How to Impress Agents and Editors

JERRY B. JENKINS

This tips sheet was downloaded from the **Your Novel Blueprint** *Bonus Section.*

Excellence and etiquette pay off. This tips sheet is designed to help you connect confidently with editors, agents, and publishers. You will gain insight into what each decision maker is looking for and how to make your work stand out.

Whether you are pitching an editor with an article idea, or an agent or publisher with a book idea, these five guidelines will help you move forward with clarity and confidence.

5 Keys to Successful Pitches

Follow submission guidelines. Hardly any editors still insist on conventional mail. For the majority who prefer email, check to see if they want material embedded in the message (unlikely) or attached.

1. **Let your content speak for itself.** Your editor, or agent or publisher, will always be very busy. Usually, he or she will have multiple manuscripts on hand, so don't bloat your query with why your book or article is special. The writing sample has to do the talking.

2. **Assume the best.** Never assume an adversarial relationship. Editors, agents, and publishers are looking for solid, dependable writers to deliver quality work. Even if they rarely say yes, they're on your side, hoping you succeed. If they don't give you an explanation for a rejection, don't badger them. Their job is not to educate you but to find publishable material. Your job is to produce that.

3. **Stand on your merit.** Never try to sell your writing on the basis of a special relationship. Your stuff must stand on its own merits. The people you pitch know quality writing. If you keep getting rejected, don't quit. Master your craft and refine your ideas.

4. **Be patient.** Editorial guidelines or their listing in *Writer's Market* or *The Christian Writer's Market Guide* will tell how quickly you should expect a response. Far beyond that, a brief, polite note is appropriate.

Professionalism + Persistence = Payoff

Marketing your work may be the most tedious part of being a writer. Today's competitive markets require you to show up in the arena and play competitively and professionally. Researching where your article fits and what value it carries will set you apart. The more specific your query and the more you zero in on a publication's readers, the more valuable you will be to editors.

Nothing looks worse to an editor than an idea totally wrong for his readership. Prove you're familiar with the publication with a solid, focused query—and make an editor look good! Once you've established yourself as someone who can be counted on, you'll be on your way. Then you'll just need persistence for opportunities to present themselves.

So what do editors love from a writer, and what drives them crazy? Well, they aren't keeping any secrets. If you're curious about what editors and agents want in queries and proposals, set up a column in your TweetDeck or Hootsuite for the hashtag #querytip or #mswl (manuscript wish list) and listen in. You can also do a simple hashtag search on your Twitter profile page.

Query/proposal insight found on Twitter

"Three queries in a row mentioned that their spouse loved the book. That is nice, but does not matter."

"Don't insult other genres in your query. Especially when they're ones I rep."

"Seeing too many queries that focus on marketing angles and writing credentials instead of on the story. Tip: those never hook me."

"Start with the hook. The hook is the thing that makes your story go from status quo to 'whoa!'"

"Calling your book a crossover is like calling yourself beautiful: better when someone else does it."

"50,000 words is barely a novel. 250,000 words is a mind-numbing epic. Know the generally accepted word counts 4 your genre. Okay?"

"Telling me your book will change the world is a big DON'T DO. At best, you're lying to yourself. At worst, you're delusional."

"In any writing sample I'm reading for the quality of the writing, not for content (I get a feel for that in your pitch)"

"A polite 'thank you for your time' email after a rejection is fine — but it shouldn't also include another query for your next MS."

"Some version of 'self-publishing didn't go the way I thought it would' isn't the best way to get an agent interested in your MS."

"PERSONALIZE YOUR QUERY LETTER. If I could type that bigger, I would. Really can't emphasize that enough."

"In general, you can take the 'self' out of the phrase 'I have self-published my novel.' You published it. And we're going to treat it as such."

"Query me with ONE project at a time. Pretend I am a goldfish and have a three-second attention span."

"You guys are killing me with all the images embedded in the queries. Yeah, stop."

"Typos in your query letter, any portion of it, not acceptable."

"Don't just send me a link to your website, or your blog, or your Amazon page. That's a fast way to immediate deletion."

"Hook us with exciting/emotionally driven openings. Entice us with a great fast paced and catchy query."

"Pretty please. I read everything on my Kindle and 'Full Manuscript' is not a super helpful title."

"Even if you come across an agent's direct line or email, send your query to where they ask: their query inbox. We like to keep organized."

"If we've met at a conference, don't forget to mention WHERE we met when you follow up with me."

"Missing a vital part of submission requirements is likely an instant rejection. Research who you are subbing to!"

"Don't send random samples from all over ms – if sub guide asks for first 5-10 pgs – we are trying to assess writing and flow."

"Don't start your #query with a rhetorical question. The answer will always be no."

"Seeing a lot of queries that quote the length in number of pages. Don't do that! It's always in number of words."

"Take the rejections, look for feedback, read, and keep doing the work."

"Hook agent by grabbing hold of emotions and making us curious."

"Pls. read agent preferences. Why torture yourself?"

"Always lead with your pitch. Agents read hundreds of queries a day, and you don't want us wading through a long preamble."

Remember to personalize your #query. Even a simple, 'Hi Saritza' is better than a generic 'Dear Agent' or worse, 'Dear Sir or Madam.'"

"Facebook is not the place to find an agent. Please don't add me to pitch your story."

"I am so over 'I teach teenagers, so of course I can write for them!' That's not how any of this works."

"[Saying your MS is] professionally edited and flawless . . . that's highly unlikely."

"Multiple 150K+ manuscripts queried today. Ask yourself: are all 187,934 words essential?"

"If we make the decision to pass on your manuscript, please do not call our office multiple times a day trying to change our minds."

"#1 reason Ur Book was Rejected: the writing. So research, hone your craft, and learn."

"1. Follow guidelines 2. Hook me 3. Intriguing comps 4. Capture tone/voice of work 5. Short paragraphs."

"If you intentionally use omniscient POV, tell me in your query. Otherwise, I might think you don't understand POV."

"In your query, you are selling yourself and your platform."

"A pass is not an invitation to ask for more feedback, guidance, or a referral for a more appropriate editor/agent/pub'r."

"I love when a writer introduces her or himself as part of the query. Make it brief but let your personality show."

"I genuinely wish I could read/respond faster, but the universe keeps rudely refusing to give me extra hours in the day."

"Writers, please keep track of the agents you've queried and their responses somehow (i.e. via spreadsheet/log)."

"Nothing makes me think 'next' faster than lines like, '(blank's) life is at a crossroads' in queries #snooze."

"When writing synopsis: include spoilers/plot/important characters . . . but no more details than

are necessary."

"Agents don't have a lot of time, so keep #query short & sweet Pitch of 250-300 wds is ideal Open w hook."

"The novel should be 80k-100k words, not the query letter."

"DO mention if you are a part of the culture your book references/pulls from, bc I'm very interested in authentic, diverse stories."

"Don't quote from other rejections (??) even if they sound somewhat complimentary or nice."

"Don't use your valuable opening lines on bio, past works, etc.! Hook me with your book as soon as possible."

"Please do not query me with 'I am a stay-at-home mom with no published works.' Surely there are better ways to start your query."