



# The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

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## Writing your bios: long and short

Creating a bio is the second most important piece of promotional writing authors have to do after getting a short description of their book down on paper. Why? Bios form part of your query letters and your proposals for fiction and non-fiction before acceptance of your MS and then, after you're published, part of your catalogue blurbs, introductions for readings, etc., as well as by-lines for articles you write for promotional purposes.

Bios are not resumes: they are usually written in narrative style and in the third person. A long one will be no more than a page and a short one – a paragraph, or even as short as one sentence. They have to be relevant to your writing career and your expertise on the subject of the book or article. Eg. I would not include my day job in physiotherapy unless my book/article was called "Geriatric Patients I Have Known."

Start with your one page bio as it easier to write. Make lists of your relevant credentials, special skills, awards and accomplishments, memberships, and publishing history. Look at examples (try mine at [www.beaconlit.com](http://www.beaconlit.com)) and then start writing. Use facts to promote yourself rather than lots of adjectives and adverbs, though a few judiciously placed can be effective. Brag a little but be 100% truthful. Now begin to tighten it up, cut out, and rewrite. Show the draft bio to your writer colleagues and ask for comments. Rewrite again. Finally, comes the question of whether to include a picture on a long bio – I think not for editors/agents but for my promotional packages, I do include a photo.

Short bios are demanding to write – what to include, what to cut? Start trying to describe yourself in two words: "Author, speaker."

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### From the editor's desk

Who's attending the 2001 Surrey Writers' Conference? I am! I have been talking it up for months because it is one of the best values for money around for writers. The SWC has earned a reputation for being the friendliest conference in North America and one of the most useful. Those of us who live in BC are very fortunate.

I had a computer crash in August and lost all my email addresses. If you received this issue in error, or in hard copy and think I've dropped you off my e-mailing list, please let me know and I will correct it.

Many writers are unnerved by the prospect of speaking to editors or agents and, because the SWC is coming up soon, I thought a short piece on handling this intimidating encounter would assist those doing it for the first time. I hope it helps and, if anyone has any more tips, please email me.

Julie H. Ferguson

## Your 15 minutes with an agent or editor...

With a dry mouth, a knot in your stomach, and white knuckles, you make your way to your first one-on-one meeting with an editor of one of Canada's premier publishers at a writers' conference. This is why you're here, of course, but it doesn't make it any easier. So here are a few tips to bolster your courage and to ensure a successful conversation:

1. **Prepare.** Pick the most suitable editors/agents for your work – do some research if necessary. Be able to enthusiastically describe your book in one sentence. *My book is about....* Practice saying it out loud...lots.
2. **Material.** Have a sample of your work for the editor to read that is correctly formatted – anything less and you create an unprofessional impression. (More than 50% of manuscripts handed over at conferences are single-spaced!) Make sure it is the very best writing you can deliver. Have a business card to leave behind you.
3. **Questions.** Know what you need to learn from this encounter. Write a list so you don't forget the questions and take it with you.
4. **DON'T HOG THE CONVERSATION** – nerves tend to make people babble and then you never hear the pearls of wisdom from the person you chose to meet. You only have 15 minutes...and it goes by surprisingly fast!

Take three deep breaths and go for it....

### Forthcoming events

- Sep 30:** **Word on the Street**, Library Square in Vancouver, 11-6pm
- Oct 19-21:** **Surrey Writers' Conference**. Meet Julie in the Blue Pencil Café for an encouraging discussion about your work and attend her workshops – “Writing Irresistible Query Letters” and “Getting Published in Canada....”  
Register at [www.surreywritersconference.bc.ca](http://www.surreywritersconference.bc.ca).
- Nov 1:** **Writing with Success!!** for selected Grade 9-10 students and **Writing with Power!!** for selected Grade 6-8 students of SD 43 (Coquitlam) at Winslow Centre, 9:00am-3:00pm
- Nov 17:** **Writing with Power!!** has been cancelled as I will be out of the country. Apologies....
- Feb 15:** **Writing with Power!!** for SD 42 teachers' annual conference. Location to be announced.
- Mar 2:** **Writing Irresistible Query Letters** (9-noon) and **Writing Online** (1-4pm) both at Johnston Heights School, Surrey's Creative Writing Diploma program, \$26.00 each. Call 589-2221
- Apr 9:** **Writing with Power!** for SD 42 teachers' professional development session. 4-7pm at the Resource Centre, Brown Street, Maple Ridge.

## Writing bios....

Then try to do it in a phrase: “*Leader of writing and publishing workshops for aspiring authors...*” Knowing who this short bio is for helps you to choose the key items to include. I often find myself tweaking my basic short bio to suit the “client.” Sometimes you need to include the means to contact you: “*Julie can be reached at....*”

The bio in a query letter is usually a paragraph, so you have a few more words to play with than, say, a by-line. This type of bio must clearly tell an editor/agent why you are the ideal person to write this book or article. It needs all the components of a long bio, but choose to use only your best credential, best award, best couple of publication successes, etc. If you have lots and feel the editor/agent needs to know, it's best to include them as separate attachments to both query letters and proposals.

Good luck!



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