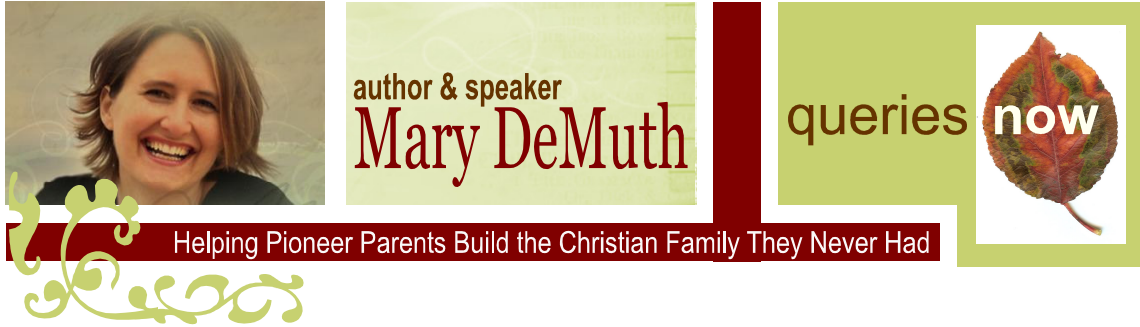


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## Queries Now: You can write one today!

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### What is a Query?

- It rhymes with scary! (Or eerie, depending on how you say it.)
- Seriously though, a query is a business letter sent to a magazine, newspaper, publishing entity that pitches your story or book idea to an acquisition or managing editor or to a literary agent. You send a query instead of a manuscript.

### Why Query?

- Most editors will not accept unsolicited manuscripts.
- It saves time. They ensure “that you don’t invest time and energy into writing an article that won’t be accepted.” Moira Allen, *The Writer’s Handbook 2003*
- It’s easier to secure interviews when you can say, “I’ve been assigned an article by *Marriage Partnership*. Would you be interested in being interviewed for my story about fighting fair?”
- It helps you forge a relationship with an editor...an editor that can give you feedback, help focus your article, hem you in with a word count, or suggest possible sidebars.

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- You have the chance to show an editor your unique writing style, to illuminate your credentials, and to demonstrate your professionalism and reliability.
- Once you've written an excellent query, if the editor likes it, you are farther along than if you had sloppily put it together.

## Should I write the article first and then query?

- *Writer's Digest* tackled the pros and cons of this practice.
- YES: Patricia Lorenz says it is easier for her to write a piece from her passion and then query. Querying quells her creativity.
- NO: Jennifer Nelson says it's better to query first so you don't waste time and you can develop a story the way an editor wants it, eliminating re-writes.

## When Not to Query

- Humor pieces are normally just submitted as is.
- You've already spoken with an editor and they have given you a verbal go-ahead to submit something. (Be sure you write Attention: So and So, and briefly remind them what you've spoken about. On the outer envelope write: Requested Materials to ensure it won't get stuffed in the slush pile.)

## Surefire ways to end up in the Editor's Circular File

- Be chatty and overly personal. "Hi my name is Mary DeMuth and I really love to write."
- Confess your lack of familiarity with a magazine. "I don't know much about *Popular Mechanics*, but I'd sure love to write for you."
- Request writer's guidelines in the body of your query letter. You should already have done that, and this demonstrates your inexperience. (Check a writer's market guide or a publication's web site for guidelines.)
- Have a crabby tone. Some have said we write because we are angry, but an angry tone doesn't work well for *Good Housekeeping*. If you have to rage against the machine, perhaps *Anarchy Today* would be a better fit!
- Be lazy and say, "Dear Editor:" Find out the MANAGING editor's name. Sandi Glahn, editor of Dallas Seminary's *Kindred Spirit*, received a recent query that said, "Dear Sir:"
- Ramble on and on, without a point. (You don't want to sound like Charlie Brown's teacher, do you? "Blah blah blah blah-blah blah.") A query letter should be one page long, single spaced, and convey your point succinctly.
- Use the shotgun approach, sending article ideas to unrelated magazines. "Dear *Better Homes and Gardens*, Would you be interested in a story about motorcycle repair for retired persons?"
- Be a brown-noser. "I've been a subscriber for 100 years and I just adore your magazine."

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- Sing a sob song. "I have never ever been published before, and you would be my first magazine. My children are starving, and I need the money."
- Sing a self-aggrandizing song. "I am expertly experienced to inform your readers. I am God's gift to print media. My article "Hamsters on Vacation" is perfect for your enlightened readers."
- Bring in quotes from family members or friends. "My mother keeps bugging me to get published; she says I write like C. S. Lewis." or "My pastor said I write with insight." or "My children read my short stories with interest and always ask for more."
- Have a query that looks like a seventh grader wrote it, with amateur language and spelling errors.
- Have True Confessions of A Rejected Writer be your mantra. "This article has been rejected 7 times. I am hoping number 8 will be my lucky number."
- Discuss payment. That is premature and presumptive.
- Misspell the magazine's or managing editor's name.

### Real Life Quotes from Real Life Editors:

- **On Knowing your publication:**
- "Know my publication and read the writer's guidelines." –Francesca Kelly of *Tales from a Small Planet*
- "I appreciate a writer that is sensitive to the publication's demographics and submits a story that targets readership." Karen Schmitt, Freelance Editor in Taiwan
- **On bothering:**
- "We're busy and we'll get back to you when we can. We remember the names of people who have bothered us and it's not in a good way." – Editor of an international magazine
- "Don't put me on your email distribution list." Pat Samples, *The Phoenix*
- **On Stunning:**
- According to John Wood, author of *How to Write Attention Grabbing Query and Cover Letters*, queries should be professional, novel, provocative, creative, focused and customized.
- "Nothing's more refreshing for an editor than to read a query that takes him completely by surprise." Betsy Lerner, *The Forest for the Trees*

### Agent Quotes:

- "The object is to stand out, to interest me and force me to ask for more. If the writer has correctly identified me as working in the appropriate field and makes the case, I'm going to look at more, then the drama will repeat itself as a proposal has to attract an agent or editor in exactly the same way." Terry Burns, Hartline Literary Agency
- "You will only have one chance to make a good first impression. A query letter has to peak my interest from the first line and carry through until the end of it. So many of these queries are not thoughtfully constructed to pull

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a positive response. Just remember, editors and literary agents are constantly operating like they are drinking out of a fire hose--looking for a reason to say no. What are you going to do to provoke a yes or better still--a phone call?" Terry Whalin, The Whalin Agency

## Query Now Tip One: Follow Format

- One inch margins all around. Classic font like Times New Roman or Garamond. 11 or 12 point font.
- *Italicize* magazine and book titles. "Quotes" around article titles.
- One page. Single spaced. Double spaced between paragraphs. This is not a hard and fast rule. Some editors prefer no spaces between paragraphs with indented (using the tab key) paragraphs.
- Include SASE (self addressed stamped envelope) Make it as professional as possible, printing it on your computer. I usually hand write the magazine's name in the upper left corner and a date.
- Send letter in a number ten business envelope. (Again, print it on your computer)

## Query Now Tip #2: Keep the correct elements in order.

- Date
  
- Your name,
- Title,
- Address,
- Phone,
- Fax, & Email address.
  
- Editor's Name
- Title
- Publication
- Address
  
- Lead paragraph. Catch the editor's attention in a lead. This should sound like the well-honed pitch you've developed, the kind you can say quickly in an elevator. The first sentence should be POW! Work on that first sentence until your mind cramps. It's the first impression you'll make. Ask your critique group to help you craft an excellent first paragraph.
  
- Body. The body can be one to two paragraphs long. Be succinct and to the point. Use bullets. For book queries: one way to garner attention is to do a brief marketing analysis paragraph, showing how your book is similar to others that are doing well, and yet how it fills a unique niche in the market you are writing for. If you know other well-known authors who have read your manuscript and agreed to endorse it, mention it here. If you're writing an article, this is where you detail what your piece will be about,

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- including the order, anecdotes, relevant quotes from experts, sidebar ideas, etc.
- Qualification Paragraph. List your publications, memberships, awards, etc. Be sure to detail your published work, if you have some.
- Closing request. Would *Name of Magazine* be interested in publishing "Name of Story"? I can have a copy ready for you by (list a date two weeks from now.)
- Thanks
- Closing. I like "Warmly." Type your name under the closing, leaving room for you to sign the query.
- Place for listing enclosures

### Even if I'm sending it via email?

- Absolutely! Keep a professional format even in the body of an email. Though I am published in magazines now, I still query editors with a proper format (unless we've established a deep rapport. I follow the editor's lead on this.)
- Err on the side of professionalism always.
- "If you're an agent looking to build a client list, then it's a numbers game and the faster you can get to a good project, the more likely you'll be to land it. I know I've taken on many a good client because I was timely in my response via email. I'm using technology to my advantage. In fact, I've taken on one client in my career who couldn't use email and wasn't interested in learning. Never again. My clients also need to be technologically savvy because that's how I operate." Kristin Nelson, Nelson Literary Agency

### Query Now Tip #3: Sell Your Article

- Digitize your photos by having your photo finisher putting them on CD. A selling point for an article can be that you already have photos available.
- Include sidebar ideas. A sidebar is usually a list of sources, a mini-article related to the larger one, or a vignette.
- When pitching an article, be sure it interests you. You will write better if you are passionate about the topic and your excitement will show through to the editor.
- Brainstorm experts you know who would add some relevant quotes. Be sure to mention those people when you query. "George W. Bush has agreed to be interviewed for my story about Texas politics." Now THAT would sell! (But you better know George!)

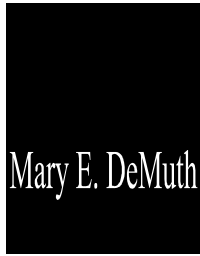
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- Use statistics. "One out of five women are raped in America" will show an editor the relevance of your story about avoiding date rape.
- Keep your focus. Choose one idea. "How to be organized 365 days a year" is too broad. "10 Ways to Organize Your Pantry" is focused.
- Similarly, editors seem to love numbers and lists. Use numbers like 5, 10, 100. Example: "10 Places to Kiss in Little Rock."
- Be sure the article has what editor's call "takeaway value." You should be able to show readers that there is immediate benefit to reading your article.
- Include well-written personal anecdotes. It is usually better to avoid personal victories. (Tell them your foibles!) Elevate others triumphs. It's a good way to stay humble.
- Use heavy weight (20 pound bond) or linen paper. (No colored paper, though) Create an interesting letterhead and have your envelopes match.
- Make use of proximity. An article sells if it is relevant to its geographic audience. Freelance writer Leslie Wilson sold a pool story to a family magazine in Florida. That same query would not do well in Seattle!
- Make sure the topic is timely. How AIDS started is old news. How it is ravaging the continent of Africa is timely.
- Show the editor you have done your homework. Know the bias from both sides. Study the opposition. Contact experts.

## But what about my novel or non-fiction book?

- Typically, you will query in this instance even if you've met with an editor at a writer's conference. The query should follow a similar format, except that paragraph two will have a one to two sentence summary of your piece (NOT an exhaustive summary).
- You may also include a brief marketing analysis paragraph.
- Usually included (after the query) is a bio, a two to three page summary of the piece, the first three chapters, and if it's a non-fiction book, an entire proposal Present it beautifully in a professional folder. You can purchase a tutorial on nonfiction proposal writing [here](#).
- If you have met the acquisition's editor or agent, be sure to note that in the letter. "It was so nice talking to you at Mt. Hermon last week..."
- If you are querying an agent, be SURE that you have done your research and that your book is a good match to the agent. You should detail this in the first part of your query with something like, "I am interested in you representing my book because my topic or style is similar to (title) by (author)." This shows you've done your research. It will save you postage too if you query only agents that "fit."
- Be sure to do this via e-queries too.

## Example of a Fiction Book Query:



Christ Follower



Freelance Writer



Novelist



Hameau des Princes,  
Villa 4  
Chemin des Princes  
06650 Le Rouret  
France

Phone: (In France)  
011-33-493-42-47-18  
(American line)  
214-432-7523

Website:  
[www.relevantprose.com](http://www.relevantprose.com)

Blog:  
[www.relevantblog.blogspot.com](http://www.relevantblog.blogspot.com)

February 28, 2005

Bob Editor  
The Coolest Publishing House Ever  
1313 Mockingbird Lane  
New York, NY 10053

Dear Bob,

Assistant District Attorney Jolie Nichols has a secret only her best friend Harper knows: Bobby Martin raped her. Although reluctant, she takes rape cases and works tirelessly to expand the statute of limitations for rape victims, yet she still keeps silent even when mysterious phone calls jar her awake at night. As her career blossoms in East Texas, Bobby's political career in Seattle flourishes, culminating in a bid for the U.S. Senate. Their worlds collide in Dallas, where Jolie fulfills her dream of becoming District Attorney and Bobby attends the Republican National convention. While there, he rapes again—in Jolie's jurisdiction. Will Jolie be able to bring Bobby to justice before his threats become reality?

*Statute of Limitations* is a legal thriller set in present day Texas. The fast-paced novel explores justice, the criminal mind, romance, authenticity, friendship and the redemptive plan of God. Told from Jolie's point of view, the reader experiences her reluctance to come to grips with the past, her reticence to trust fellow attorney David Sweetland in the present and her fear that Bobby wants to destroy her future. Woven through the narrative is God's winsome invitation to Jolie—His plan to make past, present and future new.

I have three books coming out in the next year. *Ordinary Mom, Extraordinary God* (Harvest House with Hearts at Home) was released in February, *Sister Freaks* (Warner Faith) will be released this summer, and *Pioneer Parenting: You Can Build the Christian Family You Didn't Have Growing Up* (WaterBrook) will be released February 2006. I was a weekly columnist for *Star Community Newspapers* (Dallas, TX: circulation 100,000) for two years. My articles appear in Dallas Theological Seminary's *Kindred Spirit*, *Woman's Day*, *Pray!*, *The War Cry*, *In Touch Magazine*, *The Answer*, *Discipleship Journal*, *Money Matters* and *Bon Appetit*. Last year at Mount Hermon Christian Writer's Conference, I received the Pacesetter Award.

Would The Coolest Publishing House Ever be interested in discussing publication of *Statute of Limitations* with my agent Silly String at The Cool Literary Agency? Enclosed are a synopsis and three chapters.

Sincerely,

Mary E. DeMuth

Enc. Synopsis, Three Sample Chapters

Creating Relevant Prose Since 1992

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## Example of an article query that Sold

(NOTE: This was originally on letterhead with my address and phone)

October 22, 2003

Editor's Name  
Editorial Assistant  
*Way Fun* magazine  
1313 Mockingbird Lane  
Omaha, NB 75555

## Re: Solving Problems God's Way

Dear Ms. Editor:

In our eleven years of marriage, we've moved seven times—each one with its own set of difficulties and joys. In seven months, we'll move again—this time overseas to be church planters. Along with us, sixteen percent of the American and Canadian population will move this year. Individuals move an average of 11.7 times in their lifetime, a stat our family will surpass.

Moving is ranked as the third most stressful life event. Through all the box-packing, mail-forwarding, utilities-connecting chaos, the Lord has taught me the importance of transitional dependence, depending upon Him when nothing seems stable.

In a 1200 word article entitled "Transitional Dependence," I will highlight several lessons the Lord taught our family for *In Touch* readers:

- It's when we're out of our comfort zones that we learn true dependence on God. Moving strips away at our self-sufficiency, revealing a God-shaped need. (Psalm 37:23-26, Isaiah 58:11, Isaiah 30: 19-21)
- Moving can be missional. In Luke 18, Jesus commends those who leave home behind for the sake of His kingdom.
- Relocating reveals your true home: heaven. In this world is instability, but in heaven we'll finally be truly home. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)
- Worry and fear are unprofitable during transition. (Matthew 6:33-34, Deuteronomy 31:8, 2 Timothy 1:7)

Currently, I am a weekly columnist for *Star Community Newspapers* (circulation 100,000). I have been published in *Marriage Partnership*, Dallas Theological Seminary's *Kindred Spirit*, *Woman's Day*, *the Writer's Information Network Informer*, *The War Cry*, *Discipleship Journal* and *Bon Appetit*. I've also received an Honorable Mention in the *Writer's Digest* 2002 Writing Contest. Alive Communications is representing my first two novels.

Would *In Touch* magazine be interested in publishing "Transitional Dependence" for its "Solving Problems God's Way" column? I can have a draft ready by November 14, 2003. Thank you for your consideration.

Warmest Regards,

Mary E. DeMuth



## Example of a Nonfiction Book Query



Mary E. DeMuth

*Christ Follower*

*Freelance Writer*

*Novelist*

Hameau des Princes,  
Villa 4  
Chemin des Princes  
06650 Le Rouret  
France

Phone: (In France)  
011-33-493-42-47-18  
(American line)  
214-432-7523

Website:  
[www.relevantprose.com](http://www.relevantprose.com)

Blog:  
[www.relevantblog.blogspot.com](http://www.relevantblog.blogspot.com)

February 28, 2005

Editor's Name  
Title  
Address

Dear Mr. Editor

Everything's extreme these days: sports, plastic surgery, remodels. Though Americans thrive on excessive novelty, many Christians sour on extreme faith. We'll jump off cliffs into a churning sea before we'll take a toe from the world of security to the world of risky faith. Why?

***Beyond the Precipice of Risk: Living the Adventure of Risky Faith*** addresses this question, exploring why Christians settle for safe lethargy rather than take extreme leaps of faith. Part exploration of the whys, part impetus toward change, this book serves to wake up those who are tired of business-as-usual Christianity. The book addresses reasons why we don't risk such as:

- ◆ The scandal of the hardened heart.
- ◆ The pitfall of our love of security.
- ◆ The trap of living for the applause of others.
- ◆ The addiction to happiness.
- ◆ The tendency to flee suffering at any cost.
- ◆ The propensity to live for an earthly kingdom.

Of the 15 or so risky faith titles currently available, none expose the reasons why we fail to live beyond the precipice of risk. None specifically address risk in the context of living with the Kingdom of God as one's heartbeat. Few deal with risky faith from a postmodern perspective—one aimed at those tired of cliché and pat answers. With strong sales of books like Donald Miller's *Blue Like Jazz*, ***Beyond the Precipice of Risk***—replete with authenticity, truth and candor—stands to make a strong showing on the Christian living bookshelf.

I have three books coming out in the next year. *Ordinary Mom, Extraordinary God* (Harvest House with Hearts at Home) was released in February, *Sister Freaks* (Warner Faith) will be released this summer, and *Pioneer Parenting: You Can Build the Christian Family You Didn't Have Growing Up* (WaterBrook) will be released February 2006. I have been a weekly columnist for *Star Community Newspapers* (Dallas, TX: circulation 100,000) for two years. I have been published in Dallas Theological Seminary's *Kindred Spirit*, *Woman's Day*, the *Writer's Information Network Informer*, *The War Cry*, *In Touch Magazine*, *The Answer*, *Discipleship Journal*, *Money Matters* and *Bon Appetit*. Last year at Mount Hermon Christian Writer's Conference, I received the Pacesetter Award.

Would Name of Publishing House be interested in contracting ***Beyond the Precipice of Risk***? Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you through my agent, Silly String at the Cool Agency

Warmly,

Mary E. DeMuth  
Enc.

Creating Relevant Prose Since 1992