



QWC RESOURCE SHEET #18

Writing a Cover Letter

What is a cover letter?

A cover letter is the letter that accompanies your submission to an agent/publisher.

What should your cover letter say?

Introduce yourself in the first short paragraph, including any writing credits or courses you may have done. If you have a particular area of expertise or experience in the subject you're writing about, then say so: "As I was the captain of a pirate ship for fifteen years, I am eminently qualified to write a novel about a pirate captain". The next paragraph should be about your novel: specify the genre, length, target audience and a summary of the plot (a 'blurb') in one, two or three sentences – any further detail should be left for the synopsis (see **Resource Sheet # 17 – Writing a Synopsis**). In the next paragraph, you may like to mention what inspired you to write the book, and note any authors whose work is similar to yours. As a courtesy, if you're submitting to other agents/publishers, mention that as well.

What not to do

Do not be impolite or arrogant in your cover letter. Do not tell the agent/publisher how fortunate they are that you have chosen to send them your stunning work of genius. Even if it *is* a stunning work of genius, no one likes a show-off. Do not give ultimatums or deadlines – this will not entice anyone to devote much time to reading your submission, and may well result in the manuscript being used to line a birdcage.

A sample cover letter

Here's one we prepared earlier:

Dear Agent/Publisher,

I am a Brisbane-based writer of literary fiction [or whichever genre you write in]. My previous publishing credits include short stories in Island Magazine, Meanjin and Overland Journal – a full list of my publications is attached. I am a graduate of the Queensland University of Technology Masters in Creative Writing Program.



Please find enclosed a synopsis and three chapters of my novel, Imperfections, approximately 80 000 words in length. The target audience is most likely to be women in the age range of 30 and up. The story charts the journey of Louisa, an orphan from Outback Australia at the turn of the century, from her humble beginnings to her rise to become one of the richest and most powerful madams in Sydney.

I undertook the writing of this book after discovering some family secrets in old letters my grandmother had hidden away in her glory chest. The character of Louisa is based on my grandmother's mother – while she was not actually a brothel madam, there are certainly some dubious gaps in her history and I found myself thinking 'What if?'

This work will appeal to readers of authors such as Kate Grenville and Thomas Kenneally [or relevant writer].

The manuscript is disposable and the best way to contact me is via the email address or mobile number at the top of this page.

Many thanks for considering my work, and I look forward to hearing from you in this regard.

Yours sincerely.

A Writer

When addressing your cover letter, make sure that you go to the trouble of finding out the name and title of the person to whom the submission is to be sent – if you cannot be bothered to do some research, then why should the agent/publisher be bothered to read your submission? Check their website or their entry in the *Australian Writer's Marketplace*.

Other resource sheets you should look at are:

Resource Sheet # 17 – Writing a Synopsis; Resource Sheet # 6 – Literary Agents; Resource Sheet # 2 – Pitching to Publishers; Kate Eltham's Guide on How to Format a Manuscript.