

# How to get a literary agent

by Pick Me Up

## 1. Don't send your manuscript to every agent in town.

"Write a really sharp one-page summary and a short letter explaining who you are and why you're the person to write this book. Then pick out a handful of agents who represent writers whose books you like and send it to them. The quality of your writing should be clear enough from a single page that they decide you're worth a second look. If it catches their interest, they will ask to see a few chapters or invite you for a meeting." - Dougald.

"When you write to an agent, always start by saying you've heard of them. Everyone likes to feel known, don't they?" - Lizzie

## 2. If they want to talk, you're already doing well...

"It's hard these days to get past the post box, let alone into the office." - Jonathan

"If you are at the stage of having a meeting, they really want to make it work as much as you do, so my advice is to stay positive and look for ways in which your interests coincide." - Iain

## 3. ...but make sure they're bona fide!

"I wrote a book a couple of years ago and got myself a kind of agent who then tried to get me a London agent. I proceeded to get rejected by about five different agencies before losing heart with the whole damn thing (the book now sits gathering dust)." - Stephen

"There are unfortunately a lot of disreputable and/or useless people calling themselves literary agents, so it is important to check their credibility. Ask who else they represent. What their recent successes are. What is their experience within the industry. And ask probing questions about the market for your work and how they'd pitch you within the industry." - Adrian

## 4. Remember, it's a two-way interview

"You are choosing the agent, and it is not the other way around, no matter how much it feels like it. There are many many fantastic agents in this country, and the first one you meet may not be right one for you. You need to find someone you can trust and you can

work with." - Adrian

## **5. Think long-term**

"My experience of getting an agent was that the most important thing, to them, is the knowledge that you're a long-term prospect, rather than someone with the proverbial one novel inside them... they're making a big investment by taking you on, and they need to know that you're in it for the long haul. They'll want to know what kind of books you like - whose career would you want to emulate? Whose writing do you admire?" - Jonathan

## **6. Don't sign your life away!**

"Don't sign anything in the meeting. You don't want to sign away your rights to sell your work or even show it to anybody else. Not until you see a big cheque anyway... Any reputable agent isn't going to mind if you get any contract or representation agreement checked out before you sign it. In fact, if anything they ought to expect it." - Adrian

"I got swept away with the excitement of a publishing deal (not via an agent) and the publisher ended up going into administration. Had I opened my eyes a bit wider, and done some more homework beforehand, I would have known to keep well away. Oh well, once bitten..." - Matt

"A really good agent will want to ensure that the relationship between you and them is on a good footing before locking you into any form of contract for representation. If the relationship is to move forward, there should be agreement at the meeting about some specific and time-limited actions to be followed up on both sides, e.g. you to submit another chapter or the agent to phone you with a reader's report." - Iain

## **7. Finally, remember what having an agent is about**

"The great joy of having an agent is that it's a very simple relationship; they're there to help you make some money out of your writing, and they'll do what they can to make that happen. It's a huge relief to share responsibility for that." - Jonathan