



• from Get Published Now •

Agent/Query Submission Central

~this week~

QUERY WORKSHOP #4

Hi everyone,

We have a full workshop today, with query evaluations, plus something new, writing mechanic issues and “red-flag words” (excerpted from [35 Red-Flag Words that can Block your Publication Goals](#),” a mini-tutorial on self-editing and revising words that can sabotage your publishing future.

When your queries are close to being finalized, this becomes the time to focus on identifying and removing as many writing mechanic errors as possible from your submission materials (and manuscript).



Verbs that link “was” and “ing identify the writer as a “rookie.”
For example: The agent was scanning query letters. She was searching for a skillful writer with a saleable manuscript. Revised, it reads, “The agent scanned query letters as she searched for a skillful writer with a saleable manuscript.”

First, we’ll review query letter revisions. I’ve set up the evaluations to give information in a progressive manner. Almost every issue with the queries we’ll read today apply, in one way or another, to your own work.

In line for evaluation are:

Lisa (mystery/romance/political)

Linda (culture challenges)

Carol (early reader)

Janet (Glass Ceiling)

Doree (YA/mental illness)

Vicki (YA self-acceptance)

John (remembered past/discovered powers)

Janet Kato NF (Pic. Book. Historical)

Alan NF (historical memoir)

Quick review of your 3rd third paragraph~

Your query third paragraph is written to reveal *information only*. (Meaning, your title, word count, and background information as it pertains to writing and/or the topic of your story).

It is not written to tell *about* your story.

It's not the place to be "chatty" and friendly with the agent. Stick to business. That's what they want. A quick read about your background and then scroll down the screen to read your synopsis.

This is your spot to reveal your title, the genre (if necessary) and word count along with your writing experience. Period.

Unless . . . you have a specific target market. I don't agree with linking your story to any best seller. If you haven't made your case in your first two query paragraphs, comparing your work to a best seller is an obvious ploy that, unless you've written a great tease ending for your second paragraph, won't work.

This week~

Refining a query is best achieved over a several-week period as you write and revise your synopsis and first pages are written and revised. Therefore, this revision of all your submission documents will be an ongoing process.

About the process~

Learning to craft submission documents as you shift from “telling” to “selling” in this workshop allows everyone to work at their own pace. Don’t be hard on yourself if you’re progressing at a different pace than some of the others in the group. This is not a foot race. It’s a progression. You’re doing something you never have had to do before: “sell” yourself as a talented writer with a saleable manuscript.

You will learn to develop your selling skills. All writers (who work with me) eventually craft submission documents that help them land agents. Unless, of course, they don’t put forth the effort, or participate, and do the homework. This is designed to expand understanding about how to write submission documents.

Instead, some writers (and they come along every once in a while) whine, whine, whine about how challenging this all is and are never happy with the fact that they don’t progress.

Bottom line here is that if you want to be published, follow instructions, and keep up with your homework, you’ll dramatically increase your potential to get there.

This week’s homework evaluations:

We’ll begin with Lisa’s query since her revision issues pertain to almost everyone in terms of writing a query that is tight, powerful, and engaging.

Your query goal—always—is to keep the agent interested and reading.

from Lisa~

Who is your protagonist? Kaye, a victim of a hit-and-run car accident.

What does she want? To remember her past, so she can move on with her life.

(Comment from Molli: Move on with her life or survive to live her life? Big difference.)

What stands in her way? Blocked memory.

What will happen if she doesn't get what she want? She'll be murdered.

Email SUBJECT line: Kay must remember her past to have a future. *(This works, for now.)*

Lisa's revised first paragraph:

Kay Smith awakens from a coma unable to remember anything but a few vague, disturbing memories about the hit-and-run driver who forced her car off the road and into an icy river. Hazy recollections and vivid, terrifying dreams emerge about a notorious serial strangler, leaving Kay panicked about the hidden, psychological trauma holding her memory hostage. Determined to face her dark past and move on with her life, Kay searches online for clues to her identity, only to chase one false hope after another. Information wrangled from a hospital records clerk convinces Kay she is Jane Doe, a comatose car accident victim matching Kay's physical and medical description who disappeared under mysterious circumstances. When the records clerk is strangled hours after alerting Kay to a stalker on her trail, she fears her own life is on the line, with time running out to remember her dark past before a killer catches up with her.

Kay turns to a new friend, Nick Costa, to hide her from the deadly stalker hot on her trail. Safely tucked away, she's devastated to learn the shocking truth Nick's been hiding. He's a Secret Service Agent protecting her, Angela Lockhart, the missing First Lady, from a lethal White House conspiracy that left her sister, Amy, and a young intern dead. The news leaves Angela haunted by nightmares, confused by emerging memories, and plagued by shady suspicions about her own role in the murders. Nick insists Angela lay low until her memory returns, but when the body count rises in her wake, she refuses to stay in the shadows. Rocked with guilt and unwilling to put any more lives in jeopardy to save her own, Kay sets out alone to uncover the secrets of her shadowy past and confront those she suspects of plotting and executing murder. It's a plan Kay knows is fraught with danger, with a high probability of meeting the same fate as her sister--dead at the hands of a vicious strangler.

Lost & Found is complete at 88,000 words. I've published popular articles and research papers throughout my career as an organizational psychologist. In 2013, I retired to study fiction writing and work on my first novel. I'm an active member of Sisters in Crime (President, Atlanta Chapter, 2016-2017; published in *In SinC*, March 2016), Mystery Writers of America (Southeastern Chapter, Membership Survey Specialist, 2015), and the Atlanta Writers Club. I've honed my writing skills through Continuing Education classes, webinars, workshops, conferences (Bouchercon, 2015; Killer Nashville, 2013-16, panelist, 2016), beta reader reviews, and professional critiques.

Then Lisa followed her third paragraph with the following:

A one-page synopsis and a copy of *Lost & Found* follows this letter. I enjoyed bringing Angela and Amy's twisting tale to life on the written page. I'm confident you'll find *Lost & Found* a well-written page-turner worthy of your valuable time. Thank you for consideration in representing me and my manuscript. Sincerely, Lisa Malice, Ph.D.

xxx-xxx-xxxx (home/office) xxx-xxx-xxxx (cell)

lisa@malicefamily.com

This is for everybody:

You do not need to tell more about the story with a fourth paragraph. Every second you tie the agent down reading extraneous information that has no sales value, is a lost second you are pulling them away from your synopsis and then your manuscript.

If you feel you need to explain about your story, this could mean that you haven't sufficiently revealed the core and told the story as seen through the thoughts, words, and actions of your protagonist.

Plus you never need to state what is enclosed in your submission. Everyone knows the industry standard. Stating the obvious can label any writer as a "rookie."

MY COMMENTS: Lisa's former first paragraph is written more tightly and fulfills the job of the query, which is to present the story core.

I suggest she use this, with some revision.

Yellow highlights words/phrases to delete.

Kay Smith, a victim of a suspicious car accident, awakens with vague memories, **from her life**. hazy recollections interrupted by nightmares **terrifying dreams** about a **notorious** serial strangler leave her panicked about what her past may hold. While tracking down leads to **reclaim** her identity and life, Kay discovers she's being stalked. **by a murderer**. **With her life on the line**, Time's **is** running out for Kay. Can she **, who must** remember her shadowy past before it catches up with her?

Lisa's current second paragraph:

Yellow highlights extraneous words/phrases to delete.

Kay turns to a new friend, Nick Costa, to hide her from the **deadly** stalker hot on her trail. **Safely tucked away**, she's devastated to learn the shocking truth about her past. **Nick's been hiding**. **He's** A Secret Service agent, **Nick's been** assigned to protect **protecting** her. She's Angela Lockhart, the missing First Lady, the survivor of a **from a lethal** White House conspiracy that left her sister, Amy, and a young intern, **dead**. This revelation **news** forces memories to emerge, along with **leaves Angela haunted by nightmares**, **confused by emerging memories**, and **plagued by shady** suspicions about her **own** role in the murders. Nick insists Angela lay low until her full memory returns, but as **when** the body count rises, **in her wake**, she refuses to hide **stay** in the shadows. Rocked with guilt (*about what?*) and unwilling to put any more lives in jeopardy to save her own, (*How does she know this is the situation?*) Kay sets out alone. She's determined to uncover the secrets of her shadowy past by confronting those she suspects as being the perpetrators who plot and murder. (*How does she ditch Nick?*) **execute she suspects of plotting and executing murder**. It's a plan (*Or is it a bold move?*) Kay/Angela knows is fraught with danger, with a high probability of meeting the same fate as her sister--**dead** at the hands of a vicious strangler.

(WRITING MECHANIC HINT: The em dash is—written like this—it's not two dashes--. Suggest you don't use dashes or the em dash they often doesn't translate well from system to system).

Comments:

This ending feels unclear. She's walking into a death sentence. That's certainly a terrible "or else," but as written, it doesn't hold the tension it needs. How will confrontation open up her memories and stop the killing? What is her desired objective of confrontation with the possible bad guys?

Lisa's third paragraph:

Yellow highlights words/phrases to delete.

"Lost and Found" is a 89,000 word mystery/psychological thriller. My popular articles (about what?) and research papers have been published I've published popular articles and research papers for xx years, throughout my career as an organizational psychologist. In 2013, I retired to study fiction writing and work on my first novel. I'm the President an active member of Sisters in Crime, Atlantic Chapter, and belong to the (President, Atlanta Chapter, 2016-2017; published in In SinC , March 2016), Mystery Writers of America (Southeastern Chapter, Membership Survey Specialist, 2015), and the Atlanta Writers Club. I've honed my writing skills through Continuing Education classes, webinars, workshops, and conferences. (Bouchercon, 2015; Killer Nashville, 2013-16, panelist, 2016), beta reader reviews, and professional critiques.

Without extraneous information above, Lisa's third paragraph reads quickly:

"Lost and Found," a mystery/psychological thriller is complete at 89,000 words. For xx years, I've published *popular* articles (about what?) and research papers throughout my career as an organizational psychologist. I'm the President of Sisters in Crime, Atlantic Chapter, and belong to the Mystery Writers of America, and the Atlanta Writers Club. I've honed my writing skills through Continuing Education classes, webinars, workshops, and conferences.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Lisa Malice, Ph.D.
xxx-xxx-xxxx (home/office)
xxx-xxx-xxxx (cell)
Blog
social media involvement

(Don't waste space giving your email address. It's on the email)

NOTE from last week: if this is a first novel, the length *might* be a problem. As I've said before, first novels tend to run 65 to 70K. At 89K, this might cause an agent to wonder if the writer knows how to self-edit and trim extraneous information out of her manuscript.

Ongoing nag, nag, nag for everybody:

Your third paragraph is the place to reveal title, word count, writing background and involvement in writing groups. It is NOT THE PLACE TO explain "about" your story. If you feel compelled to your story in the third paragraph, you've obviously not shown and sold it in your first two paragraphs. If this is the case, the agent won't read your third paragraph anyway, but will "CLICK" and send your submission to . . . arrgh . . . delete-ville.

From Carol

Who is this story about? Fairy Princess Shaylee

What does she want? Peace and friendship between fairies and pixies so she can maintain her friendship with pixie Brott who gives her some pixie dust, gratis, when she is told by her father, the king, that she needs to earn it.

What stands in their way? Her father, the king.

What is the terrible or else that might occur if she doesn't get what she wants? She will lose, forever, a dear friend along with her chances of

earning pixie dust. This has become muddled. Does she want free pixie dust or peace or to please her father? Same issues we discussed last week.

Carol wrote:

Fairies and pixies have been enemies since time began. Secret friends, Fairy Princess Shaylee and pixie Brott, want to change that with a new idea they call Fairies and Pixies – Friends Forever. When the king finds out about this friendship, he forbids Shaylee from ever seeing Brott again. Will they figure out a way around this or lose their friendship forever?

(Question: Does he forbid the friendship or the plan for peace?)

One day when Shaylee is out riding her pony, she ponders what her father told her. To earn her pixie dust, she must show that she has a pure heart, and that her goal is to serve the highest good in the kingdom. He said until then she would have to be patient, which she wasn't. As she heads for home, she hears Brott calling out for help. She knows she must obey her father and not have any contact with him, so she continues on her way home. But Brott's cries get more intense. Will she listen to her heart and go to Brott, or disobey her father's command and will the two kingdoms continue to be enemies to the end, ending forever their chances of being best friends?

“Fairy Princess Shaylee” is a chapter book of 2600 words. I have sold more than two dozen stories and articles to a variety of magazines including *Highlights for Children*, *Girl's Life*, *the Writer Magazine* and am the author of seven children's books. I was a writing mentor for, and have given presentations and speeches for the Minnesota chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and taught classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. *(Comment: Great job! Your third paragraph works. Tight. Clean. Quick to read and shows your writing history.)*

Comments:

In your story core, you mentioned that Shaylee wanted free access to fairy dust. Is this why she's friends with Brott? He's her supplier?

You have written that:

Shaylee rides her pony. She hears Brott's calls for help. (*Why does he need help?*) She knows she must obey her father and not have any contact with him, so continues on her way home. But Brott's cries get more intense. Will she listen to her heart and

- (1) go to Brott
- (2) disobey her father's command
- (3) will the two kingdoms continue to be enemies to the end
- (4) will she lose her best friends?

NOTE: You have four options. Which ONE refers to Shaylee's most pressing want or need? Is it her friendship with Brott, based on the fact that he gives her free fairy dust that she doesn't have to earn? BTW: This shifts the focus of your story, and makes her appear to be shallow or lazy. If she wants the free fairy dust, wouldn't she save her supplier? Or does she make a choice? Save his bag of fairy dust or save Brott? Make this Shaylee's quest, her need, her choice, her "or else."

At this point, you have not defined a specific need, and the terrible "or else" that could occur if she doesn't get what she wants. So, what does she want? Without knowing this, the agent won't read your third paragraph or your manuscript. They don't have time to hunt around or try to figure it out. You have to be very, very clear about what this is.

So, what does Shaylee want?

Carol, it's impossible to write a compelling query if you aren't clear about your story core. No kidding. Impossible.

From Doree~

Who is your protagonist: Levi.

What does he want and why?

What is the terrible or else if he doesn't get what he wants? Addiction? Mental illness? Suicide?

SUBJECT line: Cancer Sucks when it tackles your mother.

At age 16, Levi Yokum's mom has cancer and he feels like he's been hit by a dime size 200 pound line backer.

Coriander High School's junior running back Levi Yokum starts his days with a mixing bowl of cereal and a bear hug for his mom. Until his youth smashes into harsh maturity as a big hairy linebacker, named cancer plows into his life. Now, for the first time, he's afraid this opponent might win.

Completed at 54,500 words, "Turn" will appeal to readers of "Fault in our Stars" and "Thirteen." My background includes three years as a reporter for the Salt Lake Valley Journal. For seven years, I've been an active member (and past vice president and president) of the Utah RWA (Romance Writers of America) and participate in the Utah League of Writers and Absolutely Writers as well as two critique groups.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Doree Anderson

Contact info.

Social media

Comment:

Hmmm. This isn't quite a query, and here's why: the story core is unclear. Last week several suggestions were made as to what Levi wants: status quo forever, his best friend (mom) to always be there for him? Or what?

(Nice job, by the way, with your revision of your *third* paragraph.)

Now, tackle the story core. Nail it down so you can write a query that works.

Issue of maturity. Facing the need to grow up. Suicide or life.

He wants mom to fight and not give up. He doesn't want to grow up and face life without mom. Fear of being alone/unloved. Mom

has handled everything. He wants everything to stay the same. He wants her to fight so he doesn't end up alone.

What is the terrible or else? He gives up as well, with drugs etc.

From Linda~

SUBJECT LINE: A Journey of 10,000 miles begins with one act of rebellion. *(Great subject line!)*

Who wants what and why? Wu Meichen wants **freedom to participate in family decisions** that will affect her marriage.

What stands in the way? **Chinese cultural traditions** give the oldest male in the family the power to make decisions in the best interest of the family regardless of what individual family members want.

What will happen if Meichen doesn't get what she wants? The head of the family will send her husband to America, and they may **be separated** for years until he's allowed to return.

Revised query:

Newlywed Wu Meichen wants a close relationship with her husband, and the freedom to plan their future together. But Chinese tradition demands all family members obey the orders of the oldest male who's responsible for the family's . . . (missing text)

Months pass, then years. Meichen has no comfort except the few letters her husband sends, his photograph, and memories of their short time together. No one tells her when she might see him again. In the fifth year Meichen's sorrow turns into anger and then rebellion. If her husband can't come home, she'll find her way to him. The family patriarch, furious with Meichen, tries to send her back to China when she reaches San Francisco, but she disguises herself as a boy and crosses America by train. Meichen rejoices when she sees her husband again, but she soon learns there is more trouble ahead. Her husband has been ordered to divorce her or his family will disown him. Without love, Meichen sees no point in living. **But will her husband still love her when he remembers her rash actions caused the loss**

of his family? Can Meichen find a way to make peace with her in-laws and live with her husband? (*Great tease!*)

Complete at 90,000 words, “Unbound Woman” won first place in an ethnic novel contest sponsored by Romantic Times Magazine. I belong to the Augusta Writers and am an active member of RWA (Romance Writers of America) and Georgia Romance Writers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Comments:

This query has become more clear, but at 250 words, is almost too slight to tell your powerful story.

Suggest you combine elements of last week’s first paragraph with what you have written for today.

Newlywed Wu Meichen hates the Chinese traditions that dictate her actions and thoughts. Although their marriage was arranged, Meichen falls deeply in love with her husband, Chao Chung. She wants him to accept her as a partner and give her a voice in his plans for their future. When the Chao family patriarch sends him to work in America, Meichen fears they’ll be separated for years, perhaps for life.

Your second paragraph also could include some elements from your last query, especially how she attended the missionary school, and experienced that freedom. This demonstrates her love of learning. The exposure to missionaries from America give her a taste of western culture. It also gives the reader a foundation for how Meichen acts and reacts and expands mentally and emotionally as she learns a second language and more about the world outside of China.

Third paragraph is tight and OK as written. Novel length may become an issue if this is your first one.

From Vicki~

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

(Great subject line!)

Who wants what and why: Sadie, 15, lives with cerebral palsy. She wants to belong and be a normal teenager.

What stands in her way: Cruel scrutiny from her peers about her disability has left her with no self-esteem.

What is the terrible or else: If she doesn't find the strength to believe in her own self-worth, she will crumble in her dark place and give up on living.

Dear....

Born with cerebral palsy, Sadie's tangled walk attracts attention everywhere. She hides the real Sadie, for people only see a **broken cripple slithering by. WOW This is a powerful and highly visual!** Except for her one friend who is moving to London, and she's convinced she'll never see him again. Sadie is sent to her grandmother's isolated Catskill Mountain home for the summer. In her state of despair she decides it is a perfect refuge to end her life. But in the forest, as at school, Sadie senses someone is watching her once again.

When Sadie unexpectedly comes face-to-face with a malevolent fairy, Devilia, intrigue puts her suicide plans on hold. As their odd companionship changes, unexpected emotions surface in Sadie. But she pays a huge price for her encounter with Devilia. Not only is she now responsible for the fairy, but she never knows what to expect from Devilia's antics, and Sadie is filled with constant anxiety. While on a field trip, Devilia is the culprit of a magical incident that makes Sadie even more of a freak. Sadie becomes an international sensation, her disability on display for the world to see. Mortified by Devilia, Sadie finds herself trapped, Devilia destroying what little dignity she has left. Sadie wants to rid herself of Devilia for good, until she learns that the one person she truly cares about is in danger. And the only being that can go to his rescue is Devilia. In a **mad race against time (trite cliché)**, Sadie learns the true meaning of love and loss. Can Sadie accept who she **is meant to be**, or will scrutiny and lack of self-esteem force her to live in a dark place forever? *(Question: Who is she meant to be? Self-assured? At peace with being different?)*

Will Sadie accept herself as she is, and become the best she is . . . as she is.

My YA novel Crooked is _____ words. As a professional actress in New York City, I've created characters and stories at an early age, which then evolved into a love of writing. I live in Manhattan with my husband and am the mother of a "sometimes" crooked young adult. I also live with a wirehair dachshund, Clancy, my muse.

I look forward to sharing my novel with you.

Comments:

Nice work Vicki. You're moving closer to writing a query that works for you. It's time to become more aware of writing mechanics and red-flag words:

First paragraph works. Leave it alone for now.

Revise with powerful verbs in mind. Particularly revise "ing" verbs out of your work. These verbs wave red flags and announce "rookie."

Vicki wrote:

Dear....

Born with cerebral palsy, Sadie's tangled walk attracts attention and everywhere. She hides the real Sadie. Others for people only see her as a broken cripple slithering by. Except for her one true friend who is moving to London, and she's convinced she'll never see him again. Sadie's is sent to her grandmother's isolated Catskill Mountain home for the summer. In her state of despair she decides it's is a perfect refuge in which to end her life. But in the forest, as at school, Sadie senses someone is watching her once again.

Comment: Suggest you include *some of* the following in the next draft of your second paragraph. Remember, as you reveal more about your story, link it to Sadie and her hopes, feelings, beliefs, and need to be accepted.

Your second paragraph is not the place to reveal your entire story, but enough of the core so that it proves you are on track with your appealing protagonist who is in the process of self-acceptance.

Core need is for self-acceptance.

Stick with your story core, Sadie wants to be accepted, by herself, and others.

- Sadie attempts suicide, then awakens with a lap full of crystal shards.
- She meets Devilia, a fairy.
- Sadie discovers Devilia has malevolent tendencies. Malevolent about what or to whom?
- Intrigued with this being, Sadie puts her suicide plans on hold for the moment. Why?
- She and Devilia spend time together. Why? How does this change Sadie? From what to what?
- You say Sadie pays a huge price for her encounter with Devilia. What is the price? What is the payoff for Sadie? Why does Sadie do this?
- You say Sadie becomes responsible, or feels responsible for Devilia. Why? What causes this?
- Apparently they go places and do things together. What?
- Does Devilia go to school with Sadie?
- What happens to bring Sadie to international attention via a YouTube video that goes viral.
- Sadie believes her dignity has been destroyed. Why? What happened?
- She decides to drive Devilia away.
- But then, she discovers her friend, in London, is in a desperate situation and only Devilia has the power to save his life. What is the challenge and why is Devilia the answer?
- She must choose: accept Devilia in her life and help her friend, or kick the fairy out and allow her friend to die? Finn is her friend.
- Why did this become a race against time?

- Show does Sadie faces the true meaning of love and loss. Is it important to say this, or can you show it?
- How does becoming what she is mean to be tie in with this problem in re her friend in London? If she longs to be accepted, to belong, how does this play out in the terrible “or else” at the end of your second paragraph.
- Tie your second tease in with the core of Sadie’s story, about her needs and wants.

Vicki’s third paragraph:

My YA novel “Crooked” is complete at xxxxx words. As a professional actress in New York City, I’ve created characters and stories at an early age, which then evolved into a love of writing. (**Comment:** *Your life history is of no interest to the agent. What matters is that you have been involved with writing groups for 10 years. Add involvement with SCBWI*). I live in Manhattan with my husband, our "sometimes" crooked young adult, and my muse, Clancy, a wirehair dachshund.

Note: when you begin your query with Dear (agent’s name), this brands you as being out of touch with the need for an agent-and-digital submission. When you end with “I look forward to sharing . . .” this smacks of friendly amateur. This is business, not a coffee chat. Close the query portion of your submission with:

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Do not write “sincerely”

from Janet Franks Little

Note: Always include the following information in every homework submission.

Email SUBJECT line:

Who is the protagonist (main character)?

What does this person want and why?

What stands in their way?

What happens if they don't get what they want?

Dear <Agent Name> *(Don't use any type of greeting, EVER. start right out with your query.)*

A person's greatest strength and weakness is their family. Grace Stone is the adult widowed daughter of a rich man's mistress. She has worked hard to distance herself from her mother's lifestyle. When she falls for a man wary of commitment, she must confront her own insecurities and a malicious family member.

Grace doesn't want another man in her life but her four-year-old daughter, Lily, has different ideas. In an unusual circumstance, she meets Beau Charvet who carries the scars of a nasty divorce. Lily sees him as perfect daddy material. When Grace learns the identity of her own unknown father, she finally has a biological connection to a family. The problem is that she's sleeping with one member and being threatened by another. To protect herself and her child, she makes two demands of Beau—he must declare his love and set boundaries with his sister. Her ultimatum estranges her from him and her newfound family. It takes a knife attack at work and the machinations of a preschooler to secure promises for a loving future together.

GLASS PROMISES is a 72,000 word completed romance manuscript. It recently won third place in the Royal Palm Literary Award for unpublished romance. I am a member of the Florida Writers Association and Romance Writers of America.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Comments:

The challenge with this query draft is that it doesn't meet the needs of the query letter. Your story core is unclear. Time-pressured agents will not read and re-read any query to try to figure this out.

Even though you have an agent waiting (**and congratulations!!!!** on your Golden Palm Award and a successful pitch given during the FWA conference), you still need to clarify the core of your story. This is what attracted the agent to your manuscript.

I've highlighted information of information that needs to be in your query.

Dear <Agent Name> (*NO GREETING!*)

A person's greatest strength and weakness is their family. Grace Stone is the adult widowed daughter of a rich man's mistress. She has worked hard to distance herself from her mother's lifestyle. When she falls for a man wary of commitment, she must confront her own insecurities and a malicious family member.

Grace doesn't want another man in her life, but her four-year-old daughter, Lily, has different ideas. In an unusual circumstance, she meets Beau Charvet who carries the scars of a nasty divorce. Lily sees him as perfect daddy material. When Grace learns the identity of her own unknown father, she finally has a biological connection to a family. The problem is that she's sleeping with one member and being threatened by another. To protect herself and her child, she makes two demands of Beau—he must declare his love and set boundaries with his sister. Her ultimatum estranges her from him and her newfound family. It takes a knife attack at work and the machinations of a preschooler to secure promises for a loving future together.

GLASS PROMISES is a 72,000 word completed romance manuscript. It recently won third place in the Royal Palm Literary Award for unpublished romance. I am a member of the Florida Writers Association and Romance Writers of America.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Comment:

Instead of telling so much of the story (which raises questions and interferes with the necessary understanding of your story core), focus on Grace. Focus on how she feels when she meets Beau. How does his influence give her hope that she can shed her dubious parentage and form a normal family, filled with love and the promise of a future together and a daddy for Lily? How does she feel when Lily becomes so attached to Beau? Why has she insisted on an iron-clad agreement with Beau? To insure a “happily ever after?”

When you introduce the “who is sleeping with whom,” this raises questions about the focus on your story. This portion could be a subplot that she resolves as she moves along the path toward creation of a relationship with Beau. If you focus on Grace, you can mention the discovery of twisted family relationships, and how this forces Grace to rethink any involvement with Beau or any man.

Suggest you drop the knife attack (which sounds a bit like the “bear came out of the woods and ate the bad guys”) and focus instead of the struggles in her heart to accept love from Beau (crappy sister and all), and bring Lily the daddy’s she’s been longing for.

This is a poignant story, full of potential with a child more willing to trust than her mom. And, you need to tighten it up and bring the reader into Grace’s inner world as demonstrated via her thoughts, fears, actions and reactions. And yes, the revelations about the identity of daddy dearest is powerful. Is it more of an influence for her than the desire to create a family? At present, as written, this feels like a major block to overcome. And yet, I feel the major block for Grace is herself, not an outside force.

In re the agent in waiting: think back to your pitch and remember what engaged the agent’s interest the most, or generated immediate questions or comments. This may be a guide for you in terms of writing a query you can send off ASAP to the agent.

From John~

SUBJECT line: ??? Query, if they ask for it. Put it there.

Who wants what and why?

What stands in their way?

What is the terrible “or else” that could occur if they don’t get what they want?

TITLE: Can two wrongs make a right?

Dear Agent,

Jack Crane, a feared gambling debt collector, is shot in the head when he interrupts a large drug transaction. Later, he wakes up face down on a park bench in the rain with no recollection of his past. After being hospitalized in the historic town of Littlefield New Hampshire, he fears the truth about what he may have done before being shot. He would like nothing better than to remember everything, but for the moment, he asks, “Am I a victim or a criminal?”

To add to his fears, he’s carrying \$50,000 in cash and hasn’t a clue where it came from. While living each day in the dark, trying to remember, he meets a beautiful young woman who claims to be his lover. As his memories return, Jack finds he’s not the person he’d like to be and his lady friend has problems of her own. She has a split personality and a missing husband. Could Jack possibly be her next victim? Eventually, Jack discovers he’s not like other human beings. He can perform unimaginable feats. His purpose in life is very different from those around him, and he’s told that more will be revealed as his memory returns. How can any of this make sense? Is he a killer or a hero?

My novel, “CAN TWO WRONGS BE MADE RIGHT?” is complete at 55,000 words. A sequel is finished, along with three other books. I’ve spent most of my technical career in the newspaper and publishing industry. I’m a member of a writers’ group, and in the process of starting a group for first-time writers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely, John Levasseur

Comments:

John, it's difficult to evaluate any query without knowing the core of your story. This needs to be at the top of every homework submission to help you stay focused and be totally clear about your story.

As written, you reveal a bit about Jack's inner world, but then tell the story as "this happens" and then "that happens" which is not going hook and hold an agent's attention. Your first paragraph does end with an interesting tease: is Jack victim or criminal?

Your second paragraph needs to stick with Jack, how he struggles to discover who he is, carefully, since if he's criminal he could end up in jail. Reveal Jack's inner world, his confusion, and what he decides to do to find out who/what he truly is. If, in the process, he discovers some unusual information about himself that makes him different from other people. If you bring this up, what is it and how does this discovery aid (or not) his quest to know who/what he is.

Remember, your goal is to engage the agent to read your entire query and then wonder, "Hmmm, so what happens?"

Suggest you don't mention a sequel. Agents aren't interested in a second book until they become engaged in your first. Focus on that.

TWO NON-FICTION PROJECTS:

from Janet Kato~ (called JC)

TITLE OR SUBJECT LINE? July 4, 1879. American Independence Day in Japan.

Story Core: Ulysses Grant and Emperor Meiji were once young boys who loved horses. The culturally diverse paths of two great men come together

in history on July 4, 1879 to forge a friendship (*between two countries*) that still exists today.

What do they want: To travel beyond their own backyards.

What stands in their way: Civil war within their countries.

What's the or else: A divided country cannot grow without changing the way things have always been done.

Dear Agent,

Hiram and Sachi are two boys born worlds apart in the nineteenth century, but mirror one another's greatest challenges in life as men; to rebuild their nations after civil war. One boy becomes Ulysses Grant. The other becomes Mutsuhito, the young Emperor of Japan.

Ulysses travels as far as his horses will take him in Ohio. Mutsuhito is never allowed to ride a horse, or even be seen outside his father's palace in Kyoto. Ulysses is stubborn. Mutsuhito pesters his tutors with questions. The seemingly annoying qualities of these two boys turn into attributes as they grow into men. And on the occasion of a world tour taken by Ulysses in 1879, the two bridge continents and rattle the cage of tradition with one important, defiant act; a handshake.

When Sachi Met Hiram is a Non-fiction Picture Book of 1230 words. Melding cultures has been my interest since becoming a long time member of a Japanese-American family. I've published articles in "New Times Magazine", have served five years as co-editor of the Florida State Poets Association's annual Anthology, and received **the SCBWI 2015 Karen Cushman award for a middle grade novel. WOW!** *This is a great credit.*

Source quotes and Bibliography are available upon request. I look forward to the opportunity of submitting for your review, "When Sachi Met Hiram."

Comments:

Non-fiction does not require the same type of query as fiction. However, Janet's nicely presented her story, actually the *same* story, as experienced by two different men, continents apart, with the shared goals of uniting their countries.

(Question: Is this historically correct? If so, this makes your story a “lesson” type of picture book which is much more difficult for an agent to sell than if you told your fictionalized story about events that actually transpired.)

A picture book requires a cover letter (not a query letter) that introduces the story, gives the title and word count, and then leads the agent on to read the manuscript which is included in the same email.

Check the “Purple Crayon” website and the SCBWI for specific information on picture book cover letters.

Basically, you want to write three or four strong sentences that tell the story and introduce your main character (s), Ulysses and Mutsuhito who reveal personality traits of stubbornness which prove to be power attributes that enable them to not give up, but to lead their countries from civil war to peace and unity.

Picture book submissions usually include the text of the story which used to be under **1000**. Check with the SCBWI in re acceptable lengths.

Agents and school finances~

Non-fiction books are challenging to market in the schools where book purchases often are regulated by school boards etc. However, if you label this as historical fiction, this makes it easier for you to interest a publisher and/or land an agent. Plus, you have a laudable award in your “skills” column.

BTW: For everybody: Do not use “Dear so and so” as the first line of your query. It’s wasted space and dates you as having one foot in the Jurassic Age. Instead, jump right into your story with the very first line. Remember, your submission may be read on a smart phone screen. (Very, very small).

End with “Thank you for your time and consideration.”
Your name

Address
Social media connections
Writing associations

Additional thoughts/assignment for JC. Since you have a NF contact to submit your story to, consider crafting one version in the NF fiction mode, and then, to possibly appeal to the larger market, craft a second version that is historical fiction.

From Alan~

Subject/PITCHLINE: Forgotten African-American true-life hero escaped slavery, ruled thousands, entertained millions, died early and inspired books

Richard “King Dick” or “Big Dick” Cephus was one of the most famous African-Americans of his day (1791? – 1831). He grew up among slaves, illiterate, derided and feared by a world that increasingly controlled and devalued black people. Yet he ruled a British war-prison during the War of 1812, with more than 300 pounds of solid muscle. He measured 6’3”, 6’5”, or “seven feet” tall (depending on the source). We can only guess his feelings and his life-goals, although we know he was graceful enough to teach dancing and fencing. He was a pioneer boxer. After the War he made himself the constable and last King of Boston’s black people. His sense of humor was legendary. He had two wives, or a dozen, and no known offspring. His skeleton, now lost, was displayed in public for at least fifty years. This first-ever biography of a lost true-life American legend explores how he became the central character in at least five novels, two plays, a dozen scholarly works and a Technicolor Hollywood movie. Unravelling his mystery tells us as much about who we were and who we’ve become, as it does about him.

King Dick’s life is a kind history-detective story. It’s the jaw-dropping tale—or rather tales—of a working man who lived his everyday life in incredible ways. He reigned over thousands in Britain and Boston, yet he died of “a rapid consumption from a severe cold induced by exposure” at age 41 or 42.

In fiction he commanded from Haiti to the Shores of Tripoli. He became a Revolutionary general, an expert on Haitian “voodoo”, and a wandering Muslim “marabout” or mad monk. Among his chroniclers—all White and unsympathetic—were Nathaniel Hawthorne, a pioneer vaccinator, dozens of journalists from Maine to the southwestern frontier, and a Pulitzer Prize-winning racist historical novelist. Yet his true story could not have been written before the Internet-age. His life is so sparsely documented that he still demands speculation by those who encounter him. Dick’s many and powerful fictive “after-lives” imply a kind of spiritual (not religious) immortality that will make film and mini-series producers salivate.

The Last Black King of Boston: The Extra-ordinary Life and Stranger Afterlives of King Dick! is about 95,000 extensively-researched words. It’s based on my 2013 (second) History Master’s thesis which has attracted an exceptional 1800 downloads from USF’s Scholar Commons web-archive. The project represents a culmination of my twenty-years-plus of writing, producing and directing award-winning nationally-broadcast public radio documentaries about race in America. The Last Black King is my first book-length project; the second could be a multi-media/ multi-platform adaptation of my Between Civil War and Civil Rights documentary series. I will unveil a massively-revamped website devoted to that series, and forum about America’s continuing racial predicament, in the next month or so. *(Suggest you do not reveal the highlighted portion in your query.)*

Thank you for your time and attention,
Alan Lipke

www.listeningbetweenthelines.org (undergoing reconstruction)

www.racewithhistory.org (outdated)

813 237-5585 (landline)

813 480-2385(c)

<https://www.facebook.com/alan.lipke>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/alan-lipke>

Comments:

This is an extensive book project. Your efforts are obvious.

Question: What is your history of submission of the book?

Have you written a full book proposal?

As written, this is scholarly, which may not make it viable as a commercial non-fiction project, although a university press may be interested.

NOTE: 1800 downloads doesn't translate to book sales, only to a level of interest on a college level.

What is your premise or reason for writing this story?

As a political statement?

Is there one specific point you want to make?

How do you tell his story if there are few facts about him? Through the people he was associated with? Or ??

Your query first paragraph needs to engage agent interest so they will move on to your second paragraph which is more about the market and how you can help promote your book. This also includes the most information about your background and why you are qualified to write this book. NF requires expertise in the topic.

What do you hope to add to the five novels, two plays, a dozen scholarly works and a Technicolor Hollywood movie that have touched or featured King Dick's life?

Although you obviously have a great deal of knowledge about what he did, and possibly who was involved with him, what you have written above overwhelms with information and misses the point of your proposed book which is to entertain, or inform, or teach about civil rights, or make a cultural point?

Once you decide that, revise your query to present that case.

Remember, the purpose of a NF book query is to engage agent interest so they'll be motivated to read your book proposal where you'll describe King Dick's activities/exploits/achievements in greater detail. The query is not the place to list these. Make the agent want to know more about his history and character and how you plan to reveal his life without have much concrete information about him.

Good to know that you have Michael Larsen's book on the NF book proposal. The greatest value in his book is how to structure and write the book proposal.

The next Submission Central workshop meets Friday, November 4, 1PM Eastern.

HOMEWORK DUE WEDNESDAY, Nov 2nd, noon, includes:

Your next query draft which includes:

YOUR email SUBJECT line~

YOUR STORY CORE:

- Who wants what? Why do they want it?
- What stands in their way?
- What is the terrible "or else" that may occur if they don't get what they want?

And, if you're clear about your story core, and have a query letter that flows appropriately, expand some of that material to write your first draft of the synopsis. Place this in the same document with the subject line, story core, and query.

New next week~

OPEN FORUM/Trouble Shooting Saturday, November 5th at 11th AM Eastern.

We'll discuss anything you want. However, homework assignments will not be assigned. This is the time and place to ask questions about anything involving the submission process.

I'll be inviting writers from my larger "gang" or writers. Feel free to invite a writer friend (or two) to drop in and ask questions about agents, agencies, industry changes, agent research "best practices," and face-to-face pitching which we can practice on camera, on the spot. It's been my experience that, regardless of where anyone is on the submission path, they always look ahead and want to know more about the path and possibilities.

I'll share contact information about a new agent and explain why "new" agents (associated with established agencies) are great contacts for writers who are ready to be published.

They're looking for you: you're looking for them. What could be better?

Workshop link will be posted on getpublishednow.biz, on our private Facebook page, in the "on-demand," and in my weekly newsletter.

Catching up~

Regardless of when you join Submission Central, if we're working on the synopsis, but you haven't written a query, no problem. Begin with the query. Use my query template and jump right in. Move through the query, week by week, until you've mastered it. And, if the workshops are focusing on synopsis, first pages, or submission protocol, etc., watch these as well as while you work on the query. Really truly, this document must be written first because it forms the basis for the synopsis and structure of your manuscript first pages.

I'll help you, as will members of the group who have progressed beyond where you may be at the moment.

Pitch practice~

Keep in mind, when you participate in a pitch fest, or a one-on-one pitch, or engage an agent at the buffet or bar, they want to meet you. Agents attend writers' conferences because they are on the prowl for potential clients. They want manuscripts that are publication worthy and can be presented to publishers or acquisition editors.

Agents want to meet you. Their spoken or unspoken question always is the same, "So, what'cha got?" Although they may say it more graciously. "So, tell me about your story."

So tell them. Reveal your protagonist, what they want, why can't they have it, and how your story unfolds.

Look straight at the agent while you're talking. Look for signs of interest, or a place where you might pause so they can ask a question or make a comment.

Do not read your pitch. Know it well enough to speak it. Even if you stumble. This proves you're human, and nervous, and gives the agent an opportunity to react and help you with questions.

Thanks to all of you for being here today. See you next week.

Write on! May the words be with you!

Molli