



Publishing Nonfiction Books on Spirituality
benebell wen

MODULE 3
TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

My Query Letter for *Holistic* and Responses

The actual query letter I sent to North Atlantic Books (the publisher of *Holistic Tarot*) appears on page 2 of this handout. Note the date I sent it out—March 18, 2013. That was around the time I queried both literary agents and publishing houses for a book deal. All the query letters I sent out are similarly worded, though of course tailored specifically to the comparable titles that the literary agent has represented (or the publishing house has published).

Pages 3, 4, and 5 are rejection letters from other agencies and publishers I had submitted my book proposal to. I by no means have provided *all* the rejection letters I received. I'm only supplying enough to drive home to you the point that it's normal to get a bunch of rejection letters, perhaps enough to wallpaper your home office, and then not only land a book deal with an incredible publisher you love, but go on to become a bestselling and award-winning author. If it can happen to someone as ordinary as me, it can and will happen to you. If this handout conveys only one point, I hope that point is that I never gave up, and neither should you. You have to keep trying and believing.

Then—happy ending! (As an Asian woman given social context I should probably never say those words, like ever...) Page 6 shows you the response letter from North Atlantic asking me to send the whole manuscript for review and finally, the letter extending an offer for publication.



March 18, 2013

Acquisitions Board
North Atlantic Books
2526 Martin Luther King Jr. Way
Berkeley, California 94704

Re: Book Proposal, TAROTANALYSIS

Dear Acquisitions Board:

I was referred to your publishing house by [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] and hope that my 156,000-word manuscript, TAROTANALYSIS may find a home at North Atlantic Books. What's more, your company is headquartered close to me, as I live in Richmond and work in Emeryville. My husband works on Milvia Street in Berkeley, close to MLK, where you are located.

Please let me pitch to you why my book will be an asset to your company and how it fits with your listings. You have published in the tarot category before: the Sirian Starseed Tarot and also one of my favorites, Dai Leon's Origins of the Tarot (2009), which is cited in my book and listed in the bibliography. My comprehensive tarot reference manual would definitely add to North Atlantic Books' catalogue.

Comparative titles to my proposed book include: The Tarot Handbook: Practical Applications of Ancient Visual Symbols by Angeles Arrien, or the sum of Joan Bunning's Learning the Tarot (1998), Learning Tarot Reversals (2003), and Learning Tarot Spreads (2007), or Tarot for Life by Rachel Pollack.

Enclosed please find my Proposal for TAROTANALYSIS, structured according to your submission guidelines. I am interested in publishing my book with North Atlantic, as the closeness in proximity would permit the nurture of a close publisher-author working relationship. I hope to help promote your press locally in the East Bay and greater Bay Area while contemporaneously promoting my book.

I would like the opportunity to send you my full manuscript for review.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

BENEBELL WEN

Enclosures:

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Statement of Intention | Statement of Qualifications | Marketing Plan

Note: My original book title idea was Tarotanalysis. It was later changed to Holistic Tarot.

I had submitted a query to a publisher who said that my tarot book fell a bit outside the scope of what they publish, but that North Atlantic Books might be interested, and so the editor referred me to NAB. As fate would have it, NAB was one block from my husband's office.

The cover letter said 156,000 words, but the final ms I submitted was 203,608 words.

In retrospect, this is a poorly drafted query letter. Now I'm surprised *Holistic Tarot* got picked up for publication.

Here is a rejection letter from a literary agent I had queried. Although personal information has been redacted, this is a real, actual, bona fide rejection letter.

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Thank you for your submission of TAROTANALYSIS, but this doesn't sound right for me.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Another rejection letter from a literary agency.

I used my real name and noted by pen name, which is why you see the redaction there—for my real name.

This one isn't even from the agent—it comes from the agent's personal assistant.

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your query. [REDACTED] asked me to reply after he evaluated your submission of Tarotanalyses.

We're afraid your project does not seem right for our list, but thank you for thinking of [REDACTED], and best of luck in your search for representation.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Assistant to [REDACTED]

Another rejection letter. This one was also from a literary agent.

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Thanks so much for this query, but I'm afraid I'm taking on so few new clients at present that I will have to step aside. I wish you the best in finding a match.

[REDACTED]

Here's a rejection letter from a well-known mid-size publishing house that I'm sure many of you in the tarot world would recognize.

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Thank you so much for your query. Unfortunately, this does not sound quite right for us. Best of luck and thank you for considering us.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Nice and to the point!
Another rejection letter
from a publisher.

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Sent from my iPad

Thanks, but we will pass.
[REDACTED]

A rejection letter from
an agency.

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you so much for querying us with your project. Unfortunately, we did not feel Tarotanalysis was the right fit for our agency. While we are unable to comment personally on every query, please know we did give your work our full consideration. Thanks for thinking of [REDACTED] and we wish you nothing but the best in your writing career.

Sincerely,
[REDACTED]

Rejection letter from a
publisher.

I submitted query letters and book proposals for *Holistic Tarot* (then titled *Tarotanalysis*) between January and March of 2013. The rejection letters started coming in around April and May. Even after I had secured a book deal with NAB, I continued to receive rejection letters from places I had queried months earlier. Those kept coming in June and onward, though by then, who cared? I was with NAB!

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you so much for your query. Unfortunately, TAROTANALYSIS is not quite right for us at this time. Given how subjective this business is, I'm sure there are others who will feel differently. Best of luck as you continue on with this book.

Regards,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Oh, look! For a change of pace, here is an editor who actually wants to see more work.

Hold your breath!
Are you excited?!

To be continued...

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your query. Would you please forward a few chapters for us to take a look at?

Best,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

...and...

Three days later, the editor rejects the book.

Here is another publishing house many of you would recognize.

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your query. We regret that your project does not appear to be suitable for our list. Please bear in mind that every editor has different criteria for selection. We wish you success in finding the right publisher for your work.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

One more rejection letter just for fun.

There were plenty more where these rejection letters came from. But I think I've presented enough of them for you to get the idea. Don't ever give up. No matter who rejects you, keep going, keep trying, and keep believing.

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@[REDACTED])
To: benebellwen@live.com

Thank you for your query. Unfortunately we do not think the project is right for us.

We receive so many queries that it is not possible to reply in detail on an individual basis. We appreciate your writing and wish you success in your publishing career.

Cordially,

[REDACTED]

Recall the date I sent out my query letter to North Atlantic. It was March 18, 2013.

You'll see it took a little over 2 months to receive a response. That's normal. I'm pointing the dates out to you so you get a sense of timing for these things.

I recall sending out the manuscript the same day I received the editor's request for it. Yet another 2 months passed before receiving the informal publication offer. Again, totally normal, so when querying to publishers, give it time.

May 31, 2013

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@northatlanticbooks.com)
Sent: Fri 5/31/13 11:39 AM
To: benebellwen@live.com

Dear [REDACTED],

I'm an editor at North Atlantic Books - sorry it's taken so long for us to respond to your proposal! We're interested in your manuscript, but we'd like to see more material (or a full manuscript, if it is already written) to review. Please let me know if this would be possible.

All best,
[REDACTED]
Senior Editor

July 29, 2013

From: [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]@northatlanticbooks.com)
Sent: Mon 7/29/13 1:50 PM
To: benebellwen@live.com

Dear [REDACTED],

So sorry for the delay! Our reviewers in acquisitions were enthusiastic about the book and are interested in moving forward, though they did have some notes to share. First, one reviewer felt that it would be best to cut down on the number and/or complexity of charts where possible - we are now publishing ebooks of all our print books, and charts and tables can be extremely difficult to get right in ebook format. Do you think it would be possible to rethink some of the charts as lists or very simple tables?

Our second reviewer also asked if we might move away from using the term "Tarotanalysis" - simply calling it "tarot analysis" might be preferable, or we could explore other options. (Among other reasons, "TAROTANALYSIS" as one word is not very searchable, and our sales reps at Random House are constantly impressing on us the need to include common search terms in our titles, subtitles, and book descriptions!)

Please let me know what you think!

Thanks,
[REDACTED]