



FREEDOM LINE CREATIVE SERVICES

Publishing 101

Everything You Need to Know!

RYAN M. PHILLIPS



Today's Discussion

- Novel Writing: Finding Your Niche
- Literary Agent vs. Self-Representation
- Book Proposals and Query Letters
- Going it Alone vs. Hiring an Editor or Ghostwriter
- Self-Publishing vs. Traditional Publishing
- Contract Negotiations
- The Publishing Process from Start to Finish



“If there’s a book that you want to read, but it hasn’t been written yet, then you must write it.”

TONI MORRISON

Novel Writing

Finding your niche and Unique Selling Point (USP)

Writing to meet readers' genre expectations is part of marketing your book. Almost all novels that make it to market fall within a standard genre or sub-genre.

12 Most Common Fiction Genres

- Science Fiction
- Dystopian
- Adventure
- Romance
- Detective/Mystery
- Horror
- Thriller
- LGBTQ+
- Historical Fiction
- Young Adult (13 -17)
- Children's Fiction (0-13)

12 Most Common Fiction Sub-Genres

- Hard Science / Soft Science / Superhero
- Ecotopian / Environment / Totalitarianism
- Survival / War / Spy
- Multicultural / Paranormal / Contemporary
- Hard boiled / Noir / True Crime
- Gothic / Psychological / Supernatural
- Action / Legal / Political
- Coming of Age / Urban / Religion
- Time Travel / Alternate Histories / Saga
- Amateur Sleuth / Fantasy / Comedy
- By Juvenilia / Picture Books / 2nd Person POV



STEP ONE: MAKE LISTS

TIP: Make a list of your fiction interests and your current knowledge base.

This is a vital first step in finding the right niche for you.

STEP TWO: READ. A LOT.

TIP: Read a popular example of the sub-genre. If you find a sub-genre that you 'zing' with, check back with your Interests and Knowledge Base list to see if it's a niche you'll enjoy writing for and can start writing for in straight away.

STEP THREE: RESEARCH-MONEY TALKS

TIP: Find out if authors are making money in your chosen genre or sub-genre by following these steps:

- On Amazon, go to Kindle Ratings
- Find a book within your selected genre or subgenre that is selling well. Kindle Ratings are easy to find.
 1. Make sure you're in the Kindle Store
 2. Search the book you want to check out by scrolling down from the Book Description.
 3. Go past "Sponsored products," and you'll hit "Product details."
 4. Have a look at the "Amazon Bestsellers Rank."
 5. Take the book's current rating and plug it into Dave Chesson's Kindle Bestseller Calculator to find out how much the book grosses per day from Kindle sales. This will help you determine if your genre or sub-genre of interest is commercially viable.

TIP: It's best to repeat the above sequence with a dozen or more books in your chosen genre or sub-genre to get a feel for how the broader field is doing.

Picking Your Genre

STEP FOUR: AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS

Genres and sub-genres are so **tightly defined by conventions and tropes** because that's what the readers want. Yes, readers are also open to having those conventions and tropes challenged and subverted. They're open to seeing their genres and sub-genres progress, become more sophisticated. But innovations still need to be within the firm confines of the established genre or sub-genre.

TIP: Immerse yourself in your chosen genre and sub-genre.

Listen to sub-genre fans on social media and other online communities to get a feel for their preferences and expectations. Decide from there what expectations you are willing and prepared to meet and which you will simply will not pander to.

Then, write your own definition of the genre or sub-genre that you can use as a touchstone

STEP FIVE: WRITING TO MARKET

If you've done your due diligence ahead of time, your story will organically meet reader expectations and you won't feel pressured to write anything you don't feel comfortable with just to keep your audience happy.

When you need to make narrative decisions about your novel, revisit your definition to make sure that what you're planning to write fits with the audience's expectations.

If it doesn't, either ditch that idea or come up with a really good reason why that innovation is progressing the genre or sub-genre and will be welcomed by the audience.

TIP: If you find you simply clam up when you think about all those readers and what they're expecting from your book, then that's a sure sign that you've chosen the wrong sub-genre.

Picking Your Genre



Write for You

I've written because it fulfilled me. Maybe it paid off the mortgage on the house and got the kids through college, but those things were on the side — I did it for the buzz. I did it for the pure joy of the thing. And if you can do it for joy, you can do it forever.”

- STEPHEN KING

Literary Agent vs. Self-Representation

WHAT IS A LITERARY AGENT?

A literary agent is a person who represents the business interests of writers and their written works. Agents work with new writers and bestselling authors alike, acting as business-minded intermediaries between creatives and book publishing houses, film producers, and theatrical or film producers. Agents generally are paid a fee of between 10 and 20 percent of sales that they help negotiate on behalf of the writer they represent.



WHAT DOES A LITERARY AGENT DO?

Good literary agents can be helpful on both the business and creative sides of the writing industry. Here are some typical responsibilities for a literary agent:

1. **A literary agent helps the client get work.** One key aspect of an agent's job is to know how to interface with book publishers as they negotiate publishing contracts. In addition to overseeing book contracts, agents help their clients get speaking arrangements and organize licensing deals, all while keeping track of payments from these endeavors.
2. **A literary agent reviews manuscripts.** A good agent will review their client's full manuscript, collection of short stories, or nonfiction book, offering creative insights and edits along the way. Reputable agents want to make sure the manuscript is in the best possible shape before submitting it to the publishing world.
3. **A literary agent puts together query letters and pitch packages.** Once it's time to submit the book to the traditional publishing industry, agents will help the author put together query letters, book proposals, sample chapters and marketing plans as part of an overall pitch package for the literary work. Agents will keep track of various submission guidelines and formats, which may vary depending on whether or not you're submitting commercial fiction, narrative nonfiction, or children's books.



BENEFITS OF HIRING A LITERARY AGENT

Working with the right agent or literary agency can make life easier for nonfiction and fiction writers alike. Benefits of having a literary agent include:

- 1. An agent can help land lucrative book deals.** Though it's possible to make money by self-publishing as an indie writer, your best shot at getting a big advance upfront from a high-profile New York publisher is through a literary agent. Most of the Big Five publishers won't accept unsolicited manuscripts—especially if it's the first book a new author—and are only looking for books with bestseller potential. Agents have the contact information for publishing executives, and traditional publishers have a familiarity with an agent's client list. This relationship can increase your chances of signing a lucrative book deal and make it more likely that your manuscript will make it to the top of the vast slush pile of submissions.
- 2. An agent enables you to focus solely on writing.** The business side of the writing can be complex and mentally taxing, especially if you're a first time writer who's new to the industry. Agents can tackle the tricky stuff, like negotiating foreign rights, subsidiary rights, and keeping track of royalty statements. An agent can also deal with the logistics of planning a United States book tour and hiring a publicist for your completed work. Having a dedicated teammate to help with the business aspects of the industry can free you up to focus on what you do best: writing.
- 3. An agent helps guide your career.** Agents work on commission, so they should be actively invested in your success. In a perfect world, you and your agent are partners, working in tandem to promote your career. They can offer you constructive feedback and advice as to the current state of the writers' markets. For example, if you're considering writing something in genre of fiction that is new to you—a thriller, a science fiction epic, a young adult romance, or even a self-help book—a great agent will encourage you to follow your passion while also advising as to the market feasibility and editors' appetites for certain genres. In a perfect world, your literary agent assists you during every step of your career, serving as a trusted adviser and honest confidant.

DISADVANTAGES OF HIRING A LITERARY AGENT

Literary agents aren't for everybody. Here are some potential disadvantages to consider before seeking out an agent:

TRUST: While the best agents can help shape your career, it's important to do your research before signing with an agent. One way to confirm that your agent is reputable is if they're a member of the Association of Authors' Representatives (AAR), an organization with a searchable database whose signatories promise to observe an ethical code of conduct when representing clients. Some agents charge a high reading fee in order to consider taking you on as a client—these agents are usually not reputable. Though it's not always possible to tell who is legit, you should stay away from agents who seem untrustworthy.

COST: Generally speaking, a literary agent will take around a 15% commission on your published work, which includes everything from audiobooks to film rights. This percentage is usually higher for things like translations and foreign rights sales. If you want to keep a greater share of the profits, you may want to consider self-publishing without an agent's representation.

WAIT: Publishing a book takes a fair amount of time and patience under any circumstances. However, literary agents can increase the amount of time it takes between completed manuscript and your book actually hitting stores. Submitting your book to an agent takes time. Then, you have to wait for your agent to go through the querying, pitching, and negotiating processes necessary to get a deal from a traditional publishing house. Since you're functionally submitting your book twice, you should expect to wait a while longer to see the finished product than you would if you went the agentless route.



HOW TO FIND A LITERARY AGENT



1. Do research. Before you reach out to any literary agencies, research them thoroughly and create a wish list of the ones you think would be the best fit for you. If your goal is to write commercial fiction, you need a literary agent who's well-versed in that particular market. If you want to create graphic novels, then you need an agent who has the necessary connections in that space to lead you to success. You're going to spend a lot of time communicating with the person you choose to represent your professional writing career, so it's best to get a feel for everything that's out there and make sure the agent you trust with your first book is an agent you can trust with your next book.

2. Check agent listings. There are a number of websites with databases containing lists of agents and community resources geared towards helping new authors find representation (or experienced authors find a new agent). Some sites let you sort by genre or keywords like narrative nonfiction, literary fiction, picture books, or science fiction to help you narrow down the search to find an agent in the right field.

3. Start querying. If the professional contact information of the person you'd like to be your agent is available, send them a query letter. A query letter is a condensed version of a book proposal: a brief, one-page letter containing all of the relevant information pertaining to who you are, what your novel is about, and who its target audience is. A good query letter is your ticket to capture an agent's attention—so keep it short and enticing; it's your best chance at standing out. Once you've hooked their interest, an agent may request to read your full manuscript. If they like what they read, they may make an offer of representation, which means you're that much closer to having your work out there.

4. Try self-publishing. It might be a long shot, but publishing your own work either in book form or online can also attract an agent's attention. If you attract the right audience, you may end up building yourself a fanbase, which can also amplify your presence in the modern literary scene.

TEN SITES TO GET YOU STARTED

1. ASSOCIATION OF AUTHORS' REPRESENTATIVES, INC.

aaronline.org

2. BABBLES FROM SCOTT EAGAN

scotteagan.blogspot.com

3. BOOKENDS LITERARY AGENCY BLOG

bookendsliterary.com

4. HOLLOWAY LITERARY AGENCY BLOG

hollowayliteraryagency.com

5. JANET REID, LITERARY AGENT

jetreidliterary.blogspot.com

6. MANUSCRIPT WISH LIST

manuscriptwishlist.com

7. PUB RANTS

nelsonagency.com/pub-rants

8. QUERYMANAGER

querymanager.com

9. QUERYTRACKER

querytracker.net

10. RED SOFA LITERARY

redsofaliterary.com

Self-Representation

Almost without exception, a literary agent is needed to even gain an audience with what is known colloquially as "The Big 5." They are:

1. PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE
2. HACHETTE LIVRE
3. HARPERCOLLINS
4. MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS
5. HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT

As a rule, they do not accept unsolicited manuscripts.



SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Many smaller publishing houses do accept unsolicited manuscripts, submitted by self-represented authors. Some things to consider:

- Every publishing house has submission guidelines.
- Be sure to follow those guidelines when submitting your unsolicited manuscript for consideration.
- Submission guidelines (even for houses that don't accept unsolicited manuscripts) are located on the company's website.
- Some publishing houses want the first few chapters accompanied by a book proposal. Some want only a query letter. Some will only accept hardcopy manuscripts with a SASE, while others will only accept electronic PDFs.
- Failure to follow the posted submission guidelines will almost always result in the rejection of your manuscript out of hand. So, be sure to do your research and adhere to all directions provided.

PITCHING TO
PUBLISHERS



Query Letters & Book Proposals

WHAT IS A QUERY LETTER?

A query letter is a way of introducing your writing to editors or literary agents and publishers. Writers use these letters to pitch their ideas to editors and publishers. In a single page, the writer aims to make the editor/publisher get interested in reading or publishing the entire story- that's how important the letter is to a writer.

The letter introduces the writer and their work to editors and publishing agents and draws their attention to the work. Besides, it promises the work will make them money. If your query interests them, they'll ask you to send the entire copy. Since the letter is critical to writers, you can't write a substandard letter. If you're not used to writing these letters, try to use a template or a sample to know what you should include in your letter.



What to Include

Things to Avoid

Since a query letter is an opportunity to market and sell your ideas and work, you must craft a winning ONE-PAGE letter. Some important considerations when writing the letter are:

- Previous writing and publishing experience
 - A brief overview of the novel
 - Other novels that are similar to yours
 - Why your novel is different
 - Reasons you want to work with this particular agent/agency
 - Your novel's market
 - A request to have the manuscript read
 - A self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE)
- Bragging
 - Wordiness
 - Doubts

SAMPLE QUERY LETTER

NICHOLAS SPARKS | *THE NOTEBOOK*

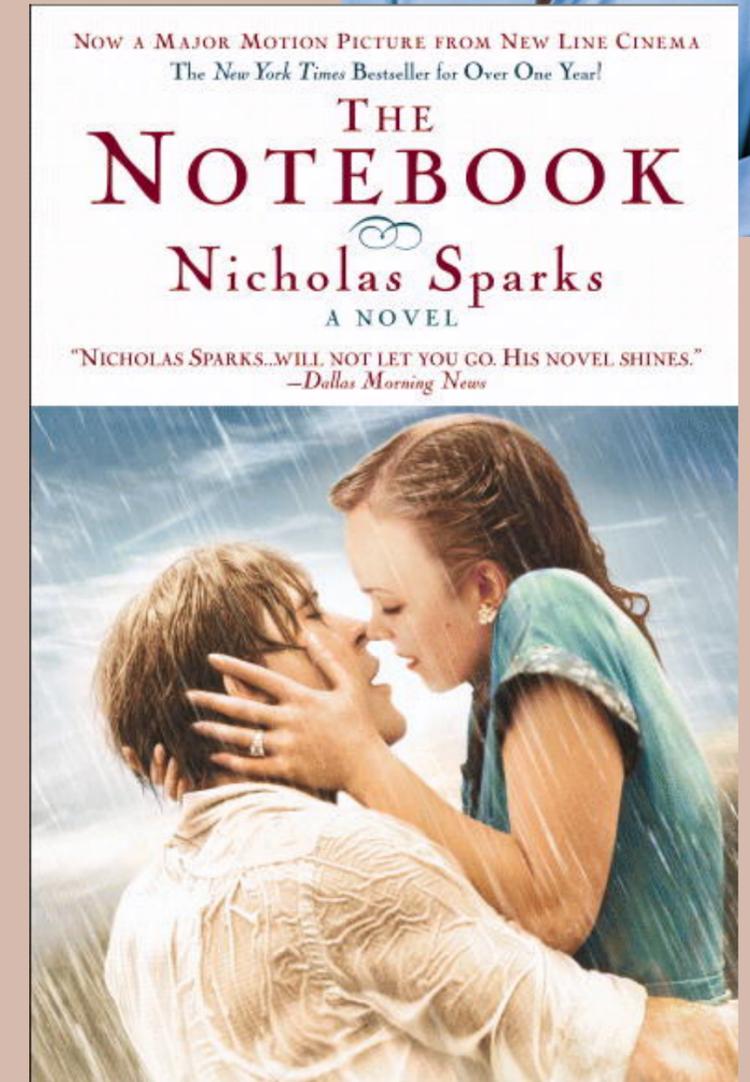
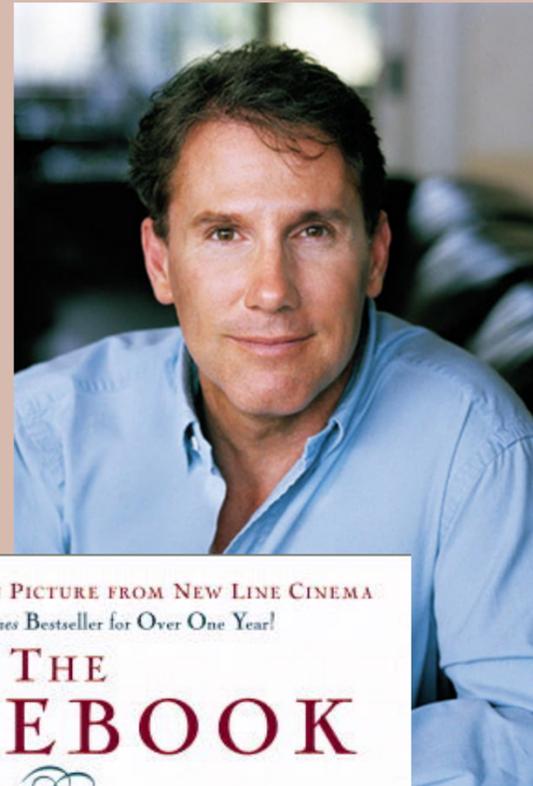
On his website, bestselling author Nicholas Sparks shares the query letter he wrote for his second novel *The Notebook*.

He wrote 17 drafts over two weeks and did his best to make sure every word counted.

<https://nicholassparks.com/for-writers/the-business-sample-query-letter/>

What he says about the importance of a query letter:

- A query letter is the first contact with an agent and is absolutely critical to getting a manuscript read.
- A typical agent in New York gets 400 query letters a month. Of those, they might ask to read 3-4 manuscripts, and of those, they might ask to represent one. The odds are tough, but not impossible.
- A good query letter is the single most important page that any unknown, unpublished author will ever write.





Book Proposal

WHAT IS IT?

The main purpose of the book proposal is to convince literary agents and publishers that there is a market for your book and that you are the best person to write it. Think of a book proposal as a business plan for your book. It has one purpose: to convince a traditional publisher to give you money to write the book. When you self-publish, you don't need to write a book proposal. To work with a traditional publisher, you are in effect asking them to invest a lot of money into your book, and a book proposal is the document that will convince them to do that. If you write a great proposal—one that convinces the publisher that your book idea, content, and marketing plan has a serious chance of commercial success—the publisher will make a monetary offer to you as an advance against royalties, and buy the rights to publish the book (and own the book and profits as well).

ELEMENTS OF A GOOD BOOK PROPOSSAL

NON-NEGOTIABLES

Title page
Overview
About the author
Chapter outline and TOC
Sample chapter
Competitive titles analysis
Target audience
Marketing Plan

OPTIONAL

Expected word count
Longer synopsis
Relevant stats and figures
Sales figures for previously published books

Should I Hire a Ghostwriter?

There are actually a variety of ways in which you can utilize a ghostwriter, and it all depends on your level of skill and comfort with writing and editing. If you are completely confident in your writing abilities and want to take on the bulk of the work yourself, you can hire a ghostwriter to simply edit, fine-tune, and offer advice on your work.

Or, if you are not so sure you have the ability or time to successfully write an entire book, you can hire a ghostwriter to draft it from start to finish. You can also simply give the ghostwriter your idea and let them run with it. For example, you set a deadline, they write, and then you get final say over the finished product. If you want to give them more direction, you can provide them with an outline and let them develop the book based on that. You could even provide a rough draft and have them revise it for you. There are many different levels of ghostwriting, so you can completely customize your own experience.



Traditional Publishing vs. Self-Publishing

Traditional Route

With traditional publishing, the author completes a manuscript, sends a query or proposal and their manuscript to a publishing house or agent. If the manuscript is first sent to an agent they will then send it on to potential publishers for the author, that is if they accept to take on the manuscript. Within a publishing house, an editor will read the manuscript and decide whether or not it is worth publishing. If a publisher does decide to publish the author's work, they will buy the rights of the author and pay them in advance for any future royalties. Royalties being the percentage the author gets from the retail price of their book. The publisher will then sort out all elements of the book including design, marketing and price.

PROS

- Gives you the confidence that your writing is good enough to be published
- Easier to get your books in stores and shops
- Have a professional team to back you
- Literary prizes are more likely

CONS

- Publishers take a percentage of your book sales
- Slow process
- Don't have much control over the process
- Only take on work that they believe is good enough
- Low royalty rates



Traditional Publishing vs. Self-Publishing

Self Publishing Route

This type of publishing is a little different. With Self-Publishing the author is the publisher. The author has full responsibility for the book from the proofreading, to the design, to the selling. The author is in charge. People/Companies can be employed by the author to do such things with the book but all funding for the book must come from the author or in some cases authors may take part in events such as crowdfunding.

PROS

- Have control over the whole process
- The possibility to make more money
- Publishing houses are likely to take more notice of self-published books
- Higher royalties

CONS

- Difficult
- Sometimes isolating
- You may find bookshops won't accept self-published books.

Choosing the right publishing route is down to you. If you have the motivation and dedication to create, market and sell your book then great. If time isn't a big issue and you feel you need more help then that's fine too. You just need to get a clear idea of exactly what you want from your book and what you are prepared to do.



Book Contracts

NEGOTIATIONS

Topics most often open for negotiation are:

- royalty v. flat fee
- anticipated royalty %
- anticipated advance
- expenses to be built in
- second use rights (including electronic)
- free copies of book
- cost to author to buy copies

SOME INSIDER TIPS

1. Specify gross profits over net profits
2. Make sure you retain ownership rights
3. Ask for a 'Revision of Rights' clause
4. Is there a non-compete clause?
5. Clearly define what each party can do with your work
6. Make sure you hold approval over licensing deals
7. Make sure your contract allows you to audit your publisher's books
8. Define a payment schedule with penalties for late payments.
9. Ensure that your publisher cannot assign the rights to your book without your approval.

Publishing from Start to Finish

1 PRODUCE THE BOOK

Write the book: Whichever publishing path you choose, ya gotta write the book. There are many processes and strategies, and it will look different depending on the author and their preferences.

Edit the book: Just like writing, there are several different processes and strategies available for editing your book. Ideally, you're going to go through multiple rounds of edits. For example, a lot of writers will edit their book in this order: developmental edits, line edits, and copy edits.

Cover design: You might do this in-house, or you might hire someone to do it for you. If you have the ability to invest in something, I recommend investing in a cover. This is your customer-facing element and a major marketing tool, so investing makes sense!

Interior format: This is something else you could do in-house, but you should consider your skill level and amount of time you're able to invest. Think about what you have more of: time or money. If you have more time, maybe it's worth it for you to learn to format the book yourself. If you have more money and less time, it might be worth the financial investment.

Publish the book: There are many options for indie authors to self-publish with. KDP, IngramSpark, iBooks, Kobo, and more. Each has different levels of accessibility, different learning curves, and different requirements. There are also differentiation between your publishing and licensing rights between them, so research carefully before making your selection.

2 MARKET THE BOOK

Build a platform: Possibly the most powerful marketing tool to sell your book is having an audience—your author platform—ready to buy it before you've finished writing it. There are many things you can do to build a platform for your book. Jenna Moreci's Skillshare class is a great place to start.

Book launch: The most crucial time frame to market your book is before and during its release. Don't miss out on this opportunity to hype the art you've been working so hard to create!

Book tours, book signings, conferences, panels, and other speaking engagements: It's time to get out there and be seen and heard.

Giveaways and promotions: Hosting giveaways on social media is a great way to build hype for your book and platform.

Advertisements: You might buy ads to run where your demographic might see them. For example, if you're writing romance novels for the age demographic of 40+ readers, a Facebook ad might be a great investment. If your target demographic is teenagers, a Facebook ad would be virtually useless (unless you're targeting their parents!).

Publishing from Start to Finish

If you think traditional publishing might be the right move for your book, let's look at the steps to do it!

1. Write the book.

2. Gather application materials. This includes:

- A clean manuscript of your book
- A strong query letter
- A high-quality book synopsis

3. Apply for a literary agent

4. Wait. Most of the traditional publishing process is spent waiting. Some writers can wait for months or years trying to snag a literary agent. You might even end up tossing your manuscript and trying again with the next one.

TIP: Try to use this time productively, like by working on your next manuscript!

5. Edit! If/when you find an agent, you'll go back and forth with your agent and editor to edit your manuscript over and over again, until it's right!

6. Market. Once your book is edited, you wait for publication. Again, this could be months or years, but once it happens, time to market. Unfortunately (and contrary to popular belief), being traditionally published does not guarantee that your publisher will market the book for you. In fact, they almost definitely won't.

Questions

THANK YOU!

It was a joy hosting this workshop. I hope you found it helpful!

Please feel free to contact me with questions or inquiries:

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