

## Freelance Writers: Don't Waste Your Time with Query Letters

Virtually everything ever written about freelance writing and getting published says that you need to write query letters. Yet in the Internet Age, the truth of the matter is that query letters are almost always a huge waste of time.

Certainly some people do get work by writing query letters. But the query process soon turns into a numbers game, almost like a direct mail campaign. You have to send out so many queries to get meaningful responses that you won't have much time left to do any actual work. A good query letter must be carefully crafted and painstakingly personalized. To compose one that doesn't sound cutesy or contrived is difficult and time-consuming.

The reality is that you must think of editors as your potential customers. They control the budget and whether or not to buy from you. It is NEVER a good idea to harass or inconvenience a customer. For many busy editors, query letters are annoying. Often they are just another form of junk mail.

Now you're probably thinking, "If editors don't read query letters, how does anyone ever get published?" What the writing books don't tell you is that article topics are often defined far in advance. At many magazines, editors figure out a monthly or yearly plan. Barring some earth-shattering catastrophe, the editors stick to that plan. The standard query letter is usually a waste of time because with the calendar of topics decided well in advance, off-topic queries are ignored. In other words, your carefully crafted query letter gets round-filed, not because it's bad, but because it had no hope of being used.

The fact that query letters are often thrown away doesn't mean editors don't use freelance writers; they do. But the reality is that editors tend to rely on a stable of writers who have proven themselves experts on the magazine's chosen topics. So if you want to be published, your task is to discover those topics and become one of those experts.

From an editor's point of view, few decent writers actually exist out there in the big world. Editors have simple needs: they want articles that are original, easy to read, accurate, and on time.

Flakey writers that don't meet deadlines are the bane of every editor and publisher in the industry. If you meet your deadlines, every time with no excuses, you will stand out from the pack. If you consistently send articles that are:

- \* precisely focused on a topic the magazine wants to run;
- \* written in the magazine's chosen style and tone;
- \* 100% accurate and error free;
- \* formatted the way the magazine wants them;
- \* and arrive BEFORE the deadline

an editor will notice you!

Okay, so what if you've never written for that magazine before? Instead of querying, do some research on the magazine. After you have read the magazine and any available writer's guidelines, write a polite letter to the editor to ask for an editorial calendar and explain your expertise.

This method is far preferable to any query letter, no matter how clever or well-written.

Why? With some concise information about you, often an editor can tell whether or not your writing will be a good fit for my publication.

For example, if you say that you have written articles for managers about "enterprise computing" and the editor works for a "how to use Microsoft Word step by step" magazine, it's likely that you won't be the right writer for that magazine.

However, if you explain that you spent two years teaching "introduction to word processing" classes at your local YMCA, and that you wrote handouts for your students about how to get started using Microsoft Word, that same editor might just encourage you to submit a few articles! At the very least, the editor might send you the editorial calendar.

Don't forget the basics! Simple little things often make you stand out from the crowd and help your chances of getting published. For example, when writing an e-mail or letter to an editor, always remember that you are writing to someone who spends a lot of time with words and probably has a degree in English or Journalism. Double-check your spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Format properly. If you don't compose your e-mail competently and professionally, editors won't believe that you can write a good article.

And finally, be truthful. Don't inflate your credentials. Don't fib about how much you know about a topic. Don't gush, and don't sell. Just state your credentials concisely, clearly, and correctly. Editors don't need to be sold and they have no tolerance for hype. They're just too busy to put up with it.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

#### About the Author

Susan Daffron is the President of Logical Expressions, Inc. (<http://www.logicaexpressions.com>) and has written more than 300 newspaper and national magazine articles. She regularly publishes ezines on computers (<http://www.LogicalTips.com>), pet care (<http://www.Pet-Tails.com>), and other topics.