



# JERICHO WRITERS

Please find below an example report from one of our experienced editors: prepared with care and attention for a writer like yourself. Identifying details for the author, editor, and the content of the book have been blocked out or changed to preserve anonymous identity and the author's intellectual property. Please note that this is a sample used to reflect the quality of our editorial service. By nature of the service, as feedback is tailored to each individual manuscript, reports may vary in length and content. Wondering if this service is right for you? Drop us an email at [info@jerichowriters.com](mailto:info@jerichowriters.com) and one of our writer support team will be happy to discuss your options.

## EXAMPLE AGENT SUBMISSION PACK REVIEW

Please find below your commissioned Editorial Report from Jericho Writers.

This report has been prepared with care by your editor and will help identify what is working and give you practical and constructive advice on your next steps. We advise you to read the report carefully and then put it aside for a few days. After that time you may have questions so do remember that you have the opportunity to have a follow-up conversation (by email or phone) with your editor in order to understand better any comments made. This is all part of the service.

### INTRO:

During World War Two, Stephanie is sent by her family to the small village of [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] to stay with her aunt and uncle in order to hopefully escape the war. However, she finds poverty and fear and gets caught up in playing both sides, but, ultimately, leaves a fortune to her heirs, Larry and Emily, which [REDACTED], Jack, stumbles upon when he comes to work there decades later.

### GENERAL COMMENTS:

Thanks so much for letting me read this submission package. It raises lots of interesting questions concerning the ethics of collaboration and resistance and the way this history passes down the generations. I find the setting fascinating as [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Hence the moral issues posed by the necessity of survival are similar in my family to those raised here and, indeed, I believe most families have skeletons of various sorts, so I believe many readers would find the plot alluring, as well as the historical and geographical settings. [REDACTED], wrote a book on a similar theme called [REDACTED], concerning a woman who [REDACTED] to survive, and that was a bestseller, so there's certainly an appetite for this kind of novel (I'd recommend you read her!).

You write well too, which isn't surprising, given your profession, but, even so, I do think there's some more work to be done before submission on the sample chapters, but also the letter and synopsis.

I think the book is pretty much historical or literary fiction and the latter is particularly competitive so it's important to get this package as refined as possible to raise your chances of success.

elements, as well as suggesting some works on writing which may be useful to read, so hopefully you'll be able to apply these lessons to the next draft of the novel. I am also going to make recommendations to make your letter and synopsis more industry-friendly and to pack a bigger punch.

I feel hopeful for you though as your ideas are intriguing and there's elegance in your writing, but I'd start to send things to competitions and journals to try to build a rep, if you haven't already, as publishing is very risk-averse as an industry and agents and editors like to see proof that others appreciate your work.

I do like to encourage writers to get their MS as strong as possible though before sending it off as it doesn't serve anyone to send work out too early as we only get one shot with each agent or editor and it can lead to painful rejections which could have been avoided had authors waited until their MS was ready (I know this from personal experience!). You'll know the package is ready when you don't get standard 'We didn't fall in love with it' letters from well-targeted submissions and start receiving full MS requests and personal rejections.

I'd encourage you to keep going then, even if you need to 'rest' this project to allow you to come back and rewrite this book with more objectivity, perhaps working on another in the meantime as you gather your thoughts about this one.

I know from my own experience that it's frustrating to work on the same project over and over, but it is my job to look at any MS in order to assess whether I think a novel is ready to compete in the very cut-throat publishing world and so help my clients get their literary dreams. Though it's hard to rewrite, I believe it will be worth it in the end, as multiple clients of mine who got deals or even became bestselling authors had to rewrite their novels and submission materials. It's just part of the professional writer's life sadly, but I've found small tweaks can often make the difference between someone struggling for years to find representation and having two agent offers in a week, as in one case!

Stick to approaching British agents as it's hard to sell stuff in the US and vice versa. I'd definitely also get the word count down below 100k as the industry don't like taking a punt on newbies, but long books are even riskier as they cost more to edit and print. Plus I think the plot could be tightened up, as you'll see here, and that will help you both trim the book down and make it have more momentum as I don't think the text or your letter or synopsis are currently selling your skills or ideas as well as they could.

As I always say too though, I am not infallible, so trust your judgement as well – if I make a comment that does not seem to ring true to you, then I'd stick to your guns. Of course, if five people say you're a horse though, you need to get a saddle!

## **YOUR COVER LETTER**

The biggest thing to remember is that agents and editors are jaded and busy folks who often will only look at the first few pages or even the cover materials alone before making a decision about your work. Hence you need to polish them so they showcase your writing skills and experience and the strengths of your novel in a compelling way.

The letter here is too long then as you need to make this a standard page. I presume you know that you cannot simply say 'Dear Agent' as personalisation is key to winning their attention and don't use their first name or assume a too matey tone unless you've met them at an event and they'll remember you. Hence I'd remove things like 'Happy reading!' as a conclusion as this is a job application essentially and requires a sober professionalism, so go in stating 'I am seeking representation for a historical novel, TITLE (WORD COUNT).' Give a specific reason why you want

same submissions out willy nilly, but flatter their egos in terms of having done your homework.

Research and target your agents accurately – luckily, there's a lot of information online about agents and editors now, so find out how they like to be addressed that way or email their assistant if you're brave and ask. One I was recommended wanted to be called 'Miss'. Respect their wishes and style and make sure they represent books in your genre. You can mention authors on their list who write similar work to yours, but don't overreach!

After you clearly state what that you want representation, as above, then you can include comparisons, but pick two successful books, rather than the list here. You don't have the space here!

Then summarise your plot in a paragraph, before going on in the next to discuss your work-based writing experience and why you're an authority due to [REDACTED]. Try to get some literary stuff in here, if you've taken courses or have mentor or publications.

Then say that you're including whatever materials they want as it can be slightly different and close by simply saying you look forward to hearing from them.

## **SYNOPSIS**

These outlines are notoriously tricky to get right and you're on the right track, but, again, you need to get this down to a page, telling the full story, including the ending, in that space. It's tough, but it can be done. I find going through the text and picking out essential events and then drawing them together helps.

However, you also need to add the title at the top – don't use speechmarks for book titles or if you've put diary text in italics – plus your name, the genre and book word count. Also capitalise and put key characters' names in bold when you first mention them to make them stand out.

The main thing is to make the prose flow more, creating more of a sense of causality between events as, just as in the novel itself, the sentences here are rather staccato in form. You need the reader to get the connection between the narrative points here, as well as offering them more fluent text as this is a document which, like the sample chapters, shows your literary skills.

There's also the issue of clarity such as the opening point of how your heroine [REDACTED]. Then [REDACTED] complicates this more, so maybe make it clear she's [REDACTED] to survive or save her lover as this would make her more sympathetic.

The word 'resistance' seems wrongly spelt too and such errors could get you binned so check your work assiduously! Indeed, the link to the [REDACTED] seems unclear too and perhaps gilding the lily as why would the [REDACTED]? It perhaps is what happened in your wife's family, but tell the story which works best, rather than the truth, as it were. Fiction isn't life and things work differently on the page.

However, there's also confusion about why Stephanie is accused of the [REDACTED] and what often happens when we've worked on a text for a while is that we assume the reader has the same knowledge of the book as we do and we skip key steps, when they often need more handholding. It might also be an attempt to cut to the chase, but I think ensuring every significant event is well-depicted here and the text connects the narrative elements fluidly then this synopsis will become much stronger. The novel itself is clear in its action and has a good style, so it's possible for you to do this.

## **SAMPLE CHAPTERS**

maintains a positive forward momentum. The concept and setting is also very intriguing, as I mentioned above, and the narrative manages to be a meditation on the serious moral issues of war and collusion and what will we do to survive (which may be topical too when seeing some of the behaviour during this pandemic!).

There are some points I'd recommend working on though in the next rewrite and I hope that doesn't upset you too much, but editors are often more objective than authors (I find I cannot see the wood from the trees with my own work after a while!) and we are thus able to be a little more ruthless in the types of changes we demand! I also want to challenge you to make this book the very best it can be so nothing stands in the way of it reaching an audience who will enjoy it. Plus, as I said before, this relatively short excerpt has to impress the industry, out of hundreds coming through the office, so it needs to be top notch.

The first of these narrative issues involves the book's opening, which is obviously incredibly important in terms of attracting the attention of agents and publishers. They really need to be grabbed by the collar from the first paragraph as they may only read a few pages (at most) before deciding whether to request the rest of your MS. Hence, for pragmatic as well as storytelling reasons, you need to make the beginning as powerful as possible.

I think you do well to get to the trigger events as soon as possible, with Stephanie being sent to █████ and Jack's later arrival neatly mirroring that. However, at the present, the novel opens quite slowly, with the minor players being featured in Stephanie's thread – the people she's sent to their deaths – which makes us think they will either be the leads here, this possibly confusing the reader or making us think it's a different sort of book, or setting Stephanie up as a rather unlikeable anti-heroine, which is not what I think you intend her to be.

Indeed, when you do get to the main characters, you pretty much just focus on establishing the setting in both cases and a lot of novels seem to get refused by agents for being too 'quiet' and I don't want that to happen to you. There are hints of menace and trouble currently in both threads, but nothing particularly dramatic. I'd like you then to try to get to the key action point which really turns the two leads' lives upside down, as in starting to collaborate with the █████ and the discovery of the diary, respectively.

Use copy and paste if need be to rearrange events and experiment to see what has the most immediate punch. You're good at description, but we need action to get the industry's attention and that of the general reader too. There's a tendency in the book to delve into pastoral scenes (why does Jack need to go out for a drive?) and repetitive car talk and rented property issues when there are much more interesting matters at hand. Having Jack discover the diary before the entries start would make more logical sense too as then it's clear what the italicised text is.

You can always fill in the backstory, if it's really necessary, after showing the trigger events mentioned above, just so long as you establish the main text solidly enough first and don't drift off on long tangents. People who love French-set novels do like the romanticism of such settings, but novels need tension and conflict which are currently missing here as the war is encroaching, but mainly Stephanie has troubles with her clothes, hunger and her relations, but no big fights, and certainly the █████ only become a real presence at the end and may just want a car fixed! She's not met the █████ yet either.

Similarly, Jack is caught up in domestic matters mainly involving settling in and his landlord may be difficult and eccentric and suggest sinister things and he may see the man's wife █████, but it's all very polite and he meets his evident love interest, Emily, but even by the end of these sample chapters, he's not found the diaries, which is the real start of his story/ mystery hunt, I'd suggest.

why would a stranger care about these events? What does he want and why here? The same for Stephanie – I couldn't see her proactively going after a clear goal either and they both need to for the plot to have more purpose. Otherwise, the two main characters just passively respond to events, rather than having any energy of their own which would get readers on their side.

All fiction needs to essentially put leads up a tree and then cut it down! This makes narratives compelling as we watch characters going into scenes trying to get their goal, but failing and finding another thing to attempt, or progressing, only to find a bigger obstacle. It's key to insert conflict and make readers really wonder if the protagonists will succeed in reaching their aim, usually with a terrible event happening near the end which makes us think all is doomed, but then things usually turn around.

You've got lots of juicy opportunities to submerge the reader in dark aspects in both plots with [REDACTED] and a strange landlord with secrets and the sinister past Jack discovers. However, if you want to make this more of a tense mystery than the current cosy one, I'd definitely up the ante here in both narrative threads. Have a look at James Frey's *How to Write a Damn Good Mystery* and Evan Marshall's *Novel Writing: 16 Steps to Success* as he's great on creating compelling plots and interweaving plots, as well as structuring scenes for maximum effect.

Add drama and delve right into the story then and all the mixed emotions and ethical inner and outer conflicts the [REDACTED] collaboration issue – which is the core of the book - brings up in both protagonists and impacts their lives and relationships. Dive more deeply into their motivations so we understand your leads better as, at present, Stephanie seems a bit unsympathetic in her snobbery and we can easily see she'd collaborate to live better as she's used to privilege and not just out of desperation. Jack also needs to be more interesting as there are redundant scenes here over the house issues and car chat, as I said above, which are just circling over the same ground and now it's really time to get ruthless and make every scene earn its keep and your leads been more arresting so we cheerlead for them.

As well as more deeply considering *what they want and why*, your leads need to pursue these goals in the main ([REDACTED] encounter/diary exploration) and subplots (love) doggedly throughout. At present, the plot seems a bit repetitive and slow, in Jack's case especially, even as it's well-written in terms of the language on the whole, apart from a tendency again to include truncated sentences as in the synopsis, especially near the start. I also think I'd remove the footnotes as they're cumbersome and really everything you need to know as a reader should be included in the text in this sort of literary historical fiction. Exact numbers of deaths don't matter more than events and their specific impact on your leads.

Put your protagonists in the eye of the storm then – and keep them there. Have them directly affected by the war or their discoveries of the past. I'd get rid of purple prose, like the clichéd phrase 'azure sky' and add in more original language as this opening doesn't show your stylistic strengths well enough at the moment. There are unclear phrasings, like the use of 'sister' after Catholicism mention which might make us think of a nun! Plus, there are spelling issues, like 'jowels', and the author being VdB on the letter might be spelt out as it's no mystery.

A bigger thing is the importance of 'showing, not telling' in terms of 'ratty' dad on journey to insert conflict, for example, or 'edgy' village tension and the difficulties with Stephanie and her relatives and Jack with his landlord.

I've already said too that Stephanie is possibly unlikeable in her judgemental superiority and leads can have flaws to make them 'real', but I think if she's going to collaborate we need a noble reason why, such as survival or saving her lover. At the start, we think she would do it out of selfishness. Larry initially comes over as bumbling, if harmless, but then suddenly becomes nasty about his wife and daughter and snide to Jack and this needed evening out. Maybe have Jack facing this

seemingly hostile powers as Du Maurier so wonderfully captured in *Rebecca*.

I think it's also key to introduce key figures, such as the landlord and a specific [REDACTED], as opposition figures who are out to block your leads as they pursue their goals. Get them into the action as soon as possible to up the tension, but you might also bring in their love interests sooner too and any confidant(e)s to be their sounding boards and support. Do this preferably before these chapters close, but the book's drama will increase if you get the villains in near the start so the industry can see this is a page turner.

I'd also be careful at the start, as I said above, about how much backstory to include about different leads and them settling into the village. Some of it is possibly needed to show how they got where they are, but you could easily just present this in dialogue, so don't overburden the text with flashbacks or summaries about stuff which could be illuminated within the present narrative, such as establishing the setting.

Remove parts which aren't credible either – like just popping the car in the garage out of curiosity. Have his fancy vehicle break down and Emily come to the rescue. Who puts their car in one and pays up for the sake of it?

I think then that the next draft is the time to ensure you not only open the book with a bang, bringing the inciting incidents of Stephanie getting involved with the [REDACTED] up front (perhaps the car could arrive at the garage and it starts) and Jack finding the diaries there as well as maybe he now lives in a flat above it, but you now you also need to go through the MS with a ruthless eye, asking yourself exactly what function each scene serves and, if it's not propelling the plot forward or the book could stand without it, you're going to have to cut it or rewrite it so it's relevant. I know this is tough as all writers really work hard on each line, but you can usually recycle stuff elsewhere, but, if not, you will have learnt from writing it anyway, so there's no real waste – though it may sadly feel like it!

If you do this though, the plot will become more sleek and purposive and both narrative threads will echo each others' preoccupation with [REDACTED] and the price of collaboration neatly. Before you rewrite too then, you might list all the ways opposition figures might purposely or accidentally block their goals and how they can fight back as this is how you'll add more tension to the plot. You've got lots of great fodder here, after all. I could easily see why the [REDACTED] plus loving a resistance-supporting [REDACTED] would create conflict for Stephanie, but it just needed to be brought up front, but the stakes for Jack weren't clear as it's not even his family involved, unless he discovers the secrets of his landlord and the threatens his wealth and the man turns evil! He seems to want rid of his property though.

I also am not sure the current title works as it sounds a bit more like that of a thriller, so you might see if there's a line from the novel which might work.

As well as studying craft books as I suggested, it's obviously good now to read other novels which are similar and, indeed, taking courses or getting mentoring would help you finesse the MS and package more rapidly than by yourself and we can help with this creative and professional self-development.

If you can afford to have a full manuscript review after this next draft is sorted, I would advise going for that service so we know you are on the right track before you send the book off as my sense is the book as a whole needs tightening up in terms of its plot and tension. The other option is to just have a submission package report so I can check it over. I'd be happy to look at the next version, but I know sometimes a fresh perspective is useful too. We offer a ten percent discount to returning authors too.

with a summary, and comes with a deep-dive mentoring call to help you digest any suggested changes as well.

You might have a look at some of our resources before redrafting too to help you develop your craft:

<https://jerichowriters.com/hub/plot/>

<https://jerichowriters.com/a-question-of-timing-when-to-release-information-in-your-plot/>

<https://jerichowriters.com/hub/how-to-write/>

<https://jerichowriters.com/show-dont-tell/>

These might also be useful for characterisation:

<https://jerichowriters.com/character-development/>

<https://jerichowriters.com/creating-sympathetic-characters/>

<https://jerichowriters.com/character/>

<https://jerichowriters.com/how-to-write-villains-as-multi-dimensional-characters/>

I really hope these comments help you feel able to redraft this submission package and MS with confidence. Rewriting is all just part of the writer's life unfortunately and most books go through multiple versions before they are published. You should be very proud of your all hard work!

I'd suggest maybe having a break and work on something else for a while and let this feedback sink in before going back to this project as I do feel that helps drafts get stronger, but I know it's difficult to be patient!

Just email me if anything remains unclear after you've pondered this report for a while.

Wishing you all the best with completing the rewrites and getting the novel published.