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PERFECT PITCH – Query Letters that Kill

By Sue Kendrick

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If you are reading this then you are either looking for information on how to write a query letter or your curiosity has been excited by the heading. Either way, the article has grabbed your attention and hopefully what you will read here will live up to your expectations and that in a nutshell is what a good query letter is all about!

Grabbing the editor's attention, full–filling his expectations and making it easy for him to say "yes" is what we should be aiming for. I try and keep these points in mind when I write a query letter, try a few yourself and see if your success rate improves.

1. Be professional. Don't hand write letters. Set your letter out properly in a business like way. If you don't know the formatting for this look at some of the letters you receive from your bank, solicitor, accountant etc. Alternatively, a visit to your local library should help.
2. Keep it Brief! A busy editor doesn't want a War and Peace epic on why you think your article is perfect for his publication. This letter is of course your sales pitch, but the last thing you want is to come across as a gabby salesman so one page is the absolute maximum. Most of the query letters I send out are much shorter!
3. Be Complimentary! Everyone is susceptible to a little flattery and editors are no exception. Saying how much you enjoyed their magazine will do you no harm at all and if you can get in a mention of a specific aspect then so much the better. Link this up to the subject of your article and you'll be steaming, but don't over do it! Too much flannel and you'll likely wash away any chance that you might have had!
4. Explain your subject. As briefly as possible, give a good over view of what your article is about. Remember that there is nothing new under the sun and the chances are that your subject has been covered many times before. You need to try and bring out the unique points of your article. This could be the content itself, (you've managed to unearth new facts), or you are taking a different view of an old subject. (A popular city tour accompanied by a wheelchair bound dependent perhaps). Whatever it is, you need to provide enough information to make the editor actually read your article.
5. Say Why? It may be blindingly obvious to you, but you really do need to say why you think that readers would enjoy or appreciate your article. The main reason for this is that it shows you understand

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the readership and have studied the magazine. Editors don't like receiving submissions that are totally unsuitable for their publication, it is very unprofessional and not an image you want to cultivate.

6. Why You? This one is a bit tricky and not one that you can always include. If you can claim to be an expert in the subject that you are writing about then you should certainly say so as it will add to your credibility. If not, then you had best keep quite and play up other points instead!

7. Make it Easy! If you have photographs, can supply copy on disc or have any other information that generally makes life easier for the editor, then say so! Photographs and illustrations, especially, can often be the deciding factor in whether an article gets accepted or not.

8. Naming names. Don't begin your letter, Dear Editor! If you don't know who the editor is then ring the publication. There's no need to speak to him or her, you can just ask the switchboard operator.

Actually, I always do this anyway. Even if I know the name of the editor, magazine and newspaper staff tend to move around a lot so it's wise to check that they are still there. Secondly, I hate sending out

articles without knowing that the editor is at least willing to look at them. Once I've got the name of the editor I ask to speak to him and very briefly tell him that I'm a freelance writer and that I have an idea for an article for his publication, would he be interested in taking a look? He might say no for a variety of reasons but should he say yes it will usually be made clear that it is without commitment. If he does say "yes", there is no guarantee that it will be accepted, but at least you'll know that there is some interest.

9. Manners maketh the man! A brief thank you is a good way of ending the letter, but don't grovel! This is supposed to be a business arrangement amongst equals!

10. To S.A.E. or not to S.A.E. There is much debate amongst writers about including stamped addressed envelopes for the return of manuscripts. Some writers think that including them makes it easy for a busy editor to return a manuscript. Others feel that it is unfair to expect a publication to pay for the return of material that it did not ask to receive. My own view on this tends to vary depending on what I'm sending out. For an article without photographs or illustrations I don't include an s.a.e. I always keep copies of my work and would never send a used copy out to an editor anyway so I don't need to have it returned. Usually I indicate this in the letter. If I've enclosed photographs I would include an s.a.e. although I do keep copies, the cost of developing a fresh set makes it worthwhile to ask for their return.

Well that's pretty well got the print side of things covered, but what about all the on-line websites and ezines? How do you query them? Well most of the above still holds true, but there are a few points to bear in mind.

1. Make sure that you are clear on how the website/ezine accepts copy. Many will not accept attachments because of the threat of viruses. If you want to submit photographs or other graphics you will have to clear it first.

2. Assuming that you are submitting in the body of an email, format your article so that it appears in single line spacing with a double line between paragraphs. Yes I know that this is not how work is usually submitted, but reading text on-line is easier this way and the editor will be cutting and pasting from your email into his own documents. Getting rid of double spacing is something he or she can do without!

3. As you know, when sending out emails you have to fill in the subject line. Do be careful here! Lots of writers use this as an attention grabbing "hook", but it can back fire. One of my latest articles was

entitled Money in a Hurry. I put this in the subject line when submitting it to an ezine and was just about to send it out when I realised that it could be construed as a dubious get rich quick scheme and would probably be deleted without opening! I quickly changed it to Article submission, On–line payments for writers!

4. Your query goes at the top of the email and should keep strictly to the point. Leave a small gap between this and the start of your article and make sure that the type face and size are as friendly as possible. I use Ariel or Times Roman size 12.

5. Include your biography. This should be a couple of short paragraphs at the end of your article. It should include your contact details and links to your personal website if you have one and any on–line ezines or websites that you have previously written for. It is a good idea to make it clear where you live, (no need to be specific, UK, English Midlands will do) and telephone and or fax number if you feel comfortable giving those out.

Phew! Quite a lot to take in hey? If you're thinking blow this for a game of soldiers I'll take up macramé instead take a look at this query letter I sent to a new age magazine around five or six years ago. It sold for me then and has been doing so in various formats ever since, but not every time I hasten to add! (Names have been changed).

Dear Ms Editor,

Have just read the latest edition of Forecast. I really enjoyed the feature on the mystical significance of Druid art and wondered whether you'd be interested in the enclosed article on mistletoe.

Mistletoe Magic explains not only how the Druids used the plant in their rituals, as a gateway between the worlds, but also the folklore and mythology surrounding its history and uses, including new research that suggests it has a role to play in the treatment of cancer.

I think your readers may find some of the ideas associated with the plant intriguing and because of its long association with Yule tide festivities would be suitable for one of your Christmas editions.

I can supply the article on disc and photographs should you need them. (I already knew the magazine supplied its own artwork).

Thanks for your time, no need to return the article if it is not suitable as I have a copy.

Yours sincerely,

Well, did it practice what I preached?

Sue Kendrick is a freelance writer and graphic designer living in the English Midlands. She has written many special interest articles for magazines and contributed extensively to her regional newspaper. She edits and publishes www.writelink.co.uk a UK writers resource website and monthly newsletter and www.writelinkpro.co.uk a content providing service for Writelink and other publications. Sue also writes fiction and has won several prizes for her short stories.

A Few Brief Tips To Deal With Writing Rejection

By Laura Hickey

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What to do when you get rejected

You've just finished your book, sent out query letters and was rejected. What's left to do? You could give up, but I wouldn't suggest this. Here's some brief tips on how to deal with rejection.

1. Take a breather–

You've probably been wondering and rattling your brain as to why you got rejected. Take a break, not a long one...some time for a breather. If you continue to constantly analyze why you were rejected, you'll drive yourself crazy. Plus...if you decide after rejections to continue sending out new query letters, they may not be your best work. Why you ask? Because you may not produce your best work under all the stress you've put yourself under over the rejections. You wouldn't want more rejections because you didn't have the energy to send out your best sales pitch.

2. Self-esteem– Failure is not an option

You might be down in the dumps...this is understandable, but don't allow yourself to be in the mood for too long. Have you had others read your work? Did they like it, love it? It's a good idea to remember all the positives, rather than negatives. If everyone who didn't get what they wanted the first time quit, do you know what we'd have? A bunch of failures. They aren't failures though for not getting it for the first time, rather they are if they quit.

3. Motivation–

Think about your favorite movie, song or book. Now, what if they stopped trying? That favorite song, book or movie wouldn't exist. If you give up, someone out there won't have a chance to have your work as a favorite. Think about it.

Remember that rejection doesn't have to be the end of your journey unless you let it be. Good Luck!

Laura Hickey is the author of the children's book "Mysterious Chills and Thrills for Kids E-book" Along with writing children's books, she also wrote for the sitcom pilot + episodes for a project called "Officially Lush" You can read her whole bio plus access her press kit at <http://www.laurahickey.com>



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