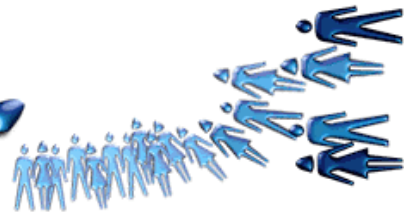


Holly Lisle's How To

Think *SIDEWAYS*



Handout 1---Lesson #11

Query Letter

By

Holly Lisle

<http://HowToThinkSideways.com>

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About The Query Letter

I have a sample query letter for you on the next page, a diagram of the query letter on the following page, and a detailed breakdown of the diagram on the page after that.

The query letter is critical to your success. It is the single tool you have as an unpublished or published-but-unagented writer that is welcome anywhere and that has the power to open doors for you. It is the best tool you have as a published writer looking to change agents. As much as any skill in writing can be end-of-the-world important, writing the query letter is that skill.

You must get this right.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Holly". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the left of the author's name and title.

Holly Lisle
Creator, ***How To Think Sideways***

Holly Lisle
Address
City, State, Zip
Phone number
Email address

9/16/08

Ms. Beverly Bookend, Editor
Big Publisher
Address
New York, NY, 10010

Dear Ms. Bookend,

In 2054, a solar manipulation experiment extinguishes the Sun, throwing Earth into darkness...and pushing brilliant, misanthropic Dr. Elaine Cardovy to search for humanity's path to survival.

In **Firebrand**, a 110,000-word stand-alone SF novel, I pursue the struggles of moon colonists, led by reluctant hero Dr. Cardovy, to create and set up a system for re-igniting the sun before all life on Earth and in scattered colonies throughout the solar system is extinguished. The novel explores not just the dangers of heedless scientific experimentation versus the endless promise of responsible scientific enquiry, but the greatness of the human spirit under duress and the ability of humanity to overcome adversity.

I have previously sold short fiction to Analog and Asimov's, and write science non-fiction for Discovery magazine. This is my first novel. Attached you will find a one-page synopsis.

Thank you for your time and attention.

With all my best wishes,

Holly Lisle

Holly Lisle

enc. Synopsis-**Firebrand**

Holly Lisle
Address
City, State, Zip
1 Phone number
Email address 2

9/16/08

Ms. Beverly Bookend, Editor
Big Publisher
Address
New York, NY, 10010

Dear Ms. Bookend, 3

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8 Thank you for your time and attention.

9 With all my best wishes,

10 *Holly Lisle*

Holly Lisle

11 enc. Synopsis-**Firebrand**

1. **Phone Number:** Always include it. Your future editor or agent may not choose to use it, but give him or her the option.
2. **E-mail address:** Always include it. Same reason as above. (Make sure you use an e-mail address that you actually check, and one where an unexpected e-mail will not get caught in a spam catcher.)
3. **Editor's name:** Unless you've met in person, ended up on a first-name basis, and were invited to send your submission, use the formal Ms. or Mr. in your initial business communication. And honestly, unless you're absolutely certain of the marital status and name status of the female editor in question, use Ms. rather than Mrs. or Miss. Getting mail addressed to Mrs. Holly Lisle bugs the bejeezus out of me. Lisle is my maiden name. Mrs. Lisle is my mother. I doubt I'm the only woman who uses my original name for working purposes.
4. **The Sentence:** In all its naked and unabashed glory.
5. **The Details Lite:** Title, genre, word count, stand-alone or part of series (if you have not yet sold anything, stand-alone is the ONLY acceptable answer here), and an additional single line about your main character and the story. In an ensemble piece, pick the single character who best exemplifies the conflict of the story.
6. **The Theme and Arc:** Think of this as the "why do I care?" line. This is why you're writing the story—to show the triumph of human spirit in people facing impossible odds, or to bring to life the disintegration of one idealistic politician who went wrong, or to present two lovers who find and keep each other against all odds. If your Sentence is "What is it about?," your theme is "Why does it matter and how will it end?"

My editor for THE SECRET TEXTS trilogy and **Vincalis the Agitator** told me the theme sentence I included at the very end of the proposal for Diplomacy of Wolves is what sold that trilogy—not my maps, not my worldbuilding, not my sample chapters, not my outline. The fact that I included theme at the very last minute on a whim was worth something over \$200,000 in U.S., British, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Russian rights and resale rights to me, and gave me the opportunity to write four books I loved and that challenged me and everything I thought I knew about writing. I have NEVER made the theme an afterthought again.

7. **Pertinent Experience:** This is "What have you sold, or who do you know?" If you have professional fiction writing credits (paying markets, established circulation, reputable publisher) these credits are all you need to include. If you have experience in a related field—screenwriting, nonfiction topical to your story (if you're an RN writing a nurse romance, for example), that will work. If you don't have anything like this, but if a well-established pro has read your story and liked it enough to recommend it to his or her own editor or agent, that's what you put here.

Do NOT include recommendations from your writers' group, your family or friends, or self-pubbing (unless you've sold more than 5,000 copies of a title). You are better off leaving the experience line out entirely, and simply noting that this is your first novel, and that you've enclosed a one-page synopsis.

Do not ever fake any part of your bio, ever. If you do, this will come back to haunt you. Do not say a writer recommended your work to this agent if it is untrue. This will eat you alive.

And no, I haven't sold anything to either Analog or Asimov's. I haven't submitted anything to them since I discovered novels, which was pretty much when I first got published. As for Discovery... don't have the creds.

8. **Say thank you.** Basic manners here. No one *has* to deal with your query, but someone is.
9. **Closing:** Something professional, and relatively formal.
- a. Sincerely,
 - b. Best wishes,
 - c. With all my best wishes,
 - BUT NOT...**
 - d. If you don't buy my book, I'll kill myself,
 - e. Your willing love-slave,
 - f. I'm your next great author,
 - g. With love,
10. **Written signature, typed signature beneath.**
11. **Notice of enclosure.**

Presentation

- Courier or Times Roman type, professional-quality business-sized envelopes and paper in white or off-white only (neutrals—pale grays and beiges). No blues, pinks, purples, yellows, or other colors.
- Single-spaced with one line between paragraphs.
- Crisp black toner, laser-printed, or typewriter with new ribbon.
- No handwritten letters, ever.
- No colored inks.
- Paper quality suitable for resumes (24 lb bond or cotton rag, or better).
- Businesslike professional-looking stationery is acceptable, but ink-jet printed or laser-printed stationery generally looks tacky.
- Check all spelling, especially your prospective editor's or agent's name.
- No enclosures other than a single-page synopsis, ever. This includes cash, checks, photos of yourself in a bikini or Speedo (or naked), your or your best friend's suggested cover art for the book, your soundtrack for the movie, or even the mundane and usually reasonable business card (it's just one loose piece of paper someone else has to keep track of). Just the letter and the synopsis.

**You don't need to be memorable.
Only your words do.**