

Query First, Publish Later: The Art of Finding (Book) Agents

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ISBN & Publishing Strategy

Before buying an ISBN or considering self-publishing, focus on querying literary agents. Aim to submit your manuscript to 100 or more agents, understanding that response times can vary wildly—from six months to a decade. Consistency is essential: target at least 100 queries per year to keep your momentum going!



Standard Submission Materials

Most agents expect four core documents:

- **Query letter** – Your first impression. Keep it concise and compelling, introduce your manuscript clearly, and include a hook that makes an agent want to read more.
- **Synopsis** – Agents may request short and long versions. Summarize the plot, main characters, and conflict, including the ending, in a clear and engaging way.
- **Author bio** – Highlight relevant writing credentials, experience, or unique perspective. Give a sense of who you are as a writer, without overloading details.
- **Sample pages or manuscript excerpt** – Choose pages that showcase your writing style, tone, and story. Follow any page or word limits and make sure it grabs attention from the first line.

Submission Accuracy & Professionalism

Every agent has their own submission guidelines. Follow them meticulously—formatting, file type, subject line, and requested materials matter. Even a small misstep can mean your submission isn't reviewed at all, so treat each query like a professional job application. With strategy, patience, and attention to detail, you increase your chances of catching an agent's eye—before ever considering a self-published path.