

# FROM QUERIES TO ROYALTIES

Breaking Down the Journey: What the Average Debut Author Can Expect from Advances, Royalties, and Submissions

For aspiring authors, the journey to traditional publishing can feel like an uphill battle. From securing a literary agent to negotiating an advance and earning royalties, understanding the landscape is key to setting realistic expectations. Here, we break down what the average debut author can expect based on industry trends and statistics.

## ADVANCES: WHAT ARE DEBUT AUTHORS PAID?

The term “advance” refers to the amount of money a publisher pays an author upfront, based on the anticipated sales of their book. For debut authors, this figure can vary widely depending on genre, market trends, and the size of the publishing house.

### ► Typical Advance Amounts

Most debut authors can expect an advance ranging between **\$5,000 and \$15,000**, although this figure can be higher for certain genres like thrillers or romance, which have established audiences. Advances over \$50,000 are rare for debut authors and typically reserved for books expected to perform exceptionally well or for those acquired in competitive bidding.

### ► Payment Schedule

Advances are rarely paid in one lump sum. Instead, they're divided into installments, such as:

- Upon signing the contract
- Upon manuscript delivery/approval
- Upon publication

## KEY FACTORS IN SUCCESS

- 1. Marketable Genre and Concept:** Certain genres, such as young adult fantasy or psychological thrillers, tend to attract more attention from agents and publishers.
  - 2. Polished Manuscript:** Many debut authors invest in professional editing or critique groups to refine their work before querying.
  - 3. Persistence:** The most successful authors are those who don't give up after a handful of rejections.
- For debut authors, the journey to publication requires patience, resilience, and a clear understanding of the industry. Advances for first-time authors are often modest, and many books don't earn out their advances. However, securing a literary agent and breaking into the traditional publishing world is achievable with persistence and preparation. **By managing expectations and focusing on craft, debut authors can navigate the challenges of this competitive field with greater confidence.***

## ROYALTIES: WHAT DO AUTHORS EARN FROM BOOK SALES?

Royalties are the percentage of each book sold that the author earns after their advance is “earned out.” This happens when the book's sales have generated revenue equal to the advance paid.

### ► Royalty Rates

On average, authors earn the following royalties:

- **Hardcover:** 10–15% of the book's retail price
- **Paperback:** 5–7.5% of the retail price
- **E-books:** 20–25% of net proceeds (not retail price)

For example, if a hardcover book sells for \$25 and the author earns 10%, they receive \$2.50 per copy sold.

### ► Earning Out the Advance

Many debut books never earn out their advance, meaning the author doesn't see additional royalties. For those that do, it can take **6–24 months post-publication**, depending on sales performance.

## HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO GET A LITERARY AGENT?

Finding a literary agent is one of the most challenging steps for debut authors, and the timeline varies depending on factors such as genre, manuscript quality, and persistence.

### ► Submission Statistics

On average, debut authors send out 50–100 query letters before securing an agent. Success rates improve with strong, tailored queries and polished manuscripts.

### ► Timeline to Secure Representation

The time it takes to land an agent often ranges from 6 months to 2 years. Some authors secure representation in a few months, while others spend several years refining their work and querying.

### ► Rejections Are Common

Rejection is an unavoidable part of the process. Most authors face dozens of rejections before finding the right match, with some estimates suggesting that agents reject 90–95% of queries they receive.