

Query Letters

Your synopsis forms the basis for your query letter.

Almost all queries today are email cover letters; your manuscript or pages are sent as a Word attachment – but these are requirements you should establish first as some houses still prefer your pages in the body of the email and rarely houses do ask for hard copy. Note also whether the editor/agent prefers pages (usually the first 10-20) or the full manuscript. Never send something from the middle of your novel.

The norm today is multiple submissions acceptable. Also, the norm today is that if you don't hear back in three months, consider your work rejected. Not nice, not fair, but that's what it is.

Here are the fundamentals of query letter writing:

1. Should be no longer than a single typed page. Seriously. Shorter is better.
2. Should be addressed to the individual editor/agent. Check spelling, check your facts. Find out what the editor/agent has previously edited/agented because you will tell them why you believe your work is a good fit for them.
3. Your opening sentence should be short and to the point: "I submit FAR CRY, my 75,000 word young adult romance set in contemporary Indochina, for your consideration."
4. Follow this with your pitch sentence: why you have chosen this editor/agent for your work.
5. Your middle should be your synopsis or a reasonable facsimile thereof.
6. Your ending summarizes your previous publications if any, and your professional writing related experience (i.e., membership in SCBWI or other professional organization, MA/MFA from wherever, whether you are/have been a teacher or librarian). Mention the Highlights Foundation Workshop if this is the novel you brought to the workshop. Non-writing related experience need not be mentioned.
7. Don't tell the editor/agent that your mother/aunt/children/students loved the story.
8. Don't go on and on with gushy personal feelings.
9. Do sound professional, serious, and educated.

Marissa Meyer shared her query letter for CINDER in a blog post, so I've deconstructed it here. Her letter is slightly on the long side, but it won her not only an agent but also a major contract. It doesn't hurt that she came up with one heck of a premise, and notice how irresistible she makes it sound.

The only correction I would make to her original is to set the titles of books she mentions, her own and the anthology, in all caps, as that is industry standard.

Your letterhead information here, or below your signature.

Dear Ms. Grinberg,

I'm seeking representation for Cinder, an 85,000-word futuristic young adult novel and a re-envisioning of the classic Cinderella story. I'm submitting to you because Scott Westerfeld's Uglies series was hugely inspirational in the writing of this novel, and I hope my futuristic world will capture your interest as well.

Opening

Sixteen-year-old Cinder is a cyborg, considered a technological mistake by most of society and a burden by her stepmother. Being cyborg does have its benefits, though—Cinder's brain interface has given her an uncanny ability to fix things (robots, hovers, her own malfunctioning parts), making her the best mechanic in New Beijing. This reputation brings the prince himself to her weekly market booth, needing her to repair a broken android before the annual ball. He jokingly calls it a matter of national security, but Cinder suspects it's more serious than he's letting on.

Although eager to impress the prince, Cinder's intentions are derailed when her younger stepsister, and only human friend, is infected with the fatal plague that's been devastating Earth for a decade. Blaming Cinder for her daughter's illness, Cinder's stepmother volunteers her body for plague research, an "honor" that no one has survived. But it doesn't take long for the scientists to discover something unusual about their new guinea pig. The surgeons who turned Cinder into a cyborg had been hiding something.

Something valuable.

Something others would kill for.

Middle
– her
synopsis
with
bells
and
whistles

I've had a novelette, "The Phantom of Linkshire Manor," published in the gothic romance anthology *Bound in Skin* (Cats Curious Press, 2007), and am a member of the Romance Writers of America. I hold an MS in Publishing and a BA in Creative Writing, emphasis on children's literature. My bi-monthly writing newsletter reaches over 450 subscribers.

Cinder is the first of a planned series.

I've attached the first fifty pages. Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,
Marissa Meyer

Ending
– short
and
sweet