



## Do I Need an Literary Agent?

One of the great debates for aspiring authors is whether or not you need representation by a literary agent and – if so – how to get one.

### Pros:

Many publishers won't read unsolicited manuscripts, they prefer the tsunami of the world's creative outpouring to be filtered through a third party who will only present work that fits their genre guidelines and meet the standard of writing they demand.

Even if you find yourself a publisher, you'll soon be presented with a contract which you must have vetted by either a specialist attorney or an agent, both of whom should have the ability to renegotiate the terms of the contract. (An attorney will charge you a few hundred dollars; an agent will take a percentage.)

If you have hiccups with your publisher along the way, your agent can act as an advocate and resolve any issues that may be tricky to discuss directly with the author.

A good agent can help you improve your work. They know books, they know what publishers are looking for – and who is looking for what – but they also are the one to break the news that your title sucks, the first chapter needs slashing and the last chapter is cheesy. Better to know now!

### Cons:

An agent will take around 10% of your publishing income – writing is not the fast route to a glorious fortune, so divvying up dollars may be painful.

Some agents are cowboys. They're often ego driven, competitive individuals, which is great when they are working in your best interests, but they can be difficult to control. There are agents who rub the wrong people up the wrong way and do their clients a disservice sometimes actually losing them deals. Get recommendations!

### How to get an Agent:

Fastest way - get a publishing contract! Most agents will take on an author who already has a publisher because the toughest part of the deal is done.

Ideally get a personal referral or recommendation from an author friend. It's not something you can ask someone to do outright. The best strategy would be to ask your friend to read your work – if they think it's good, s/he will make the next move.

Or you can just cold call/write but make sure you have your selling hat on. Be ready with a practiced pitch and hope you can convince the agent to read a chapter or two.

I strongly recommend having the manuscript written and finished to the highest possible level; essential for a first time author. You need to impress an agent to get through the door – not just impress – dazzle!

There is a school of thought that if you have written one dazzling chapter you should rush out and find an agent before you ‘waste’ your time writing another twelve or twenty chapters. The problem with this audacious plan is that an agent may agree to read one chapter and then, if he or she likes it, you’ll get a call in the not to distant future requesting the entire book – doh! The agent is probably not expecting to wait six months or a year not even knowing if you have the intestinal fortitude to see the project through to the end.

### **What are agents looking for?**

It’s often said that it is harder to get an agent than to get a publisher – I’m not sure there are stats on that but I would expect it’s just as difficult. The first thing to realise is that publishers and agents are both in the same business - the business of making money from literary works.

I’m not suggesting that agents are grasping money-grabbers (although some may be) simply that this is what they do for a living. Whether they are a large agency or a one-person operation, it’s a tough job wrangling writers and lassoing publishers. It takes time and patience. They might love literature but you can’t live on love and you certainly can’t sell it to a publisher.

So, that is one thing to keep in mind: they’re looking for work of commercial potential. They are looking for an extremely high standard of writing in a story and genre that is of interest to them and a talented author who will go on to produce more saleable work.

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