The Nuts and Bolts of Being an Author, Getting an Agent and Getting Published

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The Nuts and Bolts of Being an Author workshop was an especially useful guide to navigating the complex world of agents and publishers including tips on knowing when your work is ready to submit, identifying who to submit to, the advantages of having an agent, pitching, considering seeking publication overseas, and factors that may influence what becomes a bestseller.

Should I get an Agent or go straight to the Publisher?

If you are thinking about getting an agent, you need to think about these things:

- An agent takes your work to a publisher on your behalf who will always look at submissions from reputable agents.
- Agents will negotiate the contract for you. The agented contract is a much better contract and works in your favour.
- Agents might provide editorial feedback prior to pitching. Potentially that you could be sending out a higher quality manuscript than if you go straight to a publisher.
- Agents are a buffer between you and the publisher.
- A good agent will help you manage your career.
- If you do want to get an agent, you have to get one first before you approach publishers. The agent's job is to approach publishers and if you've already done that, there's nothing for them to do.
- The Australian Literary Agents Association website is the best port of call if you want an Australian agent.
- Publisher's Marketplace is the US website that is on subscription and every day new deals are announced.
- Publisher's Lunch is for UK publishers.

If you are thinking of making a direct approach to a publisher, you need to think about these things:

- Unsolicited manuscripts go into a slush pile and won't get read until there's time. They usually get 20 a week, 1,000 per year. Agents get fewer pitches.
- You will need to negotiate your contract directly with the publisher and decide what rights you do and don't want to sell, and decide how much those rights are worth.
- You don't have a third party to give you advice, and there is a lot to publishing — it's more complex than you first realise.

Australian or International Agent?

- Where do you think you will sell the most books?
- Sci Fi and fantasy genres are almost unsellable in Australia — this may be starting to change but it's slow. Thrillers do particularly well in the UK.
- It's much easier to pitch to an overseas agent.
- You don't have to go with the first agent who says yes — although of course you will want to! There's no point going with the agent who isn't right for you. Do as much research as you can!
- You may have different agents throughout your career.
- It's hard to know what kind of agent you need until you've had one.
- In Australia you can approach publishers by yourself. But not overseas.
- The agent isn't doing you a favour — you're paying them!
- The agent gets paid when you do, i.e. through advances and royalties. Never pay money to get published. This is a vanity publishing model and they won't have the contacts into the book shops etc.

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How do I find a Publisher?

- Look at the books you own, or browse in a bookshop for books in a similar genre.
- Check who has published them.
- Go to the websites of authors you like and find out who published their books.
- Social media on Twitter.
- Check publisher's website.
- Make a list as per agents.

Pitching your Novel

- Conferences i.e. Romance Writers of Australia
- Varuna the Writers House
- ASA Speed Dating
- Pitch wars
- Join writerly organisations and develop a writing network

The Pitch

- You should be aiming for one or two sentences that convey what's at the heart of your novel. It can be a good idea to focus on your main character and what's at stake for them. What sort of challenge, dilemma or conflict are they facing? What does their journey look like?
- Nail your one-line pitch — is it Star Wars meets Bridget Jones?
- Have a nuanced 200-300 words synopsis that really crystallises what the book is about.