



WHY MY SLUSH PILE MAKES ME CRANKY

By Kate Epstein, cranky literary agent, The Epstein Literary Agency

Writers are supposed to be my sweeties, my *raison d'être*, the ones whose dreams I help make true. And they are. So why must their doppelgangers haunt my email box?

Herewith, how to avoid the deadly sins of email queries:

1. **Do your homework.** Email queries deserve all the attention that you'd give them if they had a stamp. If you can email, you can Google—please look at an agents' website before querying. I make it abundantly clear what I consider and what I don't. But people disregard that every day.
2. **One name in the to: box.** Seeing who else you're approaching looks sloppy and makes me personally really uncomfortable.

* Cranky meter on these two: high. It seems to me that these writers are just lazy. They're figuring they'll only tick off the agents that *don't* take them on. And that might be true. But think of it as paying into karmic debt: if everyone spent their time to save agents' time, once you landed an agent, she'd be less cranky *and* have more time to represent you in the way you deserve.

3. **Clarity.** Don't get so excited about your "platform" that you forget to clarify what your book is about. Platform is the buzz word in publishing at the moment, but the book is still the product.
4. **Kvetch elsewhere.** Don't make remarks about the industry and how it's the stupid industry that's not giving you a break. I'm sorry that it sucks, I really am, but this isn't appropriate or original. I have *friends* for kvetching sessions—so do you.

* Cranky meter on these two: medium. These betray ignorance, trying too hard, not laziness. But when you see enough people making these mistakes, you lose patience.

5. **Be careful when asking for advice.** You're asking for more of my time for free. Please be respectful, especially if I've already emailed you a no—that was my chance to give advice of my own volition. Sometimes I'll answer, but never if you're not polite.
6. **Don't imagine I'll care that you landed an agent or a sale after I said no.** *I* wouldn't have made you a sale, because *I* didn't believe in your book. And why do you care how *I* feel anyway?

* Cranky meter on these two: various. It depends on how rude the writers are. Some spring days, I find it downright funny that a stranger I declined weeks or months ago thinks it matters that I feel bad for doing so. Especially when I never will.

Isn't it nice that there are only *six* deadly sins of email queries? You don't need to know everything about how this is done, and your query doesn't have to be perfect. I'll polish off your diamond in the rough. But I'm not willing to chip off caked-on mud.