



# The Electronic Query Letter

by Mary P. Walker

**W**hat is a query? A query is a letter sent by a writer to a publication, to see if a proposed article might be of interest. A query letter is a writer's sales tool. It should include information on the proposed article, how it relates to the target publication's audience, a summary of the writer's relevant qualifications, and complete contact information. Queries have traditionally been sent by post, but there are several advantages to electronic queries.

### *Why query electronically?*

First, you save money. An e-mail query is virtually free and does not require expenditures on postage, paper, envelopes, or ink.

Second, you get a prompt response. When a writer sends a query letter to an editor, there are three possible outcomes—the idea is accepted; it is rejected; or it is ignored. With e-mail queries, writers are generally notified on a more timely basis than with mail queries.

Third, you establish dialogue with an editor. Maybe your idea for an article is not quite what the editor is looking for. Or, perhaps the editor is impressed with your qualifications and wants you to write something else. Most editors are not willing to enter into a letter or telephone discussion because these can be very time-consuming. With e-mail, however, it is easy for the editor to say, "I'd like an article on this topic, but with this particular slant. Are you interested?"

Fourth, you can send out more queries in a shorter period of time. An e-mail requires only that a writer compose the e-mail, proofread it, proofread it again and send. A saved e-mail query can quickly be edited and sent to another publication.

### *Where do you find the e-mail addresses of editors?*

If you have a copy of the magazine where you want to be published, check the masthead. It may list an e-mail address. Even if it is not the editor's address, go ahead and send your query. The ease of forwarding with e-mail makes it likely that your message will get to the right in-basket.

Many magazines have an online presence. If you can find the web site, a little surfing can yield an e-mail address for the editor of the publication. You can also use search engines to look for writers' guidelines.

There are many web sites that have gathered writers' guidelines of different publications, and often e-mail addresses are included. See [writersweekly.com](http://writersweekly.com) or other sites such as [newsdirectory.com/news/magazine](http://newsdirectory.com/news/magazine); [mav.net/guidelines](http://mav.net/guidelines) and [writerswrite.com/guidelines](http://writerswrite.com/guidelines).

### *Subject line of an e-mail query*

Be sure to put the publication name somewhere in the subject line of the e-mail query, for example, "South Florida Parenting Update to Pregnancy Discrimination Act." If you send 20 or 30 queries for an article idea, make sure you can track the responses. Chances are the responding editor will just reply using the same subject line. If you do not put the publication title in the subject, you may find it difficult to determine which publication is responding. Do not learn this lesson the hard way!

### *Doing business electronically*

If you plan to contact editors via e-mail, make sure you send virus-free messages. Purchase a good virus protection program for your computer, and obtain upgrades from the manufacturer on a regular basis.

Do not send attachments on your e-mail messages without prior permission from the recipient. Large attachments may be difficult to download, or the recipient's computer may lack the capacity to handle the file. Also, viruses are often transmitted via attachments, even unintentionally.

Like any new method of doing business, querying by e-mail will be a bit awkward at first. For information on protocols for e-mail and etiquette in electronic media, visit sites such as [bspage.com/1netiq](http://bspage.com/1netiq) or [fau.edu/netiquette](http://fau.edu/netiquette), or search for "netiquette."

E-mail greatly reduces the overall time and expense of querying. With a little care, query letters can become an easy and effective way for you to do business with editors. And, what writer would not welcome more business?❖

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