

## How to Find a Literary Agent: Use the Write Bait

Most aspiring authors begin their careers with little or no understanding of how to find a literary agent to represent their work. They quickly learn that most major publishing houses only accept submissions through literary agents. So, with great anticipation they begin sending query letters to agents and, usually, meet with a cool reception, or even hit a high, impenetrable brick wall. We surveyed over 60 literary agents, from both large well-known agencies as well as smaller "boutique" agencies, to get a perspective on how authors can improve their chances of attracting an agent, and to find out the outlook for new authors trying to crack into the brutally competitive publishing industry.

We asked the agents:

What is the most critical mistake writers make when approaching agents?

What is the most common reason you decline to represent a writer?

Do you see the publishing industry becoming more or less favorable for new (unpublished) authors?

What Is The Most Critical Mistake Writers Make When Approaching Literary Agents For Representation?

Poor writing or poorly prepared contact letter

Inappropriate subject or genre for that agent

Author's hype, ego, arrogance

Uneducated about publishing process

Other

Poor writing or poorly prepared contact letter

It is curious that agents report they get so many weak query letters. A number of books have been written on the subject of crafting a query such as *Making the Perfect Pitch* by agent Katherine Sands. Numerous writers' conferences also cover this topic in depth. Once you see some examples of successful query letters, it isn't really that complicated to compose your own—and particularly compared to writing a 100,000 word novel.

Inappropriate subject or genre for that agent

The second most popular response to the question about critical mistakes reflects that the writers don't do their homework when selecting agents to contact. Sending a wonderful query about your amazing revolutionary cookbook, to an editor that specializes in placing mystery fiction is simply a waste of everyone's time. Some of their preferences (and prejudices) seem odd, even a bit nonsensical. In one reference guide an agent warned, "Don't send me any right-wing Tom Clancy stuff." Did this agent really mean to say he'd turn down the chance to earn 15% of the mega-royalties author Clancy has earned? This poor fellow should be seeking career advice, not dispensing it.

Author hype, ego, arrogance

Agents report that creative people oftentimes have big egos. Hard to believe, isn't it? Part of the problem stems from the author's awareness of how many other writers they are competing with for the agent's attention. The temptation to use hyperbole to differentiate oneself can be overwhelming.

A significant number of the agents warned against over-selling and arrogance. "Trying to act more like a sales person, and not like a writer," one agent said. "Hyping the agent. A straightforward recitation is much more effective." But others said the worst mistake was, "Not writing an engaging query," or, "Writing dreary query letters describing the plot of the book."

Now we're starting to get confused. Do the agents want an exciting query, or that "straightforward recitation"? Most likely they want both.

Uneducated about publishing process

The author who is truly talented and dedicated to the craft of writing has a clear advantage right from the start; the overwhelming response from agents was that the quality of many submissions they receive is poor. But the author who can articulate the market for his or her book is also way ahead. The author needs to think of himself as a small businessperson entering a new industry, not as a "literary artist." They must be able to address the question: Who is going to buy your book and why? Writers should not assume that an agent, or an editor at a publishing house, will automatically recognize the target audience for a book, or how large that audience might be.

Authors who can show they will be helpful and energetic in selling the book once it is published are particularly sought after in today's marketplace.

### About the Author

Dee Power is the author of several nonfiction books including "The Making of a Bestseller." Her latest e-book, "The Publishing Primer" is about [How to Get a Book Published](#) Visit and down load your free report "The Perils and Pitfalls of Publishing." Her [Dogs Rule](#)

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