

QUERY LETTERS TO DIE FOR

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Getting the gig

8 Characteristics of Successful Query Letters

Sell your idea and you

Must express confidence in your idea and your ability to write it

Must be written in tone/style of the magazine

Friendly

Convey a sense of your personality

A dash of humor

Addressed to specific editor

Cannot contain typos or spelling/grammar errors

Stage One

Think Like An Editor

Does this idea belong in the magazine

Have we run this before

Have our competitors run this before

Is this the best way to approach the story

Is this the best writer for the story

If this idea is not right, should we encourage this writer

Stage Two

Query Formula (consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative OW)

Traditional

one page

the hook

the pitch

the body

the creds

the close

SASE

Digital Age

email

content remains the same

it's still a business communication

Write it, rest it, proof it, send it. Do not Oscar Wilde it

Stage Three

- Give it a good home
- Know the magazine aka Cracking The Code
- Read the editor's page
- Read the masthead
- Which departments run each issue
- Word count of features, departments, shorts
- Staff and freelance written
- Tone of articles
- Advertisers
- Topics covered in last 6-12 months
- Illustrations and photos
- Submission/writer's guidelines
- Media kit
- No written contract
- Demographics
- Technical issues
- Personal issues

Simultaneous Queries

Reasons for Rejection

- Query sent to wrong magazine
- Query too vague
- Not enough to support an article
- Grammar, spelling, syntax errors
- Wrong style
- Just ran a similar piece
- Competitors just ran a similar piece

Paths to Success

- Develop a specialty
- Turn it into a book like *Fly Fishing for Western Smallmouth*

Query Sample without clips

DAVID PAUL WILLIAMS

PO Box 1455 • Bellevue Washington 98009 • dpwlaw@earthlink.net

January 8, 2004

Steve Probasco, Editor
Northwest Fly Fishing
PO Box 708
Raymond WA 98577

Dear Mr. Probasco:

Your presentation on Montana fishing at the Northwest Fly Anglers meeting prompted me to consider closer-to-home fly fishing adventures. Much has been written about the Yakima River, Washington's only Blue Ribbon trout stream, from the headwaters to Roza Dam. I believe the other part of the river, downstream from the city of Yakima, is a wonderful untapped resource. Recent news reports indicate this area may be threatened by the proposed Black Rock Dam.

I am a regular contributor to *The Flypaper* and other publications. I propose writing a feature article, consistent with *Northwest Fly Fishing's* Writers Guidelines, highlighting fly fishing for smallmouth bass, trout and carp in the Yakima's lower reaches. My research has revealed that even local fly fishing professionals are unaware of fishing seasons and locales on the lower river. I will interview local guides and experts and discuss the impact the dam would have on the river as part of the article.

I landed my first fly-caught trout in 1959 and have fished throughout Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. I tie my own flies and love to create new patterns. As a lawyer, I clearly understand both time and word constraints. My writing includes humor pieces with a fly fishing theme and feature articles targeting flyfishing for tiger muskies and walleye as well as trout and salmon.

Thank you for your consideration. A SASE is enclosed for your response.

Sincerely,

David Paul Williams
encl. SASE

Query Sample using magazine format
AMERICAN ANGLER QUERY FILE

Name: David Paul Williams

Phone Number: 425.463.6384

Story Topic: Bowfin on the Fly

Season/Issue: The season is open all year with the best fishing May through October Mar/April or May/June

Article Description: Sight fishing for bowfin, a fish that swam these waters when dinosaurs ruled the earth. Lake Champlain's flooded backwaters are the scene of this exciting fishery, though the fish are also found throughout the entire Mississippi River drainage. Bowfin are smart, aggressive, toothy, hard-fighting fish with most of the catch weighing up to ten pounds. I'll cover the fish, the fishing techniques and the gear that works.

Photo/Art Support: I've got quality digital photos taken July 2011 and can get more from a local Vermont guide.

Proposed Length: 1,500 words

Query Sample with Clips

DAVID PAUL WILLIAMS

PO Box 1455 • Bellevue Washington 98009-1455 • dpw@thewilliamslawfirm.com

November 19, 2007

Dave Precht, Editor in Chief
B.A.S.S. Publications
PO Box 10000
Lake Buena Vista FL 32830

Dear Mr. Precht:

Hard-striking, bull-dogging smallmouth in a river best known for salmon and steelhead? Where you say? Head for Oregon's Umpqua River, take your 6-weight rod, polarized sunglasses, a floating device, then brace yourself for non-stop action from bronzebacks which may exceed five pounds.

I propose writing a destination feature article with photographs, highlighting sight fishing for smallmouth bass on Oregon's Umpqua River. The Umpqua, widely known as a steelhead and salmon river, also provides superior smallmouth fishing in a beautiful setting. My article will cover the fish, the fishing and include informative sidebars that will allow your readers to confidently plan a successful trip.

In addition to writing for your magazine (Yakima River May 2006), my work has appeared in *Backpacker*, *Northwest Fly Fishing*, *Fly Fusion*, *American Angler*, *Game & Fish* and *Flyfishing & Tying Journal* as well as other consumer magazines and trade journals. I blog on Northwest Flyfishing for the *Seattle P-I* newspaper (blog.seattlepi.nwsourc.com/flyfishing) and teach magazine writing at Bellevue Community College.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to writing this article for *Bassmaster*.

Sincerely,

David Williams

Query Sample Travel Article

To: Rick.Blaine@casablanca.com

Subject: Article Query from David Paul Williams

Dear Mr. Blaine,

So many people want to leave Europe these days, but some governments make it quite difficult to obtain the necessary passes.

The I-need-to-leave-Europe-for-freedom trend currently sweeping the world at war is nothing new to Casablanca. Black marketeers devoted to lining their pockets on the misery and desperation of others are waiting in local coffee shops, nightclubs and gambling dens. Casablanca is full of inequity dens, their proprietors stuffing mattresses full of money from selling purloined travel passes.

I propose a feature article, supported by a soon-to-be iconic theme song, on how travelers who need to leave Europe can best accomplish their goal. I would focus on the three best travel routes and profile the three best black marketeers.

I am a Hollywood-based waiter and wanna-be screen writer. My work has appeared in the Morocco Convention & Visitors Association Guide, the North Africa Escape News and other well-known escape publications. Clips are available at www.escapefromtyranny.com.

Please let me know if you have any questions regarding this article idea. I look forward to writing this piece for your magazine.

Sincerely,

David Paul Williams

PS: If you're interested in an article about sandy deserts, I've got some great ideas about North Africa.

Template for Query Letter courtesy of Jason Brick www.brickcommajason.com

The idea is four paragraphs. No para should be more than 3 sentences long.

PARA 1: Drop some knowledge about the publisher, to prove you're courteous enough to have done some research before querying.

PARA 2: Talk about the idea in exciting terms.

PARA 3: Tell why you should write the article.

(sign off)

PARA 4: PS: offer an idea or two for other articles you could write if the first doesn't work.

EXAMPLE:

Dear Mrs. Duvall,

I've enjoyed *Pour!* Magazine's coverage of local city beer culture for years. I especially appreciated your in-depth profile of my home town Portland, Oregon last September.

Though Portland is Oregon's beer capital, the little coastal town of Astoria boasts a strong brewing culture and one of the largest brewfests in the region. I would love to do a profile for *Pour!* covering the local pubs and beer-centric events of this popular tourist destination.

As for me, I'm a freelance writer and beer enthusiast who grew up going to Astoria and wrote a guide of the town for Tourist Town Books. You can find my clips and testimonials at www.brickcommajason.com. Print magazines recently carrying my work include Northwest Travel and Amour Creole.

If the idea and my credentials match your needs, I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time. Have an excellent day.

Best,

Jason Brick

PS: If *Pour!* has interest in the harder stuff, I know a great bar in Washington that exclusively serves mead cocktails. It's a "best-kept secret" sort of thing that deserves some attention.