



# MARY KOLE

## EDITORIAL

### Query Letter Format

Mary Kole Editorial

Whether you pitch an agent or publisher in person or with a written query, your goal is the same: to get an agent or publisher to request your manuscript. The easiest way to do this is to make the reader care about character, and this especially applies in novel, memoir, and picture book query letters. Make sure to answer these questions about your manuscript:

- **WHO is your character?**
  - Edward Cullen is your typical teen vampire. Good looks, fast car, no pulse.
- **WHAT is the inciting incident that launches the story?**
  - Then he meets Bella Swan.
- **WHAT (or who) do they want most in the world (objective)?**
  - For the first time, Edward wants a human being more than anything. And he wants her alive.
- **WHO (or what) is in the way of them getting what they want (their obstacle)?**
  - But Edward's bloodlust could drive him to either kill her or turn her into a monster like himself.
- **WHAT is at stake (ha ha, because he's a vampire) if the character doesn't get what they want?**
  - If Edward doesn't get Bella or, worse, if he hurts her, he'll be alone forever. Literally.

Answer these questions about your own manuscript. Read the backs of published books and the jacket flap copy. This is roughly the length and tone you're going for with a verbal pitch or the meat of your written query letter. Your query letter length should be between 250 and 450 words. The most well crafted queries are ones that make the reader **care** about the story and characters. This should entice the literary agent or publisher toward your writing sample, which is the ultimate deciding factor.

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### Query Letter Template

A query letter will contain the following elements, in roughly the following order (though I suggest a few options):

- **Introduction/Personalization/Logistics**
  - If you have a logline, or a personalization element for the agent or publisher you're targeting, or both, use them first.
  - Any relevant sales hooks (very important for non-fiction).
  - Add your logistics that include title, word count, and category: "XYZ is a #-word young adult manuscript." Or you can add this at the end of the pitch.
  - This should take one short paragraph. Alternately, you can skip this and dive right into the query meat.
- **Query Meat**
  - Structured and crafted according to the tips on the previous page. This should take one to three short paragraphs.
- **Bio and Credentials**
  - One *short* paragraph of information about you and your experience. Avoid getting too cutesy or personal. Keep it relevant, if possible, to your writing and/or book topic.
  - Include relevant writing credentials, clips, and contest wins, if any, and be specific about publisher/source, eg: *Writing Irresistible Kidlit* (Writer's Digest Books, 2012).
- **Breezy Sign-Off**
  - One to three sentences of wrap-up for the query.
  - "The first XYZ pages/chapters are pasted below, per your submission guidelines. Please note that this is a simultaneous submission. Thank you very much for your consideration."
  - If you didn't include your logistics at the top of the query, mention your title/word count/category information here.

The query should be between 250 and 450 words and fit on one page, single-spaced. Picture book queries are shorter. Non-fiction queries are more focused on market potential and author platform.

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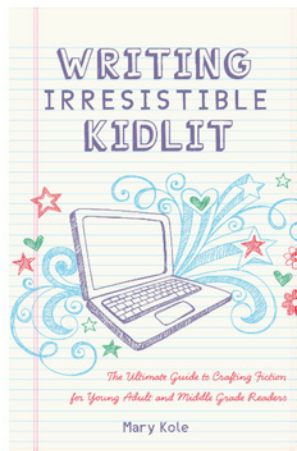
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### About Mary Kole

Former literary agent Mary Kole provides consulting and [developmental editing services](#) to writers of all categories and genres, working on projects from picture books to young adult to fantasy, sci-fi, romance and memoir. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing and has worked with Chronicle Books, Andrea Brown Literary Agency, and Movable Type Management. She has been blogging at [Kidlit.com](#) since 2009. Her book, [Writing Irresistible Kidlit](#), a writing reference guide for writers of middle grade and young adult fiction, is available from Writer's Digest Books.

### More Writing Craft Resources



*"Mary is a masterful speaker, very engaging, and I loved the intimate, casual format. I'm sure I'll revisit the webinar many times in the future." – Wendy H.*

I give monthly free and paid webinars online on writing topics like queries, character writing, picture books, and novel first pages. The paid webinars include a personalized critique of your work. Please check out upcoming [Webinars and Events](#). I'm also available to Skype into your writer's group about these topics or speak at writing conferences.

If you enjoyed this handout, consider hiring me for editorial services, sharing on social media, or passing this material along to your writing and critique groups. Enjoy, and I wish you the very best of luck with your writing and publishing endeavors!

Sincerely,

Mary Kole

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