

Frequently asked questions about agents – and answers.

What is the difference between a dramatic and a literary agent?

Dramatic agents generally work with stage plays, screenplays, television material, and musicals. Literary agents work with books.

What can an agent do for a writer?

Literary and dramatic agents market rights to literary properties. They may represent their clients with respect to literary work in these ways:

- Review an author's work.
- Provide an assessment of its quality and potential marketability.
- Offer editorial guidance.
- Suggest possible strategies for securing its publication or production.
- Advise about trends, market conditions, practices, and contractual terms.
- Establish contacts with firms and persons acquiring rights to appropriate types of literary or dramatic material.
- Market the work and rights therein, including negotiation and review of licensing agreements.
- If a work is licensed, monitor licensees' marketing activity.
- Review royalty statements and keep the author informed in financial matters

How can an author find an agent?

The first step is to detail the work(s) for which an agent is needed and the expectations or desires one has for them. From this, a short list may be assembled of attributes desired in an agent, which will be useful in assessing the viability of any suggestion.

Lists of literary agents, available [on this site](#) and in publications online or in libraries, notably Literary Market Place, can provide a pool of candidates. Editors, writing instructors or fellow writers may also provide recommendations. Common methods for evaluating an agent include the agency size, client list and areas of specialization or interest.

The normal first approach to an agent is through a **query**. The most common query method is by land mail, accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope for reply. Some agents accept queries by email; the AAR listing includes this information as well as the email, if usable, and sometimes suggestions of what to send.

A query is a brief letter describing the work. Brief. It lists prior publications, if any. Some agents accept a short, 25 or 50 pages of manuscript and an outline as part of the query. Materials should be unbound, neatly typed and double-spaced. Always retain a copy of your manuscript.

One may approach several agents at the same time, though agents expect to be informed if other agents are receiving the query.

The practice of charging for reading and evaluating outlines, proposals or partial or complete manuscripts has been subject to serious abuse. For that reason, the AAR [prohibits](#) its members from charging reading fees.

What is the author/agent relationship?

It is personal. Specifics depend on the nature of the work under consideration, the author's needs and desires and the agent's policies and practices. At the least, five subjects should be discussed:

- The particular works of the author, and the specific rights in those works, subject to the relationship.
- Any timeline or benchmarks that may govern its duration.
- The compensation or method of computing the compensation due the agent in relation to potential outcomes.
- The extent to which up-front expenses, undertaken by the agent, are to be reimbursed by the author, and the schedule for any such repayment.
- Since the relationship is, by its nature, both ongoing and fiduciary, arrangements must detail the agent's fiscal responsibility for funds collected on the client's behalf.

AAR affirms the individuality of each of our members. The association supports their freedom to act on their clients' behalf, subject to our [Canon of Ethics](#), and the client's freedom to act in protection of personal interests.

When does a writer need a dramatic agent?

When a writer has accumulated television or screen writing experience or after their work has been produced on stage, then it is a good time to seek representation from a dramatic agent.

What questions should an author ask?

After an agent expresses interest in representing an author's work, these questions should be kept in mind:

- How long has the agent been in business?
- Is the agent a member of the Association of Authors' Representatives?
- Are there agency specialists for movie and television rights? Sub- or corresponding agents in Hollywood?
- Are there agency specialists for foreign rights? Sub- or corresponding agents overseas?
- Will the agent handle the work personally?
- Will fellow staff members be familiar with the work, the agreements and ongoing status?
- How closely will the agent keep the author apprised of the work being done?
- Is there a standard agent-author agreement?
- Will the agent consult with the author on any and all offers?
- What is the language of the agency clause in contracts?
- With 1099 tax forms at the end of each year, does the agency include a detailed account, including gross and net income, commissions and other deductions?
- In the event of an author's death or disability, what provisions exist for continued representation?
- If agent and author should part company, what is the policy for handling any unsold subsidiary rights?

Agents will not be willing to spend time on these questions unless they have already expressed interest in the material.