

FINDING THE RIGHT AGENT FOR YOU

1. The two biggest mistakes that writers make when querying or pitching agents:
 - Querying inappropriate agents or querying them improperly
 - Submitting anything but a polished, professional letter, manuscript, or proposal
2. The key to getting an agent—besides having a book that's ready enough and strong enough to be published—is *research*. This will take some time and effort on your part, and you shouldn't rush the submission process. Don't decide the fate of your book in a week of rushed submission sending.
3. Use market guides, such as *Guide to Literary Agents*, or Web sites such as PublishersMarketplace, to compile a list of 50 or 100 agents who could possibly represent you.
4. For each agent you consider querying, DO YOUR RESEARCH.
 - Does this agent represent your genre? Large agencies may accept all types of work, but small agencies may represent niche areas. Make sure that your work fits the agent you're approaching.
 - What authors does this agent represent? Do these authors publish work that's similar to yours?
 - What publishers does this agent sell to? Are these publishers that might be right for your book?
 - How many clients does this agent or agency represent? Do you want to be represented by a mega agency (or a big-name agency), with hundreds of clients and many connections? Or would you prefer a "boutique" agency, with only one or two agents, fewer clients, or less star status—but who may give you more attention on a daily basis?
 - Where is the agency located? While an agent can be located anywhere in the country and be successful, you'll find most agents in New York or California. If you're selling material appropriate for Hollywood, you might prefer to limit your search to California. If you find an agent far away from the publishing world (like Iowa), make sure the agent has connections to the NY publishing world and a strong record of sales.
 - Is the agent a member of AAR? Visit www.aar-online.org to find out. AAR members subscribe to a code of ethics and have to meet certain standards to join. Many agents choose not to be a part of AAR and run wonderful businesses; their track record should plainly demonstrate this.
5. To find the answers to the above questions, start with a reference like *Guide to Literary Agents*. Continue to expand your research with other resources, such as Publishers Lunch, Publishers Weekly, literary agency sites, and online writing sites. Be knowledgeable about the agents you approach.
6. Writing conferences are an excellent way to network with both agents and editors. Take advantage of appointment times and cocktail hours to learn more about agents for your work. You'll have a better chance with an agent if your material is specifically requested as a result of a pitch session or one-on-one consultation.
7. Don't pay fees to an agent unless such fees are associated with the cost of submitting your work to publishers (photocopying, phone calls, shipping, etc.). Never pay an up-front reading fee.
8. The "hungeriest" agents—the ones most receptive to your work—are those who have just started their own agency or those who have just entered the business as a junior agent at a large agency.
9. Remember: Never query unless you have a complete novel (or complete nonfiction proposal).
10. To understand how an agent's mind works—and read their real, uncensored reactions to real queries—visit any of the numerous blogs run by agents, such as Miss Snark.