit more of a story itself.

5.4.1. THREE EXAMPLES ARE BELOW:

- 5.4.2. The planets know something wicked is coming; they select a new team of Universe Keepers. [BACKSTORY]

Krista [PROTAGONIST] was a happy, loved child who saw and knew things others didn’t. She spent her days playing with ancient Elementals and other paranormal beings.[BACKSTORY & WHAT’S IMPORTANT TO KNOW] At six, her parents died, and that world changed—she was placed in a group home. Over the years, Krista learns it’s safer to deny her childhood playmates, relating voices, and visions... drugs and unfashionable straightjackets are rewards for those stories. At seventeen, Krista jumps into a portal to another world to save her life. [INCITING INCIDENT] There, she learns she’s destined to protect the Universe, can heal the energy body as well as the physical body, can slow down energy and control it, lights on fire when her emotions go haywire, and

now, off Earth her metaphysical gifts and paranormal friends start popping back up. To top that off, she's romantically inexperienced and realizes how much that *sucks* when she meets a snatchin hot fairy dude. She's totes overwhelmed and definitely needs to meditate.

Krista desires to BE the light she's fated to be and declares she never wants her powers to cause harm. [GOAL] But as hell-a-bad as it can get, there's a MASTER-MALICE [ANTAGONIST] wielding evil power. He's twisting and defiling innocent animals into walking, talking, super stinky, human-like Creature-Malices who enhance their abilities by snacking on the essence, the life light of others. [PROBLEM] And they want to slurp the light right out of her chest, like a slushy through a straw. [CONFLICT] Our healer may have to turn killer to survive her destiny. [GOTCHA/TWIST OF THE STORY]

Krista's allies are the Fairy Queens, an Archangel, a Demon-girl, and her team: Tangi, a curvy, sexually fluid Jamaican-Asian; Blaez, a muscular, tooth-pick chewing Native Hawaiian; and Ash, a quiet, intuitive Native American. [300]

5.4.3. Jordan [PROTAG] has been the bane of every substitute teacher at Wolfson Middle School ever since his dad moved away from home. He never would have survived without his best friend Demetri, even if he is a little timid, and his cute-but-tough friend Sarah Jane, who is chronically overscheduled. [SETTING] But when the trio meets a mysterious man in gold they trade a pizza for his cheeky spaceship and blast off into the great unknown. That is, until they break the universe in a giant space bang [PROBLEM] and a nefarious space buccaneer named Manny Stackems maroons Jordan and Demetri on a small planet that smells like onion farts[CONFLICT]. The friends have to work together to make it back to their tiny street where the houses look the same, even as Earth seems farther and farther away.[GOAL]

5.4.4. Lifelong skeptic Kimberly [PROTAG] doesn't believe in ghosts, or ghouls, or things that go bump in the night. Imagine her surprise when she discovers her next-door neighbor is Death Incarnate. [PROBLEM] David is a Reaper, a damned soul given one final chance to earn his salvation by harvesting the souls of the recently departed. Sixty years on the job have left him burned out and emotionally dead – that is, until he meets Kimberly. An analytical scientist, Kimberly lives in constant fear of her own family history[GOAL=NOT TO HAVE FAMILY PROBLEMS]. Her late mother was diagnosed schizophrenic while her grandmother still swears she can see dead people.[SETTING] When Kimberly witnesses David collecting a soul, she's confronted with the reality that her family doesn't suffer from mental illness, but is actually gifted with a connection to the spirit world. [CONFLICT] While David helps Kimberly adapt to her changing reality, Kimberly breathes new life onto the dying embers of David's humanity, sparking a passion he never dreamed possible. When he learns that Kimberly is slated to die, he alters the fabric of destiny in order to save her life. Fate, enraged with this blatant act of insubordination, gives David a choice: deliver the soul of Kimberly, or surrender his own. [CONFLICT]

III. Third paragraph:

6. This paragraph should contain a summary of your **credentials for writing the book, including any writing/publishing experience and related professional experience/organization memberships**, if applicable (for example, "I've attended several writing workshops, and run a review blog dedicated to the young adult reader community."). If you don't have any, then don't try to manufacture them — that looks really lame. Just leave them out. A good agent won't turn up their nose at a good query just because the writer doesn't have a publishing history.
- 6.1. *The OWL 'S REVENGE* won first place in the 2007 Fiction from the Heartland Contest, finaled in the Dixie First Chapter Contest, and won fourth place in the Gotcha! Contest's Inspirational category.

- 6.2. I am a member of Romance Writers of America (RWA), American Christian Fiction Writers (ACFW), and the assistant coordinator for the ACFW book club, which reaches over 500 Christian fiction readers.
- 6.3. My husband and I have worked with teens in the youth pastor role for nine years. I researched medieval life and swordsmanship for three months before I started to write this novel and can provide a works cited page.

IV. Fourth paragraph:

7. This last paragraph is simply a polite conclusion to your business letter. Thank the agent for considering your query. Tell them you hope to hear from them at their earliest convenience. Then write “Sincerely,” and sign your name. Include **your contact info**—full name, email address, telephone number.
 - 7.1. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing back from you.
 - 7.2. I'd be glad to send you my complete manuscript for your review. Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.