

ADVICE ON SUBMITTING TO A LITERARY AGENT

Sandra Dijkstra Literary Agency / www.dijkstraagency.com

The Dijkstra Literary Agency receives hundreds of queries every week. Here are some tips to show you how to make your query letter / submission stand out.

The query letter should be comprised of no more than 3-4 paragraphs:

1. An introductory paragraph with your elevator pitch, genre and length of your project, and any other vital information that we should know right away, such as a referral from someone we know, an endorsement from a well-known writer or expert, a significant award you've won, etc.
2. A brief but persuasive description of the story (or non-fiction project concept). Boil your synopsis down to one paragraph.
3. The reason and rationale for the book. Why you wrote it (i.e., your connection to the project and your qualifications to write on this subject) and why you believe contemporary readers will want to read it. It helps to have a "hook" that makes your book seem more interesting.
4. Your credentials as a writer. To sell non-fiction, you'll generally need to have a platform. Are you an acknowledged expert? Why are you qualified to write this book? For fiction writers: what else have you written or published and where? And how does your personal story connect to your novel?

Other ways to stand out:

- We appreciate when you demonstrate, in your letter, an awareness of the current market and your book's place in it.
- Making a personal connection with the agent to whom you're submitting. Show you've done some research and that there's a reason why you're submitting to her/him.

Format essentials:

- Prepare an articulate, professional, and concise query letter. In the age of email, *many* submissions have become far too casual.
- Proofread—a letter full of obvious errors is at risk of not being taken seriously.
- Even though it's email and there is no real page count, keep the letter to around one-page. Lengthy query letters may lose your reader's attention.
- ALWAYS check submission requirements for each agency and follow those guidelines. It makes a difference!

Agencies typically ask for some sample pages with a query (but only send IF they request this in their website's submission policies!):

- For fiction, sample pages. It is advisable to always send the *opening* pages, not pages from the middle of the book.
- For non-fiction, you will submit a proposal, which includes a 1-3 page overview of your concept, a chapter outline (with a few sentences describing each chapter), a strong author bio, a profile of the competition (noting books in the market comparable to yours, and what you does that the others don't), delivery date and length, and a polished sample of the manuscript, generally 1-2 chapters.