

Query letter by Wen Spencer

Ahhh, the query letter. Source of much confusion and frustration.

People get worked up over how hard this seems, but really, if you sell the book, this is just the beginning. Everyone you talk to, every place that want details on your book is going to want you to keep it short.

The query is just a selling tool -- think of it as a movie trailer. Just enough to grab. And yes, really do try to keep it under one page.

Whatever you do, don't ignore 1 inch margins all around in the effort to fit as much as possible on the page.

Generally what you need in a query letter is only this:

Dear Editor (call if you don't know their name and make sure you spell it right!)

I have written a science fiction/fantasy/mystery/romance/etc (pick one -- and it better be one that this editor publishes) novel of xx,xxxx words. (Word count shows them if fits their required range. A science fiction novel falls around 100,000. Mysteries and Romances are often much shorter.)

One SHORT paragraph about what the novel is about. Mine for ALIEN TASTE was "Ukiah Oregon never had a normal life. Raised by wolves, adopted by a lesbian couple, and trained to be a private investigator, he now works in Pittsburgh finding lost people. He and his partner, Max Bennett, are called in on a multiple homicide to help find a kidnap victim and find themselves at the center of an war between two alien forces."

If you have published anything, add that into the letter. Also if you have some special skill set that suits this genre like working for NASA for SF, or ex-cop for mystery.

Everyone will want the first three chapters.

Chapter One shows how well you hook the reader. Most people looking through the bookstore will pick up a book from an unknown writer and read the first page. It needs to hook them in enough to get them to buy the book.

Chapter two and three are indications that you are developing the story in an interesting matter. It shows how you handle pacing and unfold a story in a manner that is pleasing and understandable. It also shows that chapter one wasn't a fluke.

They say "first three chapters" but usually what they mean is "first 50-60 pages" which is often three chapters. If you're one of those people that have short or massive chapters, just send them the chapters that fall within that range. Ie, if chapter six starts on page 49 and ends at page 57, then send up to and including chapter six. If chapter one is 70 pages, then just send chapter one.