



## THE LONG AND SHORT OF WRITING YOUR BIO

by  
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Creating a bio is the second most important piece of promotional writing writers and speakers have to do after getting short descriptors of their books/presentations down on paper. Why? Bios form part of query letters to editors, proposals, presentation flyers, websites, conference programs, catalogue blurbs, by-lines for articles you write for promotional purposes, introductions, etc., etc.

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 or speaking career and your expertise on the subject of your book or presentations. For example, I would not include my day job in physiotherapy in my bio unless my topic was about “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 of other writers/speakers bios and note what you like and don't like. 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 colleagues and ask for their comments. Rewrite and rewrite again. Then get someone else to edit it. Finally, comes the question of whether to include a picture on a long bio – I think speakers should and writers don't need to – but neither need offer a pic with a short bio.

The bio in a query letter to a magazine editor 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 why you are the ideal person to write this article. Short bios need all the components of a long one, but choose to use only your best credential, best award, best couple of publication successes, etc. If you have lots to say and feel the editor needs to

know all of it, it's best to include a long bio as a separate attachment to query letters. However, although I have 30+ years of experience, I never attach a long bio to my query letters because I have never found I needed to do so – my letter proclaims my writing ability.

Very short bios are demanding to write – what to include; what to cut? Start trying to describe yourself in two words: “*Author, speaker.*” Then try to do it in a phrase: “*Leader of creative writing 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.” Often you need to include the means to contact you: “*Julie can be reached at....*”

One thing is certain, writing good promotional material takes much time and effort but it is always worthwhile. When your bio is so good people start asking you to help them write theirs, you know you have achieved success.

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