

# How to respond to HARO requests

By Sandra Beckwith

HARO – “[Help a Reporter Out](#)” – is a free service that links journalists with sources. It’s a helpful resource for authors looking for book publicity.

Journalists fill out a form that lets them describe the article or segment they’re working on and what type of expert source they’re looking for to help them report the story.

HARO’s publisher collects these source requests – “queries” – and sends them to subscribers daily via e-mail. The queries are grouped by categories that include biotech and healthcare, education, general, lifestyle and fitness, and several others. The query titles are listed at the top of each HARO e-mail; click on the one that interests you and you’ll jump down to the full query.

All replies to queries go through HARO’s internal system rather than to a reporter’s e-mail address, which isn’t provided.

## 6 must-dos when you respond

I’m a writer who uses HARO regularly to find sources, so I know what works and what doesn’t. Here’s what works and will help ensure you get that interview that will help you land priceless, credible free media exposure, followed by what you shouldn’t do – tactics that will guarantee you won’t be interviewed or mentioned.

Here are the six elements to include in your responses to appropriate HARO queries:

1. **The title of the “query” you’re responding to in your e-mail subject line.** Every query has a title – for example, “Cheap, healthy holiday fare” or “How to keep employee morale up.” Copying and pasting the query title into the subject line of your message helps the busy journalist organize and track responses.
2. **Your credentials.** What makes you qualified to contribute to this article or segment? Why should the reporter interview you? In addition to summarizing your relevant expertise in one or two sentences, include a link to your bio on your website.
3. **One or two sentences that share your perspective on the topic or issue.** Maybe it’s your opinion, something counter-intuitive, or information that validates the article or segment premise. Try to offer a few thoughts that the journalist won’t get from the many others who are responding because offering information she won’t get from somewhere else helps ensure you’ll be included in the piece.



4. **Tips or advice when appropriate.** If the journalist seeks an expert and there's enough information in the request to offer tips, use bullets to present three or four.
5. **Brief anecdote when requested.** Sometimes, reporters are looking for anecdotes, not advice from experts. If you've got one to share, keep it brief, relevant, and to the point.
6. **Contact information.** This one is so obvious that it's often overlooked. Make sure you include your full signature with name, e-mail, telephone number, URL, and book title.

**BONUS TIP:** Don't include attachments. While HARO responders can attach files to their e-mail responses, HARO doesn't pass those attachments along in the e-mail responses sent to journalists. (Odd, isn't it?) If it's important to include the information, copy and paste it into the message.

### Don't do this

Many authors guarantee they'll never get an interview by responding with the following messages:

- "You should call me. I know a lot about this."
- "I saw your HARO ad. If you're ever looking for a source about (insert random topic unrelated to query here), call me."
- "Read the article at this link for my opinion about this. Feel free to use anything from my article in yours."

These responses are a waste of your time and the journalist's. If you can't be helpful and specific in your response, don't reply.

Finally, only respond to queries that are absolutely, positively a good fit for you and your book. Reporters usually get more replies than they need, so they can afford to be selective about the sources they interview and quote. If the topic is a stretch for you, you're wasting your time by responding.

*Sandra Beckwith is an award-winning former publicist who now teaches authors how to market their books. Three groups have recognized her BuildBookBuzz.com site as an outstanding resource for authors. Download Sandra's free "Top 5 Free Book Promotion Resources" at <http://buildbookbuzz.com/gift> and you'll also receive her free weekly newsletter loaded with book marketing tips and advice.*

