



Pitching Publication

The path from pitching to publication



CHAMPAGNE BOOK
GROUP

FICTION AT ITS FINEST

The Pitch

Or Getting The Attention Your Manuscript Deserves!

You're finished. You've spent countless hours writing the great American novel.

You've edited until you can recite the manuscript in your sleep. You're ready. Now it's time to find an editor to hear about your work.



But how do you get their attention when you may have mere seconds of their time? A tagline.

Wikipedia describes a tagline (also known as a log line, or promo line) as a small amount of text which serves to clarify a thought for, or designed with a form of dramatic effect. The idea behind the concept is to create a memorable dramatic phrase that will sum up the tone

and premise of the work. Hollywood has been using these with incredible success for years on their movie posters and trailers.

For example, what do you think of when you hear the phrase: "Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water..." or "In space, no one can hear you scream."

What other famous tag lines can you think of?

Now, create yours. Break your synopsis (yes, the dreaded synopsis) down to bite sizes. Then rearrange them into one short sentence of twenty five words or less.

This is the basis of your pitch.

The Query Letter

Love 'em Or Not, You Still Need A Good One.

Query letters. Just the thought of having to write one has authors cowering at their keyboards. Honestly, who really likes to write one? As frustrating as they may be, a well-written query letter is a **must** for anyone pursuing a writing career.

Why are they so important? Simple. Agents and editors don't have time to read through reams of material to decide if they wish to pursue the subject. They're busy people, with mile-high in-boxes. A query letter gives them an idea of your writing style, your publishing background and whets their whistle on the piece you've produced. This is where you have to dazzle them.

Query letters should be brief, ideally one page in length. They should be complete, persuasive and if possible, as charming as you can make it. (Dazzle baby, dazzle!) Remember, keep it short. This is only to introduce you and your manuscript. Impress them here and they will want to see more.

Like a press release, query letters come in droves over an editor's desk. Make yours stand out. How do you do that? First, **never** send a hand written letter. It doesn't look professional, and if you've ever tried to decipher Aunt May's handwriting, imagine what yours could look like to an editor with tired eyes. Handwritten letters get filed under 'T' for trash almost immediately.

Okay, so you've got your word processing package open on your computer, and you're staring with dread at the hated white page. What next? Format your page so that your letter is centred, preferably with one-inch borders. That's easy. You breathe a sigh of relief and move on.

Next, you want neatness and clarity of thought. This is where your writing talent will show through. If you can make it funny or amusing, go for it. You want to hold the editor's attention now that you've got it. The whole idea is to persuade the editor to ask for the rest of your manuscript.

Some writers like to include a bit about themselves and their background. Keep it publishing related. They don't want to know that you can check the oil on your car unless your novel is about a female mechanic!

The general format of a query letter should be as follows, but by all means, let your personality shine through. You don't have to stick to formula so long as you cover all the required elements.

Dear (name of editor if possible)

*The first section should state what category of romance you have written (contemporary, historical, paranormal, suspense, regency, etc). Give the approximate word count. State your manuscript's title and if it means something odd, explain the title **briefly**.*

In the second section, take about a hundred words to describe the general storyline. Think of the back blurby of a book for this part.

In the third section, quickly outline your main characters.

In the final section, include your writing resume. Give details of your experience as a writer, any specialized experiences you may have (such as you are a mechanic and can totally understand how your heroine doesn't like the grease from the garage under her fingernails) that qualifies you for writing about this subject. Also throw in the fact that you've been to the area in your book, so research is based on personal experience, if this is so.

The final paragraph should be:

If you are interested in seeing the book, I can send sample chapters or the complete manuscript, whichever you prefer. I enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply.

Sincerely,

Your name here.

(you may add your pen name beneath your real name if you have been published before, but always query with your legal name. Remember, a legal name can sign a contract, a pen name can not.)

Follow these guidelines, and you'll come up with a winning query every time!

One, Two, Three, Submit!



The biggest mistake I see newbie writers' do is to query the wrong publishing house. Come on, you say, I don't care who publishes my book, I just want to be published!

Before you start sending off that fantastic query letter you've just written, you must, must, must find which house is the place for you. How do you do this? First of all, seek out the publishers of those books similar to your own. A quick Amazon search will give

you a list of names. Once you have that, you can now start checking out their websites.

Look for the page that holds the submission guidelines. They may be called author guidelines, writer's guidelines or may simply say 'for authors'. This page is a very important page because it will tell you what the publisher is currently looking for, what format they want the submission sent in, and how the manuscript should be prepared. Some editors will not read material not submitted in the format they've requested, so this is crucial.

Publisher guidelines are there for a reason. It helps to have the manuscript prepared in a manner that will have your manuscript reviewed in the quickest amount of time possible. But most important of all, it shows the editor that you are able to follow direction. Because if you can't follow instructions at the submission stage, how can they be sure you'll follow instructions when it comes to editing?

And above all, be patient. I know that it's difficult, but do not email to ask about the status of your submission. Editors are busy people, and they'll get to your work as quickly as they can. If it has been an extraordinary long period of time since your submission was received, a quick note to inquire is not out of line, but do be polite and gracious. A little honey goes a long way with a busy editor.

Help, I'm going to a conference and am pitching to a real, live editor!

Oh what fun! The best thing about a live pitch is the immediate feedback. But you'll need to practice so you don't let nerves get the better of you.

Most live pitch sessions are timed, so you'll have X amount of minutes to get the editor interested in your story. You want to avoid stumbling over your words or searching for the best way to describe your story. Minutes are precious and you need to nail the pitch if you want to be asked to send in your material for a deeper review. Avoid the use of prepared notes if you can.

The best way to practice live pitching is to sit in front of a mirror and talk to yourself. Pretend you're speaking to an editor and tell the editor about your book as concisely as possible. Once you've got that down, you should practice with a real person. Again, as concisely as possible. Lead off with your tagline. Then a short paragraph about your plotline. Perhaps a few sentences about your main characters. Your live pitch person will be able to ask questions which will help you clarify and tighten your pitch. Practice, practice, practice!

When you sit down in front of that real, live editor, you're going to be nervous. But don't worry, they know that. If you must glance at your notes, do so, but please don't read from a cheat-sheet. You should know your material far better than anyone else, so other than a little note to keep you on track, you shouldn't need much in the realm of a written pitch. Simply take a deep breath, introduce yourself and begin. You'll do fine.

Formatting Your Manuscript

All right, you've finished the next best seller. You've got a great premise for a novel; you've researched your background and setting. You've even created interesting and believable characters. Everything looks terrific in your little coiling notebook. Now it's time to put it into your word processing program.

The first time you go into your program and start mucking with the buttons can be scary. Don't worry. If you screw up, you can go back and fix it quite easily. Formatting your manuscript shouldn't be difficult. In fact, it's really quite simple, thanks to modern technology.

The Basics: Good paper is essential (for hard copy submissions) -20 lb minimum
Double spacing.
One inch margins all around (or 2.5 cm)
A clear, readable font.
Paragraphs indented with tabs, not with the space bar

Cover Page: Novels require a cover page. You can either insert it at the beginning or wait until the end. If you wait until the end, just remember, you'll have to fix your page numbers before your final submission. The information required on the cover page is: complete title of the piece, your name (and pseudonym if applicable), page count, word count and contact information.

You'll need to use running headers in your manuscript. These are things you won't see while you are working, but will print out/show with the final product. You use your last name, title of the book or a keyword if it's too long, and page number. For example, my latest work's headers are *Lynn/CarlieBarnes/1*

Page numbers should be sequential, from the first page of the book (not the cover page though) to the last page. Do NOT number each chapter separately. Chapters should start on a fresh page. Insert a page break at the end of each chapter, rather than tabbing down to the fresh page.

Fonts & Format: Forget what everyone tells you about the latest trends in editor choices. A little hint for you. THEY DON'T CARE. What they do care about, is a font that is clear and easy to read. Generally, it's best to use a 12-point font size, and to choose a font that doesn't 'squish' the letters together. Always remember

the tired eyes of the editor. Nothing gets tossed into the slush pile (or garbage pile) quicker than something not easy to read.

There you go, formatting made easy. Remember to keep things simple. Don't get caught up in setting up 'tasks' or rules for your manuscript. Start with the basics. If you end up landing a publisher with more specific guidelines, it is far easier to go in and modify *this* format, than to try and undo more 'technical' things.

Contracts

You Have An Offer. Now What?

First of all, read it. All of it. Line by line and word for word. Remember, this is a legal document, so make sure you understand and agree to everything within. Just because you've been offered a contract, doesn't mean you have to accept it. And just because it's offered, doesn't mean you can't negotiate it. While some publishers are willing to discuss contract terms (negotiate) only you can decide whether any given term is a deal breaker.



Some clauses you may see and request clarification on.

- **Rights:** Make sure the rights you are signing over are clear and concise. If you are not sure, ask. You have every right to do so.
- **Editorial Clauses:** Don't expect that your work is so great that it won't require editing.
- **Royalty Points:** Most contracts will start with the lowest points available at the house. Unless you are a named author, don't expect to be able to negotiate these points, but you can certainly ask for consideration.
- **Right of First Refusal/Next Book Clauses:** These clauses require that you submit your next book to this publisher on an exclusive basis before you can submit it elsewhere. These clauses are not unusual, but should have a definite option period, such as 60 to 90 days, with an automatic release if the publisher does not accept or pass in that period.

- Pseudonyms: No publisher should control your real name, your maiden (birth) name or your pseudonym—nor should they force you to take a pseudonym if you want to publish your book under your legal name. You should be able to take your name or pseudonym with you wherever you go. If you see this in the contract, ask for it to be stricken.

Once you've read through your contract and have determined it to be acceptable, you can comfortably sign it. At this point, you are now bound by contract to deliver the edited manuscript on time, as directed. Do not expect more from the publisher than you see in that contract. Do not expect less. The publisher is bound to honor the same contract.

So what are some of the things to expect now that you're contracted?

First of all, be prepared to wait. You are now in queue to work with your assigned editor. Sometimes you know straight away who that is, sometimes you won't find out until editing is imminent. What do you do in the meantime?

You go over your manuscript again. If you've been given any information on specific formatting for the publishing house, do it now. Do another check for spelling, grammar or other small issues. Do NOT do a full edit on your manuscript, despite the fact that you feel scene such-and-such would be stronger if you took out character 'c' and fleshed out the refrigerator scene to include more carrots. No. You must resist the temptation, lest you change the manuscript so much that the publisher no longer recognizes it as something they contracted. This is a sure-fire way to get your contract voided. The publisher wants one thing, don't change it into something else without your editor's input.

If you have not already done so, start working on your promotional platform. Meaning, how are you going to promote this work once it's finished and in the hands of the reading public. And yes, you'll be doing much of the work when it comes to promotion. Most publishers do not have the big marketing dollars that they once did, and authors are expected to do the bulk of the work on their own.

While all of this is going on, there are other things going on in the background. You may have been asked for your input on back cover blurbs, taglines, and our ideas for cover art. You may also be asked to prepare a bio that the publisher will use on their website, in promotional materials, etc.

How Do I Prepare a Bio?

One thing I found the most difficult for author's to write is their own bio. After much thought, research and heartburn, I came up with a few simple rules to get the job done painlessly.

Q: What should one put in a short bio that appears at the end of an article/column? I'm having trouble trying to figure out what to write and still keep it professional/business like.

A: Here's a brief "model" that you can adapt to just about any need. Don't list the sentences by number, though; run them together into a paragraph.

1) Jane Doe has been writing professionally for XX years, and is the author of X books and more than/nearly XXX articles/stories/whatever. (Use this line to list your most prominent writing achievements.)

2) Her work has appeared in such publications as... (List two or three publications that most directly relate to the publication you're writing THIS bio for. For example, if you're writing an article for a business publication, try to list other business magazines here.)

3) Doe has practiced professional --- for X years... (Use this line to establish any professional credentials that might be helpful in demonstrating your expertise on the subject area, if necessary.)

4) Doe is also an avid photographer/blacksmith/birdwatcher... (Some publications like to list some personal interests; others don't. The key is, do they relate to the topic of the article? Again, if you're writing a business article, most people won't care that you like to mudwrestle on your days off.)

5) Doe lives in the XXX area... (Some people add "with spouse/kids/cats" to this line. Put in whatever you feel comfortable with.)

6) For more information, visit Doe's website at XXXX (or, if you wish, list your e-mail, but ONLY if you really want people to contact you.)

Here's how it looks in the end:

Jane Doe has been writing professionally for 125 years, and is the author of 2,462 books (more than Isaac Asimov!) and 300 articles. Her work has appeared in such publications as Godey's Lady's Book and Amazing! She is also an experienced tanner and hedge witch, and lives in the Hatchpatchi Hills with her two husbands and four turtles.

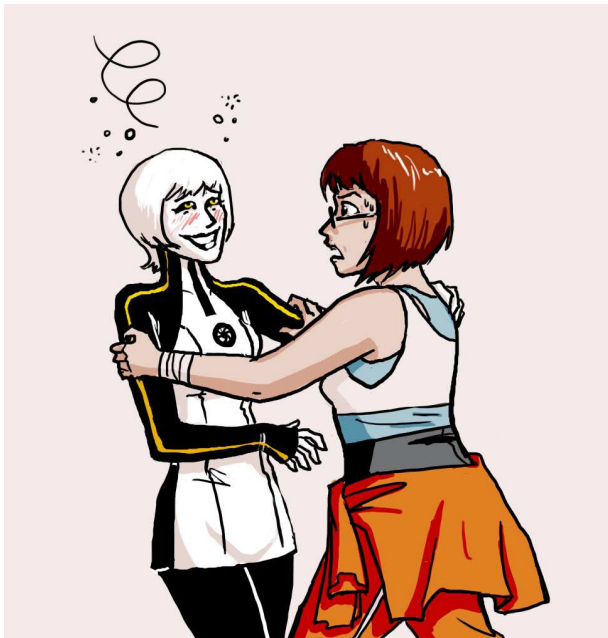
Professional Behaviors

You're contracted. You're working with an editor, and you'll soon have a book for sale. Holy cow, you did it!

Before we close, let's take a few minutes to discuss professional behavior. Remember that you are building a career, so your working relationship with your editor and publisher are extremely important. This is not the time to get a big head and become a diva. Publishing is a small industry, and despite the common belief that editors and publishers are in constant competition, the truth is, editors talk to each other all the time. At conferences, on the phone, via email. Bad behavior gets around and no one wants to work with a problem child.

If you disagree with your editor, and you certainly may from time to time, state your case in a calm, adult-like fashion. Hissy fits will only get you the opposite effect of what you're trying to accomplish. Most editors are reasonable, especially if you present yourself well. Remember, we're all working towards the same end, which is the best book possible.

Do not air your dirty laundry/opinions/disagreements on Facebook, Twitter, in chatrooms, on blogs, etc. The internet has a long memory, and more and more editors research new authors when considering submissions. Again, no one wants to work with a difficult author.



Treat your writing as a business that is trying to grow. To that end, you should be gracious at all times, dress appropriately when out in public representing your book, your pen name and your publisher, and for God's sake, do not get drunk and disorderly at conventions. Not only does it reflect badly on yourself, but it reflects badly on your publisher. Readers and bloggers love that sort of thing, and as I said previously, the internet has a long memory.

Current Needs/Submission Guidelines

Previously published manuscripts will be considered on a case by case basis. Author must have letter from former publisher stating that rights have reverted to them at the time of submission. While we do not accept previously self-published work, we may make exceptions if there is a case for it. Query and ask before sending off your submission package.

Champagne Book Group is accepting:

Contemporary romance (with higher levels of sensuality)

Erotic romance in all subgenres

Historical romance-specifically highland/scottish, medieval, cowboy/western

Urban Fantasy romance

Paranormal

Mystery/Suspense (includes supernatural mystery)

Horror

Fantasy/Science Fiction (conference attendees only)

Guidelines

Only submit finished works please. Word counts start at 25,000 words for novellas, 70-80,000 words for full length novels. Be sure to proof read your manuscript thoroughly. Your manuscript should be double spaced, Times New Roman 12 point, with one inch borders. No footers or headers, except as described in the formatting section.

Your submission package **must** include the following:

- 1) A professional query letter which includes the title of your novel, word count, genre, a brief biography and your contact information. Include this in the body of your email.
- 2) A synopsis of your book that describes the story from beginning to end. Please keep it to 2-3 pages in length. Attach it to your email in RTF format.
- 3) First three chapters, saved in RTF format and attached to your email.
- 4) A promotional plan, showing short term and long term goals. While your submission won't be won or lost on the basis of this 'plan', it will get you thinking about what you can do to help promote your novel. Saved in RTF format and attached to your email.

Email your submission to:

submissions@champagnebooks.com

Submissions not adhering to the guidelines will be deleted unread.