



Start Strong: A Guide to Query Letters & Synopses

Everything you need to make your
submission shine

BIG THINKING PUBLISHING: SCHOOL OF WRITING

Start Strong: A Guide to Query Letters & Synopses

**BY
BIG THINKING PUBLISHING:
SCHOOL OF WRITING**



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www.bigthinkingpublishing.com
enquiries@bigthinkingpublishing.com

This mini-guide is intended for educational and informational purposes. It does not constitute legal or professional publishing advice. Writers are encouraged to seek appropriate guidance for their individual circumstances.

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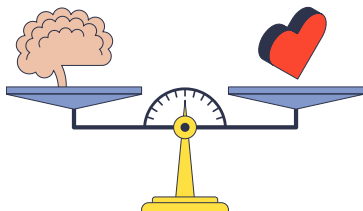
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Introduction

This guide has been compiled to help you, the writer, to make the most of your query letter and synopsis.

**NOW I CANNOT SAY THIS CLEARLY ENOUGH:
THESE CANNOT BE AN AFTERTHOUGHT!**



Where the writing is the heart, the publishing industry is the head, and this can be hard to think about when you first begin querying. Publishing is first and foremost a business, and any decision to publish your book will be based on **finances**. Will it *sell*, and can I pay my overheads based on book sales?

Firstly, it is important to say that there are WAY more authors looking for contracts than there are available. Like, thousands and thousands of people aiming for one, elusive contract. This makes the chance of landing one incredibly small. Not quite lottery small, but you get the idea.

So you need to approach the query letter and synopsis as an *interview*. This is all a publisher is going to see before making a decision about you and your book. If the letter isn't right, your synopsis won't be read. If your synopsis isn't right, the first three chapters of your book won't be read.... You see where this is going.

BIG THINKING PUBLISHING: SCHOOL OF WRITING

So many authors don't understand this and draft a quick opening 'hey, this is me, love my book!' email without realising the significance of the letter's importance.

The good news is that there are a few things that will really help to get your letter noticed, and these are things you can learn, likewise with your synopsis. Bearing in mind that publishers read hundreds of letters and queries, we can help you get your letter to make the publisher/agent interested in reading *your* synopsis, and from there, your first three chapters.



**QUICK TIP: DON'T LEAVE YOUR
LETTER AND SYNOPSIS UNTIL AFTER
YOU'VE FINISHED THE BOOK... WRITE
THEM CONCURRENTLY!**

So what are you waiting for? Dig in and see if you can manifest the query letter and synopsis of your dreams, one that any agent or publisher would be a fool to ignore.

Go for it - we've got you.

Chapter One

Your Query Letter

As we mentioned in the introduction, your letter is the equivalent of an interview and must be treated as such. Most writers actually find the letter harder to write than the book!

This chapter will look at the structure of a good query letter and will also let you know how much information is too much, and where it is okay to wax lyrical about your magnum opus.

A good query letter will tell a publisher or agent;



WHAT YOUR BOOK IS (GENRE, AGE RANGE, WORD COUNT, COMPS)



WHAT YOUR BOOK IS ABOUT (BRIEFLY) AND THE THEMES WITHIN IT



WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOUR WRITING EXPERIENCE IS.

And that's it! Should be easy, right? Let's look at some common mistakes;



A LETTER THAT GOES ON FOR OVER A PAGE



USING COMPS IN A WAY THAT MAKES YOU SOUND LIKE YOUR BOOK IS BETTER THAN OTHER, FAMOUS TITLES



TELLING THE ENTIRE STORY OF YOUR BOOK CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER

We are going to look at each of the points to make sure that YOUR query letter avoids common pitfalls and allows an agent or publisher to breathe a sigh of relief that they have finally met an author who understands what is needed.

1. WHAT YOUR BOOK IS (GENRE, AGE RANGE, WORD COUNT, COMPS)

This is the opening of your letter. At BTP, we quite like a letter to open with the hook or tagline – the one you find at the top of a blurb. This immediately sets the tone for the rest of the letter. Now, in terms of the rest;

- What type of book is it? Thriller? Poetry Collection? Spicy Romantasy?
- Who your book is aimed at (Adult, YA, children)
- Word count (including any extra bits like glossaries, appendices)
- What would be next to your book on a shelf?

These are the brass tacks – the bones of information that a publisher needs to know about.



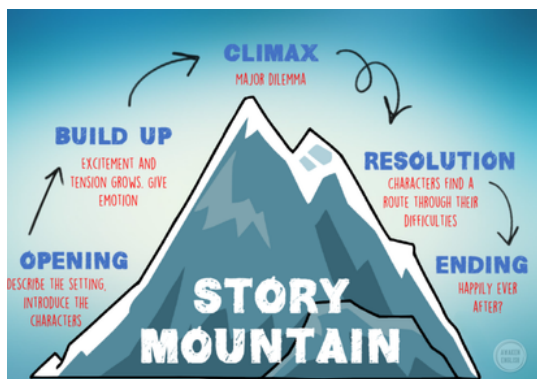
INSIDER PUBLISHER TIP:

YOUR SUBMISSION COULD BE PUT ASIDE AT THIS VERY POINT, AND NONE OF IT WOULD BE YOUR FAULT. IF THEY AREN'T LOOKING FOR 'ANOTHER' YA FANTASY, THEN YOUR LUCK IS OUT.

A publisher's catalogue will most likely have gaps they are looking to fill, hence the opening of submissions. If a catalogue already has books in the pipeline that are similar to yours in terms of genre and age range, then there is no query letter in the world that will make a difference, because, and I have to keep reminding you: PUBLISHING IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A BUSINESS. A lovely one, but still a business within the entertainment industry.

2. WHAT YOUR BOOK IS ABOUT (BRIEFLY) AND THE THEMES WITHIN IT

This is the main body of your letter, but it still needs to be succinct. Remember that you have your synopsis to expand upon your storyline, so you don't need to go into too much detail. What we need over two paragraphs is an introduction to your character and your story arc - beginning, middle, and end. Remember the story mountain from school? This is where you need to whip it out in all it's glory.



Try aiming for one sentence for each point in the first instance. It's a difficult task, but it really helps to distill your story and make it understandable for a reader who only has limited information.

In terms of themes, this is where you need to imagine your book is in a book club and is being discussed...

“Well, Doris, I can honestly say that I genuinely felt the love between the two main characters, even when the dismembering began.”

“Indeed, Iris. The familial bond that tethered the main characters together was clearly formed in childhood. So sweet that he chose his sister to be his first victim! Such a theme of family values!”

Or something like that, anyhow.

3. WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOUR WRITING EXPERIENCE IS.

Publishers and agents are a nosy lot. Plus, we are investing a sizeable chunk of change - we need to know whom we are investing *in*. Anything that can make you seem more credible (and a safe bet!) here is good.



**BRIEF HISTORY OF YOU -
WHERE YOU COME FROM
ETC.**



**WHY YOU WRITE
(IN GENERAL, AND WHY
YOU WROTE THIS BOOK).**



**IF YOU ARE PUBLISHED ANYWHERE
ELSE - SELF PUB/OTHER WORK
WITH A DIFFERENT PUBLISHER OR
ANY ANTHOLOGY OR MAGAZINES
YOUVE BEEN IN.**



**IF YOU HAVE AN AUTHOR
WEBSITE AND ANY NUMBERS
THAT LOOK GOOD -
SUBSCRIBERS, SOCIAL MEDIA
FOLLOWING ETC.**

Extra (unasked for) Advice

AVOIDING PITFALLS...

Avoiding the pitfalls can be tricky, and the temptation is to overload the letter with information. Another common pitfall is withholding the ending in the letter as sort of a 'teaser'. We don't like teasers!



It's the equivalent of asking someone to invest in making a film without knowing how the thing ends. Books are no different. We aren't readers, we need to know the WHOLE arc, so don't be shy about telling us your brilliant ending.

CHOOSING COMPS

Oh. My. Days. Do you know how many 'next *Harry Potter's* I have read? Let me tell you; it's **A LOT**. Please refrain from aligning your books with the most famous on the market - this is not the purpose of a comp. A comp simply tells a publisher what your book is *like...* not what it is equivalent to (or worse) better than. Go cautiously when name-dropping and be realistic. Please.

QUERY LETTER LENGTH

No more than a page, seriously. This can be difficult when writing your 'letter' in an email, but maybe pop it in a Word-type document first to make sure it's not overly long. To be brutally honest, an overly-long letter will mean it isn't read. It's no skin off the publisher's nose - they have a hundred more letters to read.

Example Letter

When time turns against you, who do you become?

Dear Big Thinking Publishing Team,

My novel, *The Clockmaker's Promise*, is a 75,000-word YA fantasy for readers aged 12–16 that would sit alongside *The Girl Who Speaks Bear* by Sophie Anderson and *A Skinful of Shadows* by Frances Hardinge. The story explores themes of identity, memory, and the cost of second chances.

Sixteen-year-old apprentice Lira lives a quiet life in a mountain town under the watch of a brilliant but secretive clockmaker. When she discovers he has been illegally rewinding time to erase past mistakes (including parts of her own memory), her world fractures. As his rewinds grow bolder, Lira learns he plans one final, irreversible reset to “fix” the town forever, forcing her into a confrontation that could cost her everyone she loves. Battling a collapsing timestream and splintered versions of the people around her, Lira must sabotage the device and accept that time must move forward. In the end, the town survives, and Lira steps into her own future, no longer defined by what was lost.

I am a secondary school teacher with a long-standing love of folklore and children's literature. I've previously published short stories in *Fable Quarterly* and *The Hedgewitch Review*, and I'm currently working on my second novel.

Thank you for considering my submission. I would be delighted to send the full manuscript at your request.

Warm regards,
A. Writer

Chapter Two

Your Synopsis

A good synopsis builds on the foundation of the query letter – it is less *interview* and more the architectural bones of your work.

Whilst it may be tempting to show off your writing in the synopsis, holding back and working on *clarity* is going to be more useful to a publisher or agent. Remember that we want the synopsis to unlock the door of a publisher or agent requesting the first three chapters of your manuscript.

A few things your synopsis **MUST** include;



THE ENDING OF YOUR BOOK (AGAIN, IN MORE DETAIL)



THE SKELETON OF THE STORY

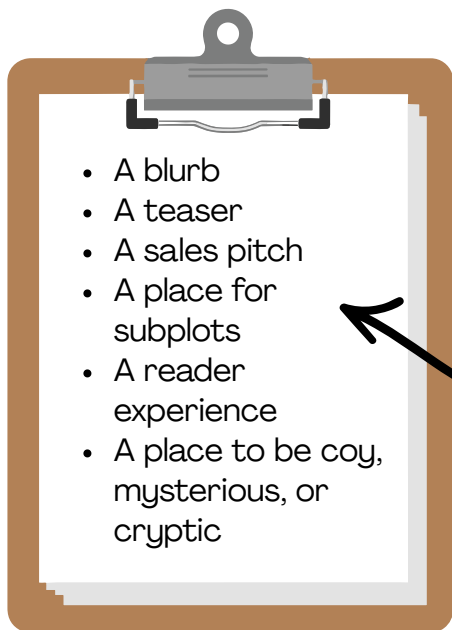
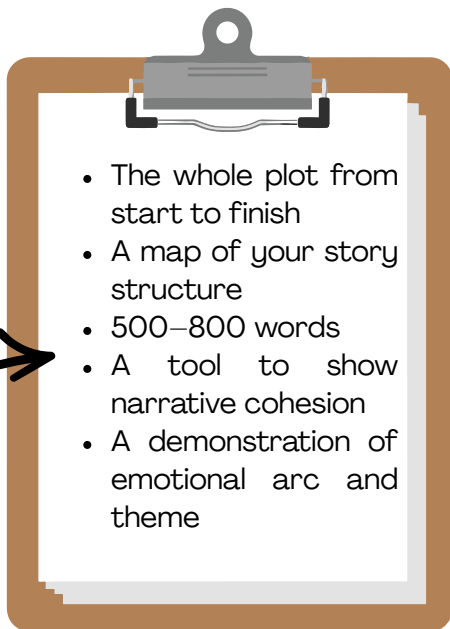


SOME INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Again, a quick reminder that we **do not need** (or want!) a chapter-by-chapter walkthrough. We need an author to be able to step back from their world and be able to show the key points of the story. If this is difficult, go back to your story mountain, but this time, allow a couple of sentences for each point, bringing in a few of the other characters along the way.

In preparation for your synopsis, if you don't already have character profiles, they can be a really good way for you to be able to summarise our characters without going overboard with explanation and exposition.

YOUR SYNOPSIS IS:



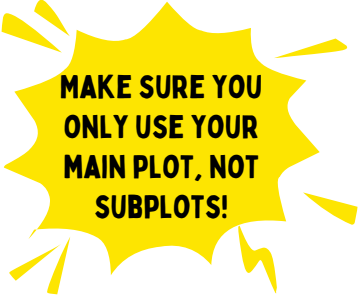
YOUR SYNOPSIS IS NOT:



The Story Mountain – A Revisit

These points from the story mountain are your bread-and-butter for the synopsis, but as we said a minute ago, you are now given permission to go beyond one sentence per point. Here they again, (in case you've forgotten!)

- Opening
- Building
- Climax
- Resolution
- Ending



**MAKE SURE YOU
ONLY USE YOUR
MAIN PLOT, NOT
SUBPLOTS!**

World Building

World-building is an important part of writing, even if your story takes place in a small suburb of Woking. It is the world your character(s) inhabit, whether it is in a far-flung fantasy realm or just down the road. Your synopsis should show your world-building, without it being too honerous.



NO LONG HISTORY LESSONS



**NO INVENTED CALENDARS/PRONUNCIATION
GUIDES/MAPS (SORRY!)**



NO LORE-DUMPS

Character Profiles

Use the sheet on the next page to help you with your characters for the synopsis. Ideally, we will only meet three or four (max) at this stage. Those need to be:

**THE
PROTAGONIST**

**THE
ANTAGONIST**

**ONE KEY
ALLY**

It can be really tempting to add more characters so that an agent and publisher get the full 'flavour' of your book, but trust me, you don't need to.

CHARACTERS THAT DON'T BELONG IN A SYNOPSIS (SORRY!):

- ✗ Minor friends
- ✗ Family members who don't affect the plot
- ✗ Anyone who exists just for flavour
- ✗ Sidekick characters who don't alter the outcome
- ✗ Half the cast of a fantasy novel
- ✗ Anyone who vanishes halfway through



Character Profile Sheet



Basic Info

Name:

Age:

Role: (Protagonist / Antagonist / Key Supporting)

Internal Core

What do they desire:

Need:

Fear:

What are their flaws:

Strength:

Plot Relevance

Inciting involvement:

Key obstacle they face:

Climax role:

How they change by the end:

Essential Relationships

Ally:

Antagonistic force:

(Just the ones that matter for the synopsis.)

In One Sentence

Character summary:

“___ is a ___ who must ___ when ___.”

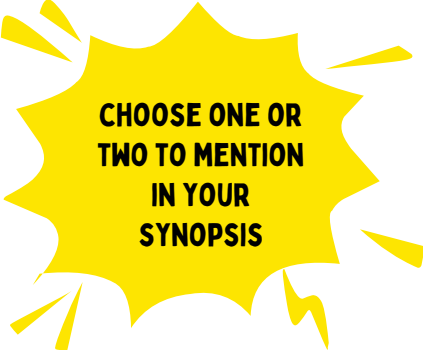
Understanding Themes

The themes are the emotional threads that run through your story; the ideas, the questions, and truths that your book explores. It's *themes* that literary students will sit around bougie coffee shops discussing long after closing. (Black polo-neck a must).

Your synopsis must mention these themes without making it read like a GCSE textbook or an English essay, and this can be tricky.

EXAMPLE OF THEMES IN BOOKS:

- Grief
- Power and corruption
- Found family
- Identity
- Belonging
- Justice
- Sacrifice
- Memory
- Friendship
- Coming-of-age
- Courage
- Redemption



**CHOOSE ONE OR
TWO TO MENTION
IN YOUR
SYNOPSIS**

If you are unsure, just focus on the ones that naturally follow your main character's story arc.

WHAT ON EARTH DOES THAT MEAN?

Yeah, okay – so that might not have been very clear.
Focus on themes that actively inform:

- Your protagonist's decisions
- The story's conflicts
- The emotional arc
- The ending

For example:

Lira begins the story afraid of standing out, but by the end, she understands that hiding from herself is its own kind of loss.

(That tells us the theme is identity, without ever using the word “identity.”)



WHAT NOT TO DO...



ANYTHING THAT SOUNDS LIKE A STUDENT TRYING TOO HARD IN A CLASSROOM!

- ✗ “This book explores the duality of time as a metaphor for emotional suppression.”
- ✗ “This novel examines post-colonial power structures through allegory.”
- ✗ “This work interrogates existential dread.”

If you read it out loud and it sounds like you should be holding a laser pointer and pacing in front of a whiteboard, it's too much.

THEMES FOR THE ADVANCED STUDENT: SHOWING A THEME WITHOUT SAYING THE WORD "THEME" ...

**ONLY FOR THE
BRAVE!**

The Golden Rule:

Show how the protagonist *changes through your book*. The theme *lives* in the shifting and changing of your character over time.

Fear → understanding
Loneliness → belonging
Shame → self-acceptance
Ignorance → truth
Naivety → maturity
Control → surrender
Grief → healing (or coping)



This is all you need! If your character has any kind of **growth**, your theme is already present.



INSIDER PUBLISHER TIP:

YOUR THEME SHOULD BE FELT, NOT ANNOUNCED. YOU CAN SHOW YOUR THEME THROUGH YOUR PROTAGONIST'S ARC AND LIMIT YOURSELF TO ONE OR TWO THEMES - REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE ON A WORD COUNT!

Quick Six to Avoid!

Here is a helpful list of all the things that writers do, (that hopefully you won't do!) when submitting your synopsis!

1. Turning the synopsis into a blurb

A synopsis must tell the whole story, not tease it. If you're trying to hook the reader instead of informing them, you're writing the wrong thing.

2. Hiding the ending

The biggest red flag of all. You **must** tell the publisher how the story resolves. That means no secrets, no cliffhangers, no "dun dun deer!" moments.

3. Including too many characters or subplots

We get that you know this book upside down and inside out. We understand that you're proud of it and want to share it with the world... however... this is only the synopsis. Remember that if we like it, we will ask for more. Stick to three or four characters and only the main plot. If your point doesn't drive the protagonist forward, it doesn't belong in the synopsis.

4. Overloading with world-building or lore

No invented calendars, history essays, political structures, or pronunciation guides. **Only** include the world details that directly affect the story.

5. Writing it like a novel (or an English essay!)

A synopsis is not the place for:

- Flowery prose
- Dialogue
- Chapter-by-chapter summarising
- Theme-analysis paragraphs

Remember: Clarity > Cleverness.

6. Being vague in the climax or stakes

“This is her biggest challenge yet...” tells us nothing.

A good synopsis clearly shows:

- What the protagonist must do
- What they risk losing
- What happens if they fail (the stakes)
- and how it all ends



**QUICK
TIPS**



- **YOUR SYNOPSIS IS A ROADMAP... MAKE IT CLEAR!**
- **PRESENT TENSE WORKS BEST.**
- **AIM FOR 500–800 WORDS.**
- **FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS.**

Example Synopsis (using the story mountain)

The Clockmaker's Promise is a YA fantasy set in the isolated mountain town of Wending. Sixteen-year-old apprentice Lira uncovers her mentor's dangerous secret: a device capable of rewinding moments of the past. When his obsession threatens to erase the town's future entirely, Lira must confront him before everything — and everyone — she knows is lost.

Opening (Exposition)

Lira lives under the guidance of its brilliant but secretive clockmaker, Master Doren Hale. She begins to notice anomalies and unsettling gaps in her memory.

Build Up

When Lira discovers Hale's forbidden device, she investigates with her friend Tovin, uncovering contradictions in the town's history and growing evidence of Doren's escalating experiments. Lira learns the truth: Doren intends to perform a full-town rewind to undo his daughter's death, a process that will erase years of life (including Lira herself) from existence.

Climax

As Doren activates the device, time fractures violently; Lira confronts him in the collapsing workshop and manages to sabotage the machine's core, stopping the reset before the town is lost.

Resolution

The timestream snaps back, leaving Wending shaken but intact, and exposing the emotional and physical damage caused by Doren's interference.

Ending

Doren turns himself in, and Lira takes over the workshop, understanding that time must move forward and that identity cannot survive if the past is constantly rewritten.

Lira is a cautious but determined apprentice who grows into her own power as she confronts the truth about time and identity. Master Doren Hale, brilliant and grief-stricken, serves as both mentor and antagonist as his desperation to rewrite the past drives the story's conflict. Tovin, Lira's loyal friend, grounds her emotionally and raises the stakes when he's threatened by the collapsing timestream. Together, these three characters form the heart of the narrative, each revealing a different facet of loss, courage, and the cost of clinging too tightly to what has been lost.

THIS SYNOPSIS HAS:



A SHORT INTRO TO REMIND THE READER WHAT THEY ARE LOOKING AT



THE SKELETON OF THE STORY WITHOUT ANY UNNECESSARY EXTRAS



SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THE MAIN CHARACTERS AND THEIR MOTIVATIONS



GENTLY REFERENCED THEMES WITHOUT SCREAMING ABOUT THEM



A GOOD LENGTH - IT SAYS EVERYTHING IT NEEDS TO WITHOUT GOING OVER-THE-TOP



MINIMAL, RELEVANT WORLD BUILDING



A REVEALED ENDING

Chapter Three

Frequently Asked Questions

1. DO I REALLY HAVE TO INCLUDE THE ENDING IN MY SYNOPSIS?

Yes. Every time. A synopsis is not a teaser, it's the whole story. We can't judge a plot arc if we can't see how it lands.

2. HOW LONG SHOULD MY SYNOPSIS ACTUALLY BE?

Aim for 500–800 words, or one single page if you're concise. Too long = overwhelming. Too short = missing bones.

3. HOW MANY CHARACTERS SHOULD I INCLUDE?

Keep it to three or four max — the protagonist, the antagonist, and one or two key allies. Everyone else can sit this one out.

4. WHAT TENSE AND PERSON SHOULD I USE?

Most synopses work best in the present tense and third person, no matter what the novel is written in.

5. Can I be funny / voicey / dramatic in my query letter?

A little personality is lovely, but clarity always wins. Try to imagine you are sat in front of a potential employer... because that's exactly what this is.

Frequently Asked Questions

6. SHOULD I MENTION SUBPLOTS OR SIDE QUESTS?

Nope. Not unless they directly change the protagonist's main journey. Keep the synopsis laser-focused on the central narrative.

7. DO I NEED TO EXPLAIN MY THEMES?

You don't need to label them ("this book explores..."). Just show the protagonist's emotional shift — the theme will shine through naturally.

8. WHAT IF MY LETTER OR SYNOPSIS FEELS BORING?

GOOD.! They're meant to be clear, not clever. Let the story be impressive — not the admin describing it.

WHAT NOT TO WORRY ABOUT

- Sounding professional enough –
- Getting your entire plot into the synopsis
- Whether your book is 'good enough'... you need to be quietly confident about your book in both your letter and synopsis.



Chapter Four

Tips & Tricks



AUTHOR WEBSITE

Get one up and running and start to build a mailing list. Agents and publishers like a proactive author.



SOCIAL MEDIA

we all hate it, but quite a few agencies and publishers will favour an author with a bit of a following. Time to step out of the comfort zone.



TYPOS AND SPELLING MISTAKES

have absolutely NO place in a letter or synopsis. They are both examples of your writing... if there are mistakes, then as a publisher I assume that your manuscript will be littered with mistakes too, and that means? More money in editing costs.



KEEP YOUR GENRE CRYSTAL CLEAR

Nothing slows a submission down faster than a publisher trying to guess whether your book is YA fantasy, adult romance-with-magic, or middle grade adventure. Pick one primary genre and audience, say it confidently, and stick with it throughout your letter and synopsis.

Tips & Tricks

USE PROFESSIONAL FILE NAMING



It sounds tiny, but it matters. Save your documents with clear, industry-friendly names like:

Surname_Title_Query,
Surname_Title_Synopsis,
Surname_Title_Manuscript.

It keeps everything tidy on the publisher's end and makes you look instantly competent and organised.

USE A PROFESSIONAL EMAIL ADDRESS



Your contact details are part of your first impression.

An address like: `firstname.lastname@...`

Looks polished and trustworthy.

An address like `dragonqueen1979@...` or `bookboy420@.....` less so. Keep it simple and industry-friendly.

READ YOUR SUBMISSION OUT LOUD (ONCE!) BEFORE SENDING



It's the fastest way to catch awkward phrasing, missing words, repeated lines, or sentences that accidentally sound like you're having a nervous breakdown. A quick read-aloud does wonders for clarity (and your confidence!)

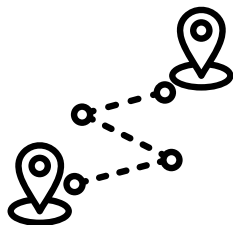
Things to Watch Out For

Don't self-publish if you are looking to land a traditional contract. Some authors think that they can release their books, create a bit of a following AND THEN query, but most publishers won't want a book that's already out in the wild. It's one or the other, I'm afraid.



Don't send your submission before the manuscript is finished. It's SO tempting to jump the gun when you're excited, but querying a half-written book is a fast track to panic. If an agent or publisher asks for the full manuscript and you can't deliver within 24–48 hours, it looks unprofessional. Finish the book first. Always.

Don't submit to everyone at once without tracking your submissions. It's surprisingly easy to forget who you've emailed, what you sent, and when you did it. So... keep a simple spreadsheet. Track dates, responses, and versions. It saves you from embarrassing double submissions, and it helps you see patterns in your feedback.



Finally...

Everyone KNOWS that people have to submit to multiple agencies and publishers before they get accepted.

Everyone knows that they will get multiple rejections.

Everyone knows that they may be querying for months... even years...

AND YET

We **ALL** still hope that we will be the exception to the rule.

Some of you may well be.

But please, **please, please** remember that publishing is a *business* and a rejection is never, ever personal. Rejections are not always about the 'quality' of your writing or your premise, it's also about what the publisher has room for on their books.

You may well have the next *Harry Potter*, but if the publisher isn't looking for a coming of age story about wizards, then your book will stay in the cupboard under your stairs until you find someone who is.

So, from all of us here at BTP: Good Luck.

BIG THINKING PUBLISHING: SCHOOL OF WRITING

Glossary of Terms

(So you don't have to pretend you know!)

ARC (EMOTIONAL ARC)

How your character changes on the inside over the course of the story — what they learn, accept, confront, or grow into.

BEAT

A key moment in the plot. A “story beat” is one important event that moves things forward.

BLURB

The short, enticing paragraph on the back of a book that makes readers want to buy it. Not the same as a synopsis!

COMPS (COMPARABLE TITLES)

Books that are similar in tone, genre, or audience to yours. Used to help publishers understand where your book sits on the shelf. (Not “books you are better than.”)

ELEVATOR PITCH / HOOK

A one- or two-sentence summary that captures the essence of your book in a snappy way — the line that would make someone go, “Ooh, tell me more.”

EXPOSITION

The opening setup where the reader learns who the protagonist is, where the story is set, and what “normal” looks like before things go wrong.

INCITING INCIDENT

The moment that kicks the story into motion — the event that forces your character to act.

MANUSCRIPT (MS)

Your book — the full, written, typed-up thing you're submitting.

MIDPOINT

The big turning point halfway through the story where something shifts — the stakes rise, a truth is revealed, or a choice becomes unavoidable.

PITCH

The short paragraph in your query letter that summarises your story and makes someone want to read more.

PLOT

The sequence of events — what happens in your story and why.

PROTAGONIST

The main character. The story revolves around their goal, their struggle, their choices.

RESOLUTION

How the story ends — the consequences, the emotional shifts, and the final state of things after the climax.

RIISING ACTION

The sequence of events that build tension, raise the stakes, and push the protagonist toward the climax.

STAKES

What's at risk if the protagonist fails. The bigger the stakes, the stronger the tension.

SUBPLOT

A smaller storyline running alongside the main one. Important in the book — but often irrelevant in a synopsis.

SYNOPSIS

A clear, concise summary of the entire plot — including the ending — to show whether the story works structurally.

TAGLINE

A super-short (one-sentence) pitch of your story's central conflict. Often used in film, helpful in books.

THEME

The underlying idea or emotional truth your story explores. Shown through the character's growth, not stated in academic sentences.

THEME

The overall feel or flavour of the writing — humorous, dark, whimsical, tense, etc.

About the Author

Kate Simkins is an award-winning short story writer who has received accolades internationally for her screenwriting. Her company, Big Thinking Publishing, is based in the North West of England and champions the work of authors from diverse backgrounds, authors of colour, differently abled authors, and those from the LGBTQ+ community.

Before devoting her time to writing, Kate spent many years in the classroom, teaching high school children from deprived areas. She has brought this knowledge and understanding to her new role, and now works to support the writing community in any way that she can, from providing feedback to authors just starting out, as well as through the new Mentorship scheme at BTP. This programme will pair published authors with writers in need of some guidance (January 2026) and will run on a rolling six-week process.

On a personal note, Kate is the mum of two daughters and two step-children and lives in a noisy, busy house with lots of fun and chaos. Her partner, Pob, is an unwavering support, as are her two dogs, Pantaliamon and Eric.

A strong submission opens doors.

Start Strong shows you how to write a compelling query letter and a clean, effective one-page synopsis that highlights the heart of your story.

Short, sharp, and full of industry insight — this is your essential toolkit for getting noticed.



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