

PROPOSAL WRITING 102

Lesson 9 -- Query Letters

By Susan M. Warren

Hello! I am sorry for the delay on getting this lesson out today. I just returned from the Post Office where I overnighed my latest story, a Russian Suspense/Romance to Steeple Hill. Yeah! Then I had to run out and go for a victory run on my snowmobile (we have to enjoy all this MN snow!!!). Now I am attacking about 700 emails in my inbox, and I will hopefully be able to give you some individual feedback on your excellent homework. Thank you for your patience!!

Anyway, Let's cut to the chase.

Query Letters!

Now that you are tying up your threads for your synopsis, and packing it with a punch, you only have two more aspects of your proposal to put together. Query Letters and Sample Chapters. Tomorrow I'll give you some input on the Sample Chapter portion, but today I want to concentrate on Query Letters.

What makes a good Query Letter?

- 1.. A compelling, succinct first paragraph hook
- 2.. A summary of your book in 2-3 sentences
- 3.. Where it fits into the publishing world
- 4.. Who you are and why you can successfully pull off this book
- 5.. The mechanics of the ms - where you're at in production.

The Hook:

In my opinion, the most important part of the Q letter is the beginning hook. This is where you get the editors attention, the part that will make her stop from tossing all your hard work into the circular file. Consider how many proposals channel through an editors desk in one month and this thought alone should impress you on the importance of the hook.

1. What is a hook?

It's the who, what, and why of the story. It's the juiciest tidbit, the selling aspect that makes YOUR story different from the rest. This is where you take your 3-4 big bang paragraph, boil it down to the MOST important aspect, and highlight it. You want to create questions, interest. And, you should do it in less than 70 words.

For example, in my Query Letter for *Happily Ever After*, I wrote:

Mona Reynolds is running home, to Deephaven, MN, to open her dream bookstore.. Joe Michaels has never stopped running. He is merely slowing down to visit a brother he barely knows. When Mona's dreams begin to crumple, Joe is conveniently there to save her. But when dreams turn to disaster, is Joe the man she hopes he is? Or is he someone

much, much different.

The key here is to NOT give away the details, but to think like a marketing person and find JUST the juiciest tidbits. Think of the blurbs on the back of books. They grab you, and much of the time, based on that 60 word summary, you purchase the book. That is what you're aiming for.

2. Summary of your book:

What is the theme and the take-away message of your book? You must get very creative, descriptive and frugal in this section of your query letter. The key is to say as much as possible about the book, in terms of its content, as possible in 2-4 sentences. Query Letters should be 1 page only. The editor just doesn't have time to read more than that.

Here is what I wrote for *Happily Ever After*:

Through a myriad of disasters including a family of roaches, a house fire, a saboteur and finally the unveiling of Joe's secrets, Joe and Mona discover that when they turn their hopes over to the Lord, He will satisfy their wildest dreams and fulfill the longings of their hearts.

3. Where does it fit in the market?

Is your book a stand alone? The first in a series? Why is it unique. This is the paragraph where you really sell your book. Go ahead, tell the editor why it is great, and tell her where it will fit in their lineup. Definitely do some research and know what the publisher offers. DON'T try and sell a romance to a publisher who doesn't publish romance. However, pump up those traits your book does have.

Here is my marketing paragraph. Note that I am selling the series, as well as book one.

Set in the fictional, picturesque tourist town of Deephaven, northern Minnesota, *Invasion of Privacy* is also the first in a three part collection entitled, "The Deep Haven Series." Each book tells the story of a woman, running from the storms of life and searching for a home, who discovers true love and the inner peace that only a deep relationship with God can bring. The series combines the threads of mystery, suspense and spiritual searching with heartwarming tales of love, and weaves them into satisfying romances set in a town we'd all love to visit. Attached is a short summary of the series and the titles in the collection.

4. Who are you and why can you write this book?

In one or two sentences, highlight your publishing credits. If you don't have any, list the reasons why you are an authority to write this story. Obviously, I could pull off Russian stories with some degree of authenticity because of my missionary experience. And my first book with Tyndale was a "found my true love in Russia" story.

5. The mechanics.

This paragraph simply explains how long the book is, how much you have written,

whether your proposal is out to other publishers as well, and tells them the items you've included in your package. And, of course, thank the editor for his or her time in reading the proposal.

Those are the basics of a good query letter. They say that the query letter hooks your reader on your idea, the synopsis hooks them on your ability to weave a story. And, of course, the sample chapters hook them on your writing ability.

Your homework, (and I PROMISE I'll get to them!!) is to write a query letter. Make it tight, precise, colorful (don't forget those strong verbs and precise nouns) and compelling!

Blessings,

Susan

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