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**Literary Querying:  
The Art of Rejection**

**Week Two:  
Commence Battle!**

Johnny Worthen  
[www.johnnyworthen.com](http://www.johnnyworthen.com)

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**Week Two Goals**

- Lots of Workshop
- Elevator Pitch
- Bio
- First Pages (5)
- Query Letter



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**Workshop**

- Log line
- Tag Line
- Comparable Titles
- Meet Comp
- Blurb
- 1-2 Page Synopsis

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## Elevator Pitch

- You're riding an elevator and the agent of your dreams enters it.
- She can't escape.
- You have seconds to pitch your story and make them want to know more.
- Go!

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## Elevator Pitch

- The basis for all in-person pitches
  - Agents, editors, managers, readers - everyone!
- Memorized, Verbal, **Enthusiastic**
- Get their attention quick and interest them
  - Part Blurb
  - Part Log Line
- **All presentation**

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# Biographies

- You will need **multiple biographies**
- A couple sentences
  - One paragraph
    - 100 words
    - 300 words
- More as required
- Different situations and uses
  - Marketing, introduction, inside book cover, etc.
- Curriculum Vitae?
- **Why are you the best person to have written your book?**

biography

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# Study Examples

- Look up authors in your genre.
- Study their examples.
  - Amazon pages
  - Websites
  - Back of their books



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# My Amazon Bio (2024)

JOHNNY WORTHEN grew up in the high desert snows and warm summer winds of the Wasatch Mountains. He graduated with a B.A. in English, minor in Classics and a Master's in American Studies from the University of Utah. After a series of businesses and adventures, including years abroad and running his own bakery, Johnny found himself drawn to the only thing he ever wanted to do -- write. And write he does. Well versed in modern literary criticism and cultural studies, Johnny writes upmarket multi-genre fiction – thriller, horror, young adult, comedy and mystery so far. "I write what I like to read," he says. "That guarantees me at least one fan and a hectic job for my publicist."

When not pounding on his keyboard, teaching the craft, attending conferences and conventions, Johnny Worthen can be found with his wife and boys in Sandy, Utah.

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# My Short Bio (2024)

JOHNNY WORTHEN is an award-winning, multiple-genre, tie-dye-wearing author, voyager, and damn fine human being! Trained in literary criticism and cultural studies, he writes upmarket fiction, long and short, indie and traditional, mentors others where he can, and teaches writing at the University of Utah.

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# Photo?



It's not a bad idea to get a professional photo taken of you. NOW, you know, before you age too much...



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# Flawless First Pages

- First Impressions
  - Manuscript Firsts:
    - Title
      - First Word
        - First Sentence
          - First Paragraph
            - First Page
              - First Chapter
                - First Three Chapters



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# Editing

- *Art is never finished, only abandoned.* —Leonardo da Vinci
- Self-Editing
  - Immediate and often
  - After a time has passed
  - Read Aloud
- Getting Help
  - Professional editors (\$\$)
  - Writing Groups/Beta-Readers/This Class!



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# Getting Help

- Lots of professional editors out there to help.
  - Can be costly
- Beta Readers
- Friends
- Community

*Understanding*  
**BOOK EDITORS:**  
Who you need & when you need them

- A DEVELOPMENTAL EDITOR**  
Looks at the "big picture." They focus on things like **plot, character development, theme, point of view, etc.**  
*When:* If you want guidance writing your story, or when you've finished a draft and want to know if it "works" or not.
- A LINE EDITOR**  
Focuses on **writing style & voice**, pointing out **awkward phrasing, unnecessary repetition, telling vs. showing, passive voice, dialogue**, and **flagging any inconsistencies.**  
*When:* You know your draft is structurally sound and "works."
- A COPY EDITOR**  
Corrects **spelling, grammar, and punctuation.** They will address **commonly confused words** as well as **ensure consistency** with capitalization, hyphenation, and numerals.  
*When:* Your draft works, and your prose has been polished.
- A PROOF READER**  
Makes sure your book is as **error-free as possible.** They check the "proof copy" for **typographical errors** as well as look for **layout and page number problems.**  
*When:* The book is formatted for print or digital publication.
- ACQUISITION EDITOR**  
Works for a publishing company. They **acquire manuscripts & evaluate the book's ability to sell** once it gets published.  
*When:* After a developmental edit, a line edit & a copy edit if you plan to traditionally publish.

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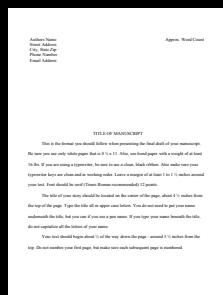
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# Standard Manuscript Format

- Know it
- Use it!



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# Query Letters

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*A query letter is a formal letter sent to magazine editors, literary agents and sometimes publishing houses or companies to propose writing ideas. The query letter is an author's first step towards getting his/her manuscript published.*

—Wikipedia

- There are no right or wrong ones
  - Only effective and ineffective
  - The goal is to get the queried to ask for more:
    - RFM: Request for Manuscript
- Timing and luck plays a big part in this

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# One Page

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# A Template

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- The Hook
- The Book
- The Look
- & The Cook



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# Hook

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- **Grab Attention**

- Tip of the Spear – **get them to keep reading**
- Heavy Blurb
- Part Log Line
- Part Tag Line
- Might be part Synopsis
- Might be about you and your experience
- NOT an excerpt from the book\*



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# Book

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- Part Blurb
- Part Synopsis
- **Get them to keep reading.**
- In the style/voice of the book if possible
- *Hook is emotional; here's where we show what the book is about*
- Concise with pertinent of information (pick an angle)
  - Ending not necessary, but most of the twists and emotional impact
- Query one project at a time.



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# Look

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- Genre
- Age Group
- Word Count
- **“Completed”**
- Audience / Target Market
  - Similar Titles (comps)
    - Affiliations, groups crossovers
- IF REQUIRED: Multiple submission or not



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# Cook

- Who you are
- **PLATFORM**
  - Publishing History (if any)
  - Awards (if any)
  - Social Media Links (next class)
  - Anything relative to your story
    - *You run a cat rescue center and wrote a book about it*
  - Anything relative to your marketing
    - *Cat rescue podcast*



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# Suggested Details (in order)

- Greeting - (be careful of honorifics, Mr. Ms. Mrs. Mx. Full name is usually safe)
- Why you think you'll be a good agent/editor/publisher with specific comps to your target
  - *Log line?*
- Blurb - story synopsis, made to sell not tell (general comps)
  - *Tag line?*
- Story details - word count, genre, etc
- Author details - who you are, credential, why you are a good person to tell this story
- Supplied material (synopsis, three pages, full ms etc) - as requested. Attached or added to the email. Or nothing.
- Professional signature with contact methods

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# Made to Order

- Have a template but adjust for each query
  - Submission Requirements
  - Personalization
- Re-read it
- Improve it



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# Common Mistakes

- No Research
  - Querying what they don't want
  - Not following formats, instructions
  - Sending wrong/incomplete information
- Exaggerations: "This is the next Jaws" or "a certain best-seller."
- Wrong tone, agent name, gender
- Mass email
- Too pushy/too whiney - UNPROFESSIONAL
- **Don't make it easy for them to say "No"**

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# Good Advice

## • BE PROFESSIONAL

- *It's a job interview*
- Do your research
- Follow instructions
  - Formatting
- Have the tools ready to go: synopses, polished manuscript
- Mention why you chose them
  - *more research*



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# Hire it Done?

- Query Letters are so important that some people hire a professional to write it for them.
- Not recommended
  - Carpet matching the Drapes?
  - *But who I am to judge?*



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# Query Letter Examples

- Study Examples
- Some very kind authors have shared their successful letters with us

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# Homework

- **For Critique**
  - Elevator Pitch
  - Short Bio (<100 words)
  - Query Letter
  - First Page of Your Manuscript (<200 words)
- **Send to me by Thursday April 11th**
- We will **Workshop** these together



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