

WHAT IS A LITERARY AGENT?

And do you need one?

A literary agent represents you and your book to publishers. For most authors pursuing traditional publishing, an agent is not just helpful, they are essential. Many of the major publishers will not consider unsolicited submissions from authors directly.

WHAT AGENTS DO

- Help you shape your proposal editorially before submission.
 - Submit to the right publishers and commissioning editors for your genre.
 - Negotiate your contract, including the advance, royalties and rights.
 - Manage subsidiary rights, including translation, audio and film and television.
 - Advocate for you throughout the publishing process, from acquisition to publication and beyond.
 - Advise on your wider career, not just the current book.
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WHAT THEY COST

- 15% commission on domestic (UK) earnings
- 20% commission on translation and foreign rights deals

You pay nothing upfront. Agents earn when you earn – if an agent asks for a reading fee or any payment before selling your book, find someone else to represent you.

PROS AND CONS OF HAVING AN AGENT

Reasons to seek an agent:

- ✓ **Access to major publishers:** Many large publishing houses do not accept direct submissions. An agent is your route in.
- ✓ **Editorial input before submission:** A good agent will work with you on your proposal before sending it out, significantly improving your chances of success.
- ✓ **Better deal terms:** Agents know the market, know what advances are realistic for your book and are skilled negotiators. Authors with agents typically secure better advances and terms than those who submit directly.
- ✓ **Rights management:** Agents handle the sale of translation rights, audio rights and adaptation rights, opening up income streams most authors would struggle to access alone.
- ✓ **Career-long support:** The best agent relationships are long-term. A good agent will advise on what to write next, help manage your public profile and advocate for you throughout your career.

Why you might not need one:

- **It takes time:** Finding and securing an agent can take months or longer. If your book is time-sensitive, or you have an established platform and a direct relationship with a publisher, going unagented may make sense.
 - **Some publishers – especially smaller, specialist ones – often accept direct submissions:** There may be publishers who will consider your proposal without an agent, especially if your book has a niche audience: academic, professional or specialist trade. Research their submission guidelines carefully.
 - **You give up a percentage of your earnings:** Commission is the cost of the service. For most authors it is worth it, but if you are confident in your ability to negotiate and have existing publisher relationships, you may prefer to go it alone.
 - **Not all agents are equal:** A bad agent can be worse than no agent: they may submit to the wrong editors, damage your reputation in the market or tie you into a contract that is difficult to exit. Take time to find the right one.
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FINDING THE RIGHT AGENT

Research carefully before submitting. In the UK, the two key resources are:

- [The Writers' & Artists' Yearbook](#) – updated annually, lists agents with their areas of interest and submission guidelines
- [The Association of Authors' Agents](#) – lists member agents and their submission guidelines

Always check an agent's current submission guidelines before sending. Some want the first three chapters; others want a synopsis or a query letter only. Requirements vary from agency to agency.

If your proposal isn't quite there yet, my Book Proposal Package can help. Find out more [here](#).