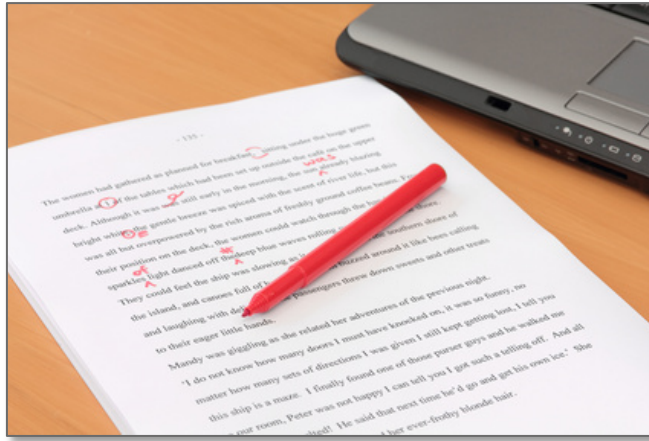




Emma Walton Hamilton's Guide to Manuscript Submission





Manuscript Submission Formatting

The following are the industry standards for formatting manuscripts for submission to agents and publishers, both for picture books and novels:

- **Standard white paper** – Don't even think of using colored paper...
- **Black ink** – Don't even think of using colored ink!
- **Double-spaced narrative text.** Always double-spaced. No exceptions.
- **Times or Times New Roman, #12 font.** (Arial and Cambria are okay too, but you're really safe with Times.)
- **1.25 inch margins on either side, justified left and ragged on the right.**
- **Paragraphs and dialogue indented,** with quotation marks around dialogue.
- **Title page** – a separate sheet attached to the front of your manuscript, which includes not only the **working title** of the manuscript and your name but also your **contact information, the date, and the word count**. Title and byline are centered, contact info, date and word count are on the bottom right. (The date is the last time you edited it, not the first time you sat down to write it.)
- **Pagination** – all pages numbered either bottom center or bottom right.
- **Footer including your last name, and the title of the book.** The reason for this is so that if your manuscript pages ever get separated in the editor's office they can be reassembled, and it's clear to whom the pages belong.
- **One staple** in the top left corner for picture books, a binder clip for novels.



Finding an Agent and/or Publisher

Authors need agents. Agents handle everything from manuscript submissions to contract negotiations and overseeing royalty statements, in exchange for which they take a 10-20% commission from your earnings. Most publishers do not accept “**unsolicited manuscripts**,” which essentially means “un-agented manuscripts,” or manuscripts submitted directly by writers. There are some exceptions to this rule, but they are few and far between. So your first task should be to try to find an agent to represent your work.

You get an agent the same way your book finds a publishing house – by impressing them with the quality of your work. So, when submitting your work to agents for representation you need to show that you can write, that you are dedicated, and that you are capable of writing more than one book – because if they take you on, they want to know that you’re going to have an ongoing relationship with them. (See “Cover and Query Letters” below, for details.)

You also want to make sure that the agent or agency is the right fit for YOU. It can be tempting to jump at the chance to team up with the first agent who expresses interest in your work, but it’s worth the extra effort to **research your options thoroughly and make sure that it’s a good fit for both of you**. Ideally this will be a long-term relationship, so choose wisely and well, and take the time to do your homework.

Most agents and publishers have very specific and strict submission guidelines, which are almost always posted on their websites. Unfortunately, it is NOT one size fits all.

Your best strategy for beginning your research is to pick up a copy of either:

- [Literary Marketplace](#) (best borrowed from the library as it is so large and expensive), or
- [Children’s Writers and Illustrators Market](#) (worth the annual investment to purchase the latest edition.)

These volumes are updated each year, and include comprehensive information as to names, addresses and submission guidelines for every publisher and agent in the industry that year.

Spend some time going through the manual and highlighting agents or agencies that seem to be a good fit for you or your manuscript. Then, **visit their websites to be sure that the submission guidelines haven’t changed** and that the information you’re working with is up to date. The annual turnover rate is very high in this business – it can be breathtaking how quickly agents and editors move from one house to another. And the guidelines as to what an agent or editor may be looking for at any given time can change just as quickly. So you want to be sure

that you're looking at the latest version of who is where and what the current guidelines are before you submit.

Another excellent – and FREE – resource is Querytracker.net. This site offers an extensive database and search tools to help you locate the perfect agent or publisher for your work, and also helps you to keep track of your query letters and responses.

When you're shopping for an agent, **it is expected that you will submit to multiple agents at the same time – just give them the courtesy of letting them know that you are doing so** by saying, “This is a simultaneous submission” at the end of your query.



Cover Letters

Whether you are submitting to an agent or a publisher, always include a cover letter with your manuscript. Keep in mind the following:

- **Be brief and respectful** of the agent or editor's time and expertise. Don't try to be hip, funny or bossy... a simple "Enclosed please find my manuscript for your consideration" is far better than forced cleverness or wit.
- **Define your market.** "*(Title)* is a chapter book for children ages 8-10," or "*(Title)*, a middle grade novel geared towards reluctant readers...." Or whatever it may be. This is a chance to indicate whether the book is intended for a general or specific audience. Only mention the this audience if it is indeed specific... i.e. intended for (boys, children with disabilities, etc.)
- **Do your homework on the other books in your genre or subject.** Conduct a search via Amazon or at your local library or bookstore. Find out who wrote the competing titles, what they're about and how well they are selling or have sold. In this way you can **include a brief paragraph about your competition**, pointing out that it demonstrates demand for your subject, but you should also speak persuasively about how your book is unique.

For instance, you might say "While bullying-themed chapter books abound, mine is unique in that it offers _____", or "In the perennially popular pirate genre, my book is unique in that _____".

- If you have hopes of turning your book into a series, say: "**This manuscript has series potential.** Other titles/ideas I'm currently developing include..."
- **Always include a self-addressed, stamped return envelope, even if it's not required.** This is known in the industry as an SASE, and is a matter of respect.



Queries

Some agents and publishers require a "query" first. In other words, you must first ask if they want to see your manuscript before you submit it. The query letter contains basic information about you and your manuscript, much like the cover letter, but is **sent without the manuscript**.

Some offices will ask for a few sample pages of the manuscript along with your query, others just want a synopsis (again, check the websites). Know which pages of your manuscript you would send as a sample if requested, but some agencies will specify exactly which pages they want, such as the first three chapters.

Don't be surprised to hear quickly in response to your query, but not to hear from them again for months once they have requested the manuscript. Saying "yes" or "no" to a query is much easier and quicker than considering a manuscript. Below are general guidelines for writing cover letters and queries.

First Paragraph: Introduction

- How you found/came to them (if someone referred you) .
- The name, length and genre of your book, and the target audience (if it's not obvious).

Examples:

→ *"I am contacting you at the recommendation of _____. I have written a ____ word (chapter book/middle grade novel), "(Your Title)," intended for (teenage girls, children age 8-10, reluctant readers, etc.)."*

→ *"I read on your website that you are looking for humorous picture books for boys, and I feel that my ____ word manuscript would be a good fit."*

Second Paragraph – Manuscript Overview/Synopsis

- Two to three compelling sentences that describe and capture the synopsis and spirit of your book, without giving away the whole story. Don't tell them how it ends – leave them wanting to find out more!

- Conclude with a sentence about what the theme is, or what the hero/protagonist (and readers) learns at the end.

Example

→ *“When Max is sent to bed without supper, his imagination takes over... etc. Finally, he learns that while being wild is wonderful, it’s better still to be loved.”*

Third paragraph – Marketing & Personal Info

- Any potential sales opportunities or outlets beyond the usual.
- If there are other books on this subject already published, mention them as a way of demonstrating interest in the subject, but also mention how yours is different.
- If you have previously been published, or have a degree, or any particular experience relative to the subject you are writing about, or are a member of SCBWI or any other writing organization that demonstrates your seriousness of intent, say so.

Examples:

→ *“In the spirit of the classic _____, “(Your Title)” is unique/offers a fresh twist in that it _____.*

→ *“While this is a chapter book, it holds crossover appeal for older audiences, and will appeal to the gift market/graduates/new parents/cat lovers.”*

→ *“This is a particularly timely topic in that....”*

→ *“Because of its subject matter, potential additional sales outlets for the book include (garden centers/pet stores/health clubs, etc.)”*

→ *“I come from a (mixed race/two mothers/coalmining, etc.) family myself, so I have personal experience with this subject matter.”*

→ *“I am a physical therapist, so I have a unique perspective on living with a disability.”*

Conclusion

- End with a simple thank you and acknowledgment. And if this is an exclusive or simultaneous submission, say so.

Example:

→ *“If this project is of interest, I would be pleased to submit it to you. This is a (simultaneous/exclusive) submission. Thank you for your consideration.”*

Know which pages of your manuscript you would send as a sample if requested, and make sure those pages (or, ideally, the entire manuscript) is submission-ready before you query.

Don't be surprised to hear quickly in response to your query, but then to not hear anything for months once they have asked to see the manuscript. Saying "yes" or "no" to a query is much easier and quicker than considering a manuscript.

And Finally...

Don't give way to discouragement, and don't take it personally, if you initially receive rejections. Many, many famous authors received multiple rejections before having their manuscripts published. Judy Blume was rejected for two straight years, Madeline L'Engle received 26 rejections before getting *A Wrinkle in Time* published, *Harry Potter* was rejected by 12 publishers... the list goes on and on. If you get rejections, it only means that a) your work is not right for that particular agent or editor, or b) you need to do more work on your query, or on the book itself.

Use any rejections as opportunities to strengthen your resolve, and to keep developing your writing and submission skills. Making a life as an author is one part talent and nine parts persistence. There's an industry saying, "Never mind the talent, do you have the tenacity?" That's really what it's about.

Good luck!



EMMA WALTON HAMILTON is a best-selling children's book author, editor and educator. She has co-authored over twenty children's books with her mother, Julie Andrews, seven of which have been on the New York Times best-seller list, including *The Very Fairy Princess* series (#1 NY Times Bestseller); *Julie Andrews' Collection of Poems, Songs And Lullabies*; the *Dumpy the Dump Truck* series; *Simeon's Gift*; *The Great American Mousical* and *THANKS TO YOU – Wisdom from Mother and Child* (#1 NY Times Bestseller).

Emma's own book for parents and caregivers, *Raising Bookworms: Getting Kids Reading for Pleasure and Empowerment*, premiered as a #1 bestseller on Amazon.com in the literacy category and won a Parent's Choice Gold Medal, silver medals from the Living Now and IPPY Book Awards, and Honorable Mention from ForeWord Magazine's Best Book of the Year.

Emma is a faculty member for Stony Brook Southampton's MFA in Creative Writing and Literature Program, where she teaches children's literature courses and serves as Director of the **Southampton Children's Literature Fellows** program and the annual **Children's Lit Conference** in July.

As the creator and host of the [Children's Book Hub](http://www.childrensbookhub.com) membership site, Emma provides resources, information and support for children's book authors and illustrators world-wide. She is also the creator of [Just Write for Kids](http://www.justwriteforkids.com), [Just Write For Middle Grade](http://www.justwriteformiddlegrade.com) and [Just Write For Young Adults](http://www.justwriteforyoungadults.com) online courses, and works as a freelance children's book editor.

To find out more, please visit <http://www.emmawaltonhamilton.com>.