<div align="center">

The Zebulon

Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Writing Contest

Query Scoring Guidelines

</div>

The query letter is perhaps the most significant part of your submission. If it does not impress the agent, the rest of your submission will be discarded, as in real life.

Presentation

A query letter is a business letter with a special purpose: hook an agent, editor or publisher on your novel and make them eager to read the rest of your submission.

It must be in Business Letter Format and include author's contact information, agent greeting, a two to three paragraph summary of your story, and a closing. Proper grammar and correct spelling are a must.

Format

The query letter must be formatted as follows:
- Document must be in .doc format (not .docx).
- Single-spaced.
- Ragged right margin. Use left justification. Do not use center, right, or full justification.
- A one-inch margin all around (top, bottom, left, and right).
- Use 12-pt. Courier New or 12-pt. Times New Roman font only. (Be aware that many word processors do not default to these fonts.)
- **No personally identifying information**.

Required Author Information

To prevent bias in the judging of this contest, it is imperative that you do not provide personally identifying information in any part of your entry other than the online submission form and payment form. Do not use your real name in the query letter or on submitted pages. We will track your entry with a computer-generated entry number. Do not include any web site information or previous titles. **If any personally identifying information appears in the query letter, the entry will be disqualified.**

You must use the fictitious author contact information listed below in your query letter:

I. M. Writer
123 Zebulon Place
Colorado Springs, CO 80900
(719) 023-4568
imwriter@email.com

Virtual Agents

Each of our six virtual agents handles a different group of genres corresponding to our contest categories. Just like real-world agents, these fictional agents, created exclusively for The Zebulon, expect you to know your genre and submit appropriate material following their rules.

Read the agent's biography carefully taking note of his/her experience, interests and where you might have 'met' the agent before. Correctly spell their name and use the appropriate title (Mr. or Ms.).

Schuyler Haack (Middle Grade/Young Adult)
Taylor Heisler-Demyen (Mainstream/Literary/Historical)
Angel Riviera (Romance/Women's Fiction)
Yong Jo (Mystery/Suspense/Thriller)
Chris Mathews (Science Fiction/Fantasy)
Morgan Trzepacz (Urban Fantasy/Horror)

If you are uncertain of the appropriate category for your submission check out our handy online Category Guide.

The Summary Paragraph(s)

The most important part of your query letter is a brief (two to three paragraph) but compelling summary of your story and its protagonist. It is not necessary to include the ending. The tone of your summary should reflect the tone of your story. Does your summary make the reader feel like a story from your genre should? Who is your protagonist? What is the inciting incident? What are the stakes?

The summary should tell a mini version of your story. Do not bleed the life out of it. If it's dry or crammed with names and excessive plot details, the agent won't have a clear sense of the story. Think of the back cover copy that you see on published novels. These concise, engaging summaries are what entice agents to read more.

Judging Criteria for Query Letter

The query letter **will be disqualified** if there is any author identifying information, including the author's name, web site or previous titles.

The query must receive at least 80% of the possible points for the entry to move on to the next round of judging.

Scoresheet

Scoring:
- 5 = Outstanding; of publishable standard.
- 4 = Good; above average; needs minor rewrites.
- 3 = Average; needs some revision.
- 2 = Fair; some elements missing; shows promise.
- 1 = Recommend significant rewrite.
- 0 = Element missing entirely.

A note on scoring: Only if an element is entirely missing should it receive a score of 0. In all other cases, the minimum score should be 1, "Recommend significant rewrite."

Presentation and Basic Story Information Scoring: Ten points (one point each)

1. Business Letter Structure: Salutation, opening, closing.
2. Prescribed author contact information is included.
3. One page in length, single-spaced, with one-inch margins.
4. The font is 12-point Courier New or Times New Roman.
5. Proper grammar and mechanics are used.
6. There are no spelling errors, including agent name with appropriate honorific.
7. Genre matches agent (appropriate agent has been selected.)
8. Title of the work included.
9. Word count included.
10. Market knowledge (in the form of comparisons to other authors and books) and/or who is the target audience.

The Summary Paragraph(s) Scoring: Forty points (five points each)

1. GENRE. How appropriate is the story to the genre?

2. SETTING. Do you get a sense of time and place?

3. PROTAGONIST. Do you get a sense of who the main character(s) is?

4. PLOT. How clear is the plot or central conflict?

5. VOICE. Can you hear the author's voice?

6. TONE. How well is the tone or mood of the story represented?

7. SUMMARY. Does the summary have the right amount of detail (neither too cluttered nor too sparse)?

8. HOOK. Does the summary hook you and make you want to read more?