NOTE:

The date for the next workshop, and deadline for submission have changed since the video was made.

This is the most current.

Workshop: Friday Oct 14 at 1 PM, Eastern.

Homework submission deadline: Noon, Eastern, Wednesday, October 12.

GET PUBLISHED NOW!
Home of Agent / Query Submission Central

Welcome to
[Submission Central's](#)
QUERY WORKSHOP

First, a little information about the publishing biz~

Dinosaur to digital~

Snail mail is almost extinct. It's all digital.

This impacts you~

The format for submission documents (query, synopsis, manuscript sample pages) has totally changed.

Your submission is submitted as one long document no attachments.

Here's the good news! Agents can read your submission quickly.

As you might expect, there's also bad news! Agents can delete your submission just as quickly. Yikes! No one wants their submission to fly off to delete-ville without being read.

You only have one chance to make a first impression~

The query letter, first paragraph, has become the most important aspect of your submission. It's first to be read (and first to be the cause of rejection).

Competition for attention~

In 2014, when agency submission policies changed from snail mail to email, this opened hundreds of agent inboxes to submissions from writers they've never met,

This created an unintended consequence.

Typing-enabled people who believed they were skilled writers with fabulous stories launched a tsunami of submissions that continue to be never ending.

Do agents (or their employees) read every submission? Yes and no. It depends TOTALLY on the subject line. If it engages attention, "Click" and the query is opened.

Is it a good idea to use your book title in the subject line? Not necessarily, unless the title is interesting, funny, or attention grabbing. Remember the goal of the subject line is to motivate the agent to open your email and read the first paragraph of your query. This needs to focus on the story core:

- **who wants what and why**

- **what stands in their way**

- **what is the terrible "or else" that will occur if they don't get what they want?**

EXAMPLE of a subject line and query first paragraph that achieved the desired reaction.

from Jenny

> Email SUBJECT LINE: Sex, lies, and electricity
>
> Sad, angry, and drunk, Clay's on the run, dodging henchmen who murdered his brother during a botched attempt to steal his revolutionary generator. Clay believes his invention is destined to increase his net worth to something north of mega millions. He heads for Iowa, desperate to hole up somewhere safe, repair his machine, and approach legitimate buyers *before* the killers find him.

THE STORY CORE:

Who is the protagonist? Clay.
What does he want? Safe haven so he can repair his invention and find a buyer.
What stands in his way? Bad guys who want to steal his invention.
What is the terrible "or else" that will occur if he doesn't get what he wants? The henchmen will find and murder him.

(Note: Jenny's second paragraph will be reviewed at the end of this workshop.)

Another EXAMPLE~

from Emile

> Email SUBJECT line: Passion, profits, and psychopaths
>
> At the age of 16, Maisy Sloane endured 27 horrifying days at the hands of a psychopath who tortured and raped her, and murdered her best friend. She's now 24, and a law student, laser-focused on discovering how her attacker evaded death row, despite the overwhelming evidence of guilt. But, when the arrival of taunting messages from her torturer rips open

old wounds, they force Maisy to set aside plans of revenge and confront the ghosts of her past.

THE STORY CORE:

Who is the protagonist: Maisy.

What does she want? Revenge.

What stands in her way? The past.

What is the terrible "or else" that will occur if she doesn't get what she wants? She'll continue to be tortured by the past.

The first paragraph hints at a good read, full of twists and turns. This query, revised and polished in my last workshop has proven to be majorly effective. So far, Emile has received three (3) offers of representation from agents associated with the "big players" . . . major literary agencies.

Keep in mind how you, as a writer, only have one opportunity to make a first impression. The following example demonstrates a SUBJECT line and opening paragraph that could *sabotage* the query and doom it to delete-ville.

from Kim

> Email SUBJECT line: Us Do Part (the book title)
>
> Dear Ms. Agent,
>
> I found Great Literary Agency on QueryTracker. After reading what you're looking for, I thought my novel, "Do Us Part," might be of interest to you.
>
> *Whoops! Wrong way to begin a query!*

Salutation and why/where/how this writer found this agent is not necessary in any query. Why? All that blah-blah-blah gobbles up valuable space. Your query may be read on a laptop, notepad, or smart phone. Don't take up screen space (and test the agent's patience) with extraneous "stuff" that doesn't get to the heart of the matter.

Instead,

First, write a clever, enticing, interesting, grabbing SUBJECT line, then jump right into your story~

Revision:

> Email SUBJECT line: Arsenic in eggplant: how to kill someone you love.

> *First line of the query jumps right into the story:*

> Anna Karotid envisions at least fifty fun ways to kill her husband. But when it starts to feel less like a game, and more like something she might do, it worries her. Refraining from murder becomes her number one priority. Until her husband reveals a devastating secret that changes everything.

STORY CORE:
Who is the protagonist? Anna.
What does she want? To kill her husband.
What stands in her way? Realization that she actually might do it.
What is the terrible "or else" that that will occur if she doesn't get what she wants? A devastating secret.

Will the agent keep reading to discover what the devastating secret is? YES!

EXAMPLE of a *first,* then *fourth* draft of a query first paragraph~

from Bob

> Email SUBJECT line: ISIL Money and Blood Flow through Congress

> Mo Thurman was called to the Oval Office and assigned to find the truth behind rumors ISIL was being supported by Washington,

supported financially. The amounts were staggering. CIA agents had already died delivering the rumors. ISIL has to be stopped.

THE STORY CORE:
Who is the protagonist? Mo Thurman
What does he want? To find out who/what is funding ISIL.
What stands in his way? Unclear, but probably the threat of death.

This first paragraph was written in past tense, instead of present. Although it reveals some information *about* the story, there is no emotional link to Mo, and no reason to care about him personally.

4th draft revision:

Email SUBJECT line: Speaker of the House of I$lam

Mo Thurman is called to the Oval Office and assigned the task of investigating rumors about massive amounts of cash being funneled to ISIS from Washington insiders. He follows a trail of bodies (CIA informants) that lead him to the White House. The trail of corruption he uncovers presents a monstrous nightmare . . . with Mo as the prey for the monster.

This revision introduces Mo, his task, and suggests the potential for a good read, filled with action and intrigue.

BTW: Bob had not completed his novel when he joined my query workshop earlier this year. He wanted to understand what he'd need to create, in terms of landing an agent, *after* his novel was complete. In the process of defining the story core, he refocused and revised Mo's story to strengthen it considerably.

Crafting a query isn't easy, but it is doable~

Since 2001, I have met only two (2) writers who could craft a query first draft that was good to go. Both writers had marketing backgrounds and understood that "selling" means "convincing." They also were aware that

they had one opportunity to make the case they were competent writers with saleable stories.

Fortunately, my Submission Central program is designed to help writers (who may not have marketing backgrounds) shift from "telling" to "selling" and land agents to guide them through the publishing maze.

And, now your questions and your evaluations.

But first . . .

WOOHOO to you for going for it!
You have chosen to move along the path that can lead you to get what you want: an agent to guide you through the publishing maze!

You asked about:
AGENTS~
Why do agents and editors respond so differently to queries and manuscripts?

All people, including agents, are different. Some love liver, others prefer chocolate. All have one goal in common: to expand their stable of talented writers who create saleable manuscripts.

Dealing with non-acceptance (rejection)~
Writing is personal. Your work began inside of your head and then your heart. You wrote and revised and grew your idea into a novel. It's natural to love what you've written and to experience "hurt" when others (agents) don't feel the same way.

However, it's not personal, even though it may feel personal. It's business. Agents accept writers who create products (manuscripts) they can sell to publishers who manufacture them into books and sell them, generating cash flow for their company, the agent, and you.

About the process~

A few of you hold misconceptions you've heard/read/learned from the internet or workshops you've taken in the past. Therefore, you may be holding onto submission concepts from the Jurassic age (prior to 2014).

(Misinformation has a longer life on the internet than Velveeta has the grocery shelf.)

The *most current industry standard (October 2016)* is for submissions to be agent-and-device-friendly with query, synopsis, and sample pages pasted inside one long email.

Contrary to former standards, you need to jump right into your query. No greeting. No yak-yak-yak unless the agent specifically requests that you reveal where you met them, or asks for your title, genre, and word count right up front. In those cases, the best practice is to give the agent what they want.

About timing~

My 90-day Submission Central program progresses from query to synopsis to sample pages. Most writers require four (4) drafts of query and synopsis, revision of their first pages, and agent quest protocol advice before they're ready to begin their agent quest.

How to know what agents and publishers want~

Agents/publishers all want the same thing: talented writers with saleable stories. Repeated non-acceptance usually is as much about the submission presentation as it is about the story. This workshop will teach you how to write your submission so agents will want to read your manuscript sample.

Don't waste your time writing what you *think* you can sell. Write what's in your heart. Write the story that is screaming and yelling to be written. Write it so well that others will want to read it because it's genuine.

For example: who would have believed the story about a boy who lives under a stairwell, has his mail delivered by owl, and goes to school in an alternative universe would become an international best seller?

Becoming traditionally published~
Most writers desire to be *traditionally* published.
They want the business card that declares . . . .

However, if, after editing and polishing your manuscript and submission documents until they glow in the dark, you submit to many carefully researched agents and nothing happens, what then? You always can consider self-publishing and work your way through a different set of challenges that come with that pathway to publication.

Several issues *always* are at play when writers can't locate agents.
- The submission does not follow industry standards, is difficult to follow, and does not reveal the story core.
- The story doesn't engage the agent's interest.
- The submission is filled with writing mechanic errors that label it as being unworthy of publication.

And, now, on to your first paragraphs.

From Lisa

STORY CORE:
(Note: Because Lisa's sentences are quite long and involved, I've highlighted the story core portion.)

Who is my story about? Kay Smith
Three days after a suspicious car accident, Kay Smith wakes from a coma at a private, metro D.C. hospital diagnosed with psychogenic amnesia, a complete, subconscious blockage of her memory triggered by a severe, forgotten emotional trauma.

What does she want? <mark>Regain her memory</mark>.

Despite the emergence of vague memories and cryptic dreams that have Kay panicked, fearful that a heinous murder may have sent her running from her life, she chooses to search for her past rather than be haunted by it.

Why can't she achieve this? <mark>Vague memories/cryptic dreams lead her into a search into her past.</mark>

When an online new story leads her to believe she and a Jane Doe accident victim are one and the same person, Kay's efforts to confirm her theory with hospital, morgue, and police personnel are stymied by falsified hospital records, a missing corpse, a car lost beneath the icy waters of a Virginia lake, and the lies of a mysterious witness to Jane Doe/Kay's car crash.

What terrible "or else" might occur if she doesn't get what she want? <mark>Death awaits at the hands of someone from her past.</mark> When murder follows her every inquiry, Kay realizes someone is looking for her, a man willing to kill to find her, and if she's to stay alive herself, she must remember her dark past before it catches up with her.

> Email SUBJECT LINE: Unwitting conspirator to political murder loses her life, then finds it.
>
> Kay Smith is lost and alone, struggling to find herself amidst a fugue of confusion and lost memories. Suffering from amnesia caused by some forgotten psychological trauma, Kay chooses to search for her past rather than run from it. But when Kay learns she may have led a less-than-innocent life, and murder follows her every inquiry, she turns to a new friend for help. But Nick Costa, a decorated ware hero, security specialist, and secretly, the object of Kay's smoldering passion, has his own secrets to hide—knowledge of their own past relationship and information about the unseen hit man stalking Kay.

WHAT WORKS: Interesting story with potential for many twists and turns. Nice story-telling skills, although sentences are a bit long, which defuse the tension instead of building it.

Subject line is interesting, but could be refocused more on "losing life to find it" aspect. Or, stick with the political conspirator aspect. It's difficult to combine multiple concepts in one short, enticing sentence.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK: As a query opening paragraph, this needs to be pared down to bare bones so the agent can scan it quickly. Most of what Lisa wrote in the 1st paragraph belongs in the 2nd paragraph.

Revision concepts:

Kay Smith, victim of a suspicious car accident, awakens with sketchy memories that pull her into a world she only vaguely remembers. Especially vivid are cryptic dreams about a car sinking into an icy lake. When Kay discovers she's being stalked, she realizes survival depends on remembering her dark past before it catches up with her.

This structure makes the first paragraph a quick read, introduces the protagonist, her challenge, and the "or else" factor.

from Janet

STORY CORE:
Who is the protagonist? A widowed college professor who is the daughter of a rich man's mistress.
What does she want? She wants to find a man to love who will be faithful and provide her with the family she's never had.
What stands in her way? Insecurities about her background and her ability to trust a man again.
What is the terrible or else if she doesn't get what she wants? She and her daughter will remain without the love and security of a family.

Janet's first query paragraph

> I am seeking representation for my 72,600 word completed manuscript, Glass Promises. It is a women's literature/romance novel which deals with one's greatest strength and weakness, a family. When the daughter of a rich man's mistress falls for a man wary of love, she must confront her own insecurities and a malicious family member to have a loving future for her and her child.

WHAT WORKS? While the story sounds interesting (and complicated), this is not what you need in a query first paragraph. Suggest you re-read my query tutorial. Instead of telling "about" your story, tell it as seen/experienced by your protagonist. .

WHAT DOESN'T WORK? Your first paragraph needs to tell your story as you have told it in your manuscript. If this is an example of what you have been submitting, I would imagine you are not receiving the query responses you want. As written, it doesn't reveal much about you, the writer. Your third sentence tells "about" the story, but is devoid of any emotional attachment with the protagonist. In other words, reveal, through her eyes, what she wants and the terrible "or else" that will occur (life without a family or a father for her little girl) if she doesn't get what she wants.

<mark>from Vicki</mark>

STORY CORE:

Who is your protagonist**:** Sadie, age 15, hides her true self from the world because of painful scrutiny all her life.
What does she want? To fit in and be a normal teenager.
What stands in her way? Lack of self-esteem destroys her.
What is the terrible "or else" that might occur if she doesn't get what she wants? Suicide.

Email SUBJECT line: It followed her to school one day, breaking all the rules.

Query first paragraph:

Born with Cerebral Palsy, Sadie's tangled walk attracts attention wherever she goes, and no matter how much of herself she hides, she will never end the cruel scrutiny from her peers. To add to her pain, the only friend she has ever known left for London, and Sadie is convinced she will never see him again. When she's sent to the isolated Catskill Mountains for the summer, it becomes the perfect refuge in which to end her life. But this time something malevolent is watching her, and its obsession with the mortal girl accidentally thwarts Sadie's suicide attempt, waking her to a world much more frightening than she could ever imagine.

WHAT WORKS? Her physical challenge and loneliness are clearly defined. Nice story telling with power-filled words that quickly paint a clear picture: tangled walk, convinced, refuge, malevolent, suicide attempt.

The subject line is intriguing and although it's a playful line from a children's song (*Mary had a Little Lamb*), the core of this story is anything but playful.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK? It's unclear about the malevolent presence that's attracted to her. What is the new reality this presence brings to Sadie, and why is it so terrifying to Sadie? Market is YA.

Is the "terrible or else" the choice she makes? End it all, or fight her way back from xxxxxxxxx (you fill in the blanks) to a reality that at least she understands?

STORY CORE
Who is the story about? 17 year-old Levi Yokum.
What does he want? Unclear.
What stands in his way? Unknown.
What's the terrible "or else" that will occur if???

Doree wrote:
His life is about to take a horrible turn and he's fighting mad about it. His mother is diagnosed with liver cancer and she's dying. Death is final. He is going to be living with his best friend and Ryan's mother under her guardianship until he graduates from high school.

In "Turn", ten tiny monsters overtake seventeen-year-old Levi Yokum's mind with promises of reuniting him with his deceased mother.

"Turn" is a completed 51,000 word YA manuscript that is based on a true story.

WHAT WORKS: Interesting story about a teens struggle with mental illness. Could this be for the YA? (Whether or not it's based on a true story is not important at this point, unless you want to write this as non-fiction.)

At this point, I don't know enough about your story to make suggestions in re structure for your query first paragraph. Suggest, as an exercise, you use the template for "Jack and the Beanstalk" in my query tutorial as you flesh out your query first paragraph. Do you have the tutorial?

~

STORY CORE:
(Not provided)
WHO is the story about?
WHAT do they want?
WHAT stands in their way?

WHAT is the terrible "or else" that stands in their way if they don't get what they want?

Email SUBJECT line: Not provided.

Linda wrote:
A Chinese wife must choose between tradition or independence. Does she dare travel ten thousand miles to join her husband?

Meichen, a Chinese newlywed, longs for passion and romance with her husband. He ignores her because his modern Western education convinces him she is too young for sexual relations. Despite her attempts to seduce him, he continues to treat her as a sister. As she matures, her husband begins to desire her, and it seems that her dream will come true. But changes in American immigration laws force her husband to go to America much earlier than his family had planned. No one knows when he will return, and Meichen faces many lonely years waiting. He may not return at all.

WHAT WORKS? This sounds like a fascinating tale that brings two cultures into conflict within one family. I assume it's set in an earlier time? Yes, early 1900s.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK? This does not serve as a query first paragraph. It's *about* the larger scope of your story, but doesn't reveal the identity of your protagonist, although my guess is that it's Meichen, with her husband in a secondary role.

Your query first paragraph, as defined in my "Jack and the Beanstalk" query template, must contain your story core: who wants what, why can't they have it, and the terrible "or else" that will happen if they don't get what they want. Although this information is partially revealed in what you have written, no time-pressured agent will take the time to try to figure it out.

STORY CORE:
WHO is the protagonist: Fairy Princess Shaylee.
WHAT does she want? Friendship restored between fairies and pixies.
WHAT stands in her way? King and Queen forbid it.
The terrible "or else" that will occur if Shaylee doesn't get what she wants? She will lose her secret, best friend, pixie, Brott.

Carol wrote:

Fairy Princess Shaylee and pixie Brott have a secret friendship that they have to hide from everyone because fairies and pixies have been enemies since time began. Shaylee's parents, the King and Queen, find out about this friendship and forbid her from ever seeing Brott again. How will these best friends keep their friendship without going against the rules of the kingdom?

The challenge here is that I don't know if this is an allegory, for adults, or is a picture book? Regardless, I suggest you study the "Jack and the Beanstalk" template and use this to guide you in formatting your story and flesh it out a bit.

If this is a children's picture book, you'll need a simple cover letter with your title, word count and a paragraph about the story. Picture book manuscripts (under 1,000 words) usually are accepted as the submission. Suggest you check SCBWI (Society for Children Book Writers and Illustrators) guidelines for more specific information about picture book submissions.

Depending on your market, revise your first paragraph, and, even though you might not need this type of query, write your second paragraph as "homework" for next week's workshop on Tuesday.

who has completed a manuscript for a hybrid memoir that combines "flash" nonfiction (short prose ranging from 100 to 1500 words), poetry, and original photographs.

She comments, "Since I've chosen a nonconventional structure to tell my story, I submitted the manuscript to independent presses which had expressed interest in unusual book formats. I also submitted a query to ten literary agents. I heard back from three. Two were not interested. The third wanted the first 50 pages. She's had the pages for months and has never responded."

Comment: It's OK to send the agent a quick little email asking for information on the status of your manuscript which you submitted, by invitation, on (give date).

"I'm also in the middle of writing my memoir as a novel."

Comment: Memoirs fall somewhere in between fiction and non-fiction, depending on how you tell your story. Non-fiction requires a book proposal, which is totally different than the submission requirements for fiction.

Debka wrote about her project:

My story is about me and my long-held secret: I have Poland Syndrome, a rare birth defect.

What do I want? To feel worthy, lovable and whole.

Why can't I achieve this? I felt a deep shame about my body.

What is the terrible "or else" that will occur if you don't get what you want/need? If I do not come to terms with my sense of self, I will continue to struggle with asking for what I want, with setting healthy boundaries, and with taking care of my own happiness.

Debka wrote:

I was born with Poland Syndrome, a rare birth defect. When I became an adolescent, my left breast developed normally while my right side remained flat and immature. Like most teenagers, I wanted to feel accepted for exactly who I was. Instead, I felt damaged. At age 16, I underwent my first surgery with mixed results. Though my physical appearance had improved somewhat, I still harbored physical and emotional pain that affected my sense of self and my relationships. As I grew older, I began to wonder if the people and activities I loved would help me find wholeness, or if there was another path I needed to take that would lead me toward integrity, compassion, and release.

Think about your format. You might do better with a hybrid memoir than the standard "this is my story" type of memoir, especially if it incorporates graphics and pieces of flash fiction. The query for this would need to reflect that style. The fact that you submitted 10 queries and heard back from three is nothing short of a miracle, even if two were "no thanks."

Most writers, when they don't understand how to write a query, never receive anything, not even the standard "no thanks" letter. Your experience proves you have something interesting and different to share with the world. The issue probably is not with your query, but with context, meaning how you've structured your manuscript.

(BTW: I offer Story Doc context evaluations to help writers evaluate their fiction or non-fiction manuscripts. This includes an overview of structure, presentation, plot, dialogue, characterization and use of writing mechanics.)

SUGGESTION:
Debka, submit the query letter that resulted in three agent responses in time for the next workshop on Friday, Oct 14 at 1 PM. We can discuss it then.

NOTE: For everyone. When you receive response from three out of ten queries, you're doing something right. Many writers submit 40, 50, or 80 queries before they locate the right agent to guide them through the publishing maze. Even a "no thank you" is a response!

<mark>NEXT WEEK~</mark>

The next Submission Central workshop meets on Friday, October 14. 1PM Eastern and expands the query to include the second paragraph.

HOMEWORK: Write your query second paragraph.

Use the guidance in my query tutorial, especially the template for "Jack and the Beanstalk" as you revise your query first paragraph and write a first draft of your query second paragraph.

Include your email SUBJECT line AND revised query first paragraph in the same email.

<mark>**DEADLINE: Oct 12, noon. (Wednesday).**</mark>

<mark>**EXAMPLE**</mark> **of next workshop's query first and second paragraphs**

from Jenny

> SUBJECT LINE: Sex, lies, and electricity
>
> Sad, angry, and drunk, Clay's on the run, dodging henchmen who murdered his brother during a botched attempt to steal his revolutionary generator. Clay believes his invention is destined to increase his net worth to something north of mega millions. He heads for Iowa, desperate to hole up somewhere safe, repair his machine, and approach legitimate buyers *before* the killers find him.
>
> He heads for a safe harbor with the spitfire who broke his heart thirty years before. As he tows the wrecked machine toward her home, Clay places a few phone calls and discovers she's dead. Survived

by Joanna, the grown daughter he never knew existed. Now Clay evades his pursuers with a new goal . . . meet his daughter before it's too late. While trying to muster the courage to introduce himself, he follows her cleaning lady/housekeeper Lila, to a bar, planning to pump her for information. Clay's charmed by Lila and never admits why he's there. Within days, his machine is hidden in her barn. Between swigs of whiskey, he falls in love with Lila, who lands him a job as his daughter's handyman. But, seeing Joanna, a mirror image of his ex, delivers a gut punch every day and reminds him what he lost. He vows to do *everything* to earn her trust . . . except tell the truth. To convince Joanna he's more than the bum her mother rejected, Clay slaves to repair his machine so he can sell the patent to the highest bidder. But the clock's ticking. If his pursuers catch up with him first, he may never get the chance.

WHAT WORKS and why?

This second paragraph expands the story and introduces two other key characters. However, it emphasizes how it's Clay who instigates the action, faces the challenge, and in the process of creating the solution, brings in the other characters, Lila and Joanna.

Note: The tease at the end of this paragraph is intended to create a question: "Hmmm, what happens next?"

Remember:

Every segment of your submission is written to engage agent interest and encourage them to keep reading your entire query, synopsis, and finally, your sample pages: the goal all along.

The submission system has been compared to being a gauntlet with challenges (query and synopsis) that lead to the goal of introducing your story to the agent.

You're invited~

Thank you to those of you who have joined this workshop today, but aren't yet members of Submission Central.

The introductory rate for Submission Central is $37 per month. However, I'm offering a **"three-fer"** that ends Monday, October 10th. You pay for two months ($74) and receive the third month free. You'll be good to go until January 1, 2017.

Catching up is easy~

You can review the video(s) on-demand to catchup.

Thanks to all of you for being here today.

Write on!

Molli