

# How to Query an Agent

[By Holly Lisle](#)

I received a letter recently asking if it would be better to send a humorous letter to an agent when asking for representation than a more serious one. I've included my response below, along with a sample query letter and suggestions that you might find helpful if you've reached this stage.

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There is no secret to getting an agent but persistence, sadly. I **wouldn't** recommend a gimmick or a "funny" letter. Every agent and editor and publisher I know is inundated by people trying to be different, when what all of them desperately want is someone who is professional. I **would** recommend including a one-page single-spaced synopsis of the work you're hoping to have the agent submit that tells the complete story, including the ending. I would keep the letter as businesslike and short as possible.

About persistence – when I finished **Fire in the Mist**, I queried Russ Galen. He turned me down by form letter, but I was determined that he was going to be my agent (he's one of the best in the field). I didn't bother querying anyone else, because I didn't want anyone else. So I sold my first novel on my own, and when I did, wrote him a note that said, basically, "You suggested that I query you again once I sold something. I sold my first book the first time out to the first place I sent it, within a month of sending it out. Would you be interested in representing me now?"

He contacted me by phone the day he got the letter.

That's the hard way to get an agent, kind of like drawing a spades royal flush in a game of five card draw with nothing

wild. But there isn't an easy way. There will only be your way, and the way of the other few who persist until they succeed.

Here's a sample of what you say in a query letter to an agent:

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Joe Writer

Address

Address

Phone Number

email@emailaddress.com

Date

Agent Name-spelled-right

Brilliant Literary Agency

Address

Address

Dear Agent Name-spelled-right,

In 3110 AD, three battered space fighter pilots, cut off from their home ship and nearly out of ammo and air, take refuge on a tiny moon---and there discover the key to their alien enemies' destruction, a key that will save humanity if only they can survive to get their discovery home.

DAGGER MOON, 90,000 words, is my first novel. I've enclosed a single-page synopsis of the story. The novel is complete should you decide you would like to see more. You'll find my SASE enclosed.

Thank you for your time and assistance. I eagerly await your response.

All my best wishes,

Pointers:

- **Be specific.** Know exactly what you've written, and describe it by its genre. Time-travel romance, mainstream thriller, high fantasy trilogy (NOTE – If you've written a book that will require more than one volume to tell the story, and have no track record with an agent or publisher, you need to have the complete story finished before you send it off, no matter how many volumes it takes. Single-volume works are easier for a beginner to sell. There are exceptions. If you're Robert Jordan or J. V. Jones, you might be one of them. But if you aren't, my advice stands.)
- **Be polite.** You are asking for someone to invest his time in reading your work. You are **asking a favor of a stranger**. PLEASE keep this in mind. You are not yet in the position to grant favors, and comments implying that you are – for example, "You are one of the lucky few to whom I'm offering the chance to represent me." – will only get your letter dumped in the trash.
- **Be modest.** Don't say your manuscript is the best book ever written, or that it will make a million dollars, or that you are the next William Shakespeare. Let your work speak for yourself. If you're any good, the agent will figure that out by reading what you've written. If you try to tell him how great you are, you'll just come off looking like a boor and an idiot.
- **Be reasonable.** Don't demand that he represent you, or threaten to kill yourself if he doesn't. Don't offer bribes. Don't write on pink stationery with purple ink. Don't send your entire manuscript unasked. Put yourself in the agent's place. Imagine that you got dozens of

letters a day from complete strangers who all wanted you to do things for them. Imagine that most of the requests had no merit, that most of the people were rude, and that most of the work they sent you was anywhere from mediocre to downright awful. Imagine getting one polite, intelligent, businesslike letter in the midst of all that chaos. Now – be the writer of **that** letter.

NOTE: Making a living as a career novelist takes dedication, focus, massive work... and a knowledge of what to do and what to avoid. [If you're already writing fiction regularly, and you need how to get your show on the road, take a look at my class in building your career, \*How to Think Sideways\*.](#)

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