

Do I Need a Writing/Literary Agent?

The answer depends on your book.

If you plan to go the traditional publishing route, publishing a fiction novel is often a long and complicated process. Traditionally publishing fiction novels is an insanely competitive field. An agent helps with the entire process, from getting your manuscript into the right publisher's hands to negotiating contracts and royalties. They are a vital and highly beneficial resource.

Nonfiction, on the other hand, comes with more options. You could self-publish without an agent and pocket more money. Or, you could hybrid publish – where you work with a few pros and do some of the work yourself. Many nonfiction books require each person you mention in the story to sign a waiver, however. True stories require permission.

Either way, agents are beneficial if you don't want to (or know how to) negotiate contracts, author rights, royalties, advances, and other fees. Industry experience is always helpful.

Finding an Agent for Fiction Novels

You can also find an agent for part of the publishing work or the entire thing.

Finding an agent from the start makes the process more comfortable but costs more money. If you go this route, you pitch your idea to literary agents, then hire the person you like to submit the book to publishers and so on. You do, however, pitch the agent and then wait while they offer the manuscript to publishers before you know anything final. The agent makes sure the submission is absolutely perfect.

Your other option is to send your book out to publishers yourself, which is called an unsolicited submission. Then, you could hire an agent to take on the marketing and negotiating of fees from there. This path is cheaper and can be faster, but it also includes more work on your part because agents may

already know which publishers are looking for your type of book. Authors can also only send out one submission to a publisher at a time, while agents can send multiple simultaneous submissions.

When to Send Inquiries to Agents

You're ready to start sending inquiries to agents when the novel is nearly complete. You want it to at least be in the final editing stages so that you have a nice-looking manuscript to offer out.

Not all agents require a completed manuscript, but it does make the process much easier and faster.

Traditional publishers need a complete book from the very beginning. Some agents may ask for only the first few chapters of a work-in-progress *if* they think it has high market potential.

If you pitch an agent first and hire them before the novel is complete, they can also help you finish the book. They might set a deadline for you to finish or motivate you along the way.

The Basic Steps to Hire an Agent

Steps:

- Write and edit your book
- Think about how your book fits into the publishing world and what agents may be interested
- Search around and start creating lists of 12 possible agents
- Write a single-page, short [query letter](#) to snag an agent
- Refine your agent search to your favorite options and target them by personalizing your query or cover letter to them
- Pitch literary agents by e-mail (which you can sometimes start when your novel is half done) OR send unsolicited submissions directly to publishers when the book is finished (if you want to take on the submission process without an agent)

- If pitching agents, the shotgun technique doesn't always work. Rather than blast all the agents you can with impersonalized queries, really look for the right fit. Send query letters to agents in small batches
- Start preparing your full manuscript or sample chapters for sample readings/follow-ups
- Follow the agent's submission requirements carefully. Most ask for at least your first three chapters, 50 pages, or 10,000 words. They may also ask for a 500-word [synopsis](#) or summary of your story
- Prepare for rejections and review how you handled the process/where you could improve. Remember, not all rejections are bad. They happen a lot for varying reasons
- If agents are interested, they will ask you to submit your full manuscript next
- If you don't hear back after six weeks, follow up!

Where to Start Looking for Agents

The best agent for you is someone who makes you feel comfortable. You should mesh well. Pick an agent who has interests and specialties that are a good fit for your book.

Look for agents who:

- Are open to new clients (newer, younger agents tend to work with newer writers)
- Have worked on similar books as yours
- Have worked with authors similar to your writing style
- Have worked with the appropriate publishers for your novel
- Have worked in your genre for a decent period (they have more industry connections)
- Is listed on the Association of Author's Representatives (AAR) database:

<http://aaronline.org/Find>

- Are vetted by online searchable directories, like <https://www.agentquery.com/default.aspx>, <https://querytracker.net/>, and <http://www.publishersmarketplace.com/>
- You could meet at writing festivals or conventions
- Is a [Publishers Marketplace](#) member (for more info on the agent's recent rates and interests, you must pay a subscription fee)
- Have established agent blogs, such as [Kristin Nelson](#), [Janet Reid](#), [Carly Watters](#), [Rachelle Gardner](#), or [BookEnds Literary](#)
- Tweet out ideas they want to see using the hashtag [Manuscript Wishlist](#), which is also now a website with agent listings
- Are listed on [WritersMarket.com](#), an agent listing website with a \$5.99/month subscription fee
- Is NOT listed on Writer Beware's [Thumbs Down Agencies List](#) or [Preditors & Editors](#)

A Few Last Tips on Finding the Right Agent for Your Book

Finally, there are a few crucial tips for finding an agent for your book:

- [The Guide to Literary Agents blog](#) is another excellent resource for info on hiring agents
- Explore multiple sources to learn more about an agent before hiring them
- NEVER pay a reading fee for ANYONE to read your manuscript
- Most agents get paid no more than 15% commission. You pay nothing upfront
- [SearchingForPublishers.com](#) and [FindPublishingHelp.com](#) are SCAMS – avoid them!
- If you think an agent might feel off, [e-mail Writer Beware](#) with the agent name, and they'll send you any info they have on him/her
- [Researching an Agent's Track Record](#) helps you learn how to find out more about agents
- Search an agent's name on [Publishers Weekly](#) for potential references

- Check out Jane Friedman's [pointers on how to tell if your agent is any good](#) and [The Complete Guide to Query Letters That Get Manuscript Requests](#)
- Before you sign on with an agent, read the Authors Guild's [an author's guide to author-agent agreements](#) and lawyer Susan Spann's [What to look for in a literary agency contract](#)