

The Three Parts of an Irresistible Query Letter

The Hook, The Book & The Cook

Agent Katharine Sands believes that the writing you do about your writing is as important as the writing itself. A query is a one-page, single-spaced letter with three or four indented paragraphs with a space between each. Without sounding self-serving, it explains why, what, and who--the hook, the book, and the cook:

1. **The Hook:** whatever will best justify reading your work

- * (Optional) A selling quote about your book (or a previous book) from someone whose name will give it credibility and/or salability. The quote could also be about you.

- * (Optional) The reason you're writing the agent or editor:

- the name of someone who suggested you contact the agent
- the book in which the author thanked the person you're contacting
- where you heard the agent or editor speak
- where you read about the person or something the person wrote

- * Whatever will most excite agents or editors about your book:

- the opening paragraph
- the most compelling fact or idea about your subject
- a statistic about the interest of people or the media in the subject or the number of potential readers

2. **The Book:** the essence of your book

- * A sentence with the title and the selling handle for the book: up to fifteen words that will convince booksellers to stock it and consumers to buy it

- * The model(s) for it: two recent, successful books (not bestsellers) that prove the market for your book and convey your literary and publishing goals.

- * A one-sentence overview of your book and, if appropriate, what it will do for your readers

- * The book's biggest markets

- * A round number for the actual or estimated word count of your manuscript

- * The number of pages in your proposal and sample chapter(s) and how many additional pages of the manuscript, if any, you have ready to send

- * (Optional) The names and/or credentials of people, if they're impressive, who have agreed to give you a foreword and cover quotes
- * (Optional) A link to illustrations, if they're important
- * (Optional) If you're proposing a series or standalone books that will sell each other, the subjects or titles of the next two books
- * (Optional) Information about a self-published edition of the book that will help sell it

3. The Cook: Why you're the person to write the book

- * **Your platform:** the most important things you have done and are doing online to give yourself continuing visibility with potential readers, with round numbers if they're impressive: your online activities, links to impressive published work, and media and speaking experience with links to audio and video
- * **Your promotion plan:** the one-to-three most impressive things you will do to promote your book, online and/or off, with numbers, if they're impressive
- * **Your credentials;** years of research; experience, positions, prizes, contests, and awards in your field
- * A link to a video query up to two minutes long in which you make the case for your book

- **Baiting Your Hooks**

- * Assemble these building blocks in the most effective order. Front-load the letter by putting what is most impressive as close to the beginning as you can, and include anything else that will convince agents or editors to ask to see your work.
- * Rewrite the letter until it's as convincing as you can make it.
- * Get feedback on it, and have someone proofread it.

From *Writing Success Guaranteed: How to Build a Career Online* by Michael Larsen (in progress).

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