

Guidelines for submitting work to publishers and agents
Some do's and don'ts of how to write a covering letter and synopsis

DON'T:

- Spell the publishers' or editor's name wrong
- Make grandiose and unsupportable statements: e.g. 'I have invented a new type of novel'; 'a tour de force'; 'this book is a masterpiece'; 'will single-handedly redeem Blackpool's tourist industry'
- Begin by slagging off other publishers, criticising agents, suggesting the only novels that get published are by young women from ethnic minorities, etc.
- Apologise for sending the editor your manuscript
- Use a self-evidently standard letter – you should tailor your letters to each publisher
- Paperclip a floppy disc to your covering letter – or any kind of disc!
- Send submissions in by email unless specifically asked to do so by publisher or agent
- Tell the editor that 'you have always wanted to be a writer'
- Invent your own endorsement quotes from people whose names are also humorous puns. If you want to include endorsement quotes from real readers then include their names and where they live next to the quotes
- Make statements with multiple exclamation marks!!!
- Write in an incredibly small font size, in letter, synopsis or manuscript.
- *Use overly fancy fonts, silly coloured ink or paper, present your work in a ring-binder*
- Send the publisher your vision of the cover design or a moody author photo of you
- Call novels 'fiction novels'
- Forget to include a date (the editor won't know when it was received and it could be put to the back of the pile)
- Send self-published novels (especially if those self-published novels feature a quote from one of our rejection letters on the cover ...)
- Strain to make every sentence a joke
- Swear
- Blow your own trumpet – self-aggrandisement puts us off, as does a superior, knowing tone
- Use covering letter to demonstrate the revolutionary prose style your experimental novel is written in
- Include a synopsis over two pages long – no need to describe *everything* that happens
- Send new, redrafted manuscript before receiving a response from the publishers. You should have done your editing work *before* sending your work out
- Send a redrafted manuscript to a publisher who has rejected it once (unless you've been invited to resubmit)
- Behave as if you're going to be nothing but trouble; you'd be better off encouraging the publishers to think you're going to be nothing but a pleasure to work with

Do:

- Pitch your letter specifically to that publisher – show an intelligent, up-to-date awareness of their list, their authors and their interests (if you've read one of their books and really like it, then tell them – they'll most likely be pleased)
- Find out what is it that they like to publish – and is your work likely to fit with that?
- Show your professionalism and ambition in your letter – a bad letter will undermine the integrity and appeal of your manuscript before the editor's even started reading it
- If necessary, make a preliminary phone call / email to check details and submission guidelines — don't send to people who aren't accepting manuscripts
- Check submissions guidelines and then conform to those guidelines
- Research and if possible find out the name of the editor you should submit to
- Write a one (two at most) page letter, explaining what you are submitting, why you think that particular publisher will like it, and offering some relevant personal details
- Make sure those details are *relevant* – be pleasingly individual but not self-consciously quirky (remembering that your credentials and success in another field or your generally extraordinary life don't necessarily mean you're a fantastic novelist)
- Remember that you want the publisher to be impressed by your writing but also for them to want to work with you – so be charming, polite, flattering, intelligent, purposeful, professional, but also be yourself and engage their interest
- Remember that the person opening the post will, most likely, have read it all before
- Include a SAE for return of manuscript. If you don't want manuscript back make this clear and include an appropriate SAE for a response by letter
- Include a SAE postcard or similar if you want receipt of manuscript to be acknowledged
- Include endorsements from other writers – and this can include rejection quotes from major publishers / agents if they are significant and positive enough
- Include any publishing history (including if you have been published outside the UK, for example), press cuttings, prizes, details of attendance of a Creative Writing MA, etc
- Ask someone you trust to be impartial and sensible to check your letter and synopsis for sense, accuracy, pitch and presentation
- Re-read your letter and synopsis, then throw what's rubbish away – and the exquisite too if it serves no purpose
- Use good quality paper and a printer with enough ink in it
- Double space or 1.5 space your manuscript. Number your pages. Use an elastic band. Staple together letters / synopsis if more than 1 sheet
- Put the correct postage on the envelope and make sure the envelope is strong / big enough
- Call if you've not heard back – but don't hassle
- While you're waiting, look for new ideas and ways to get your work known – readings, online, magazines, anthologies
- Be sparky and distinctive – be articulate and impassioned – be yourself and inspire the editor with the energy and commitment you have for your work