

## **The Business of Writing: Effective Tips for Working with Agents and Editors**

By Linda Rohrbough

Right after a big conference, talk turns to agents. It reminds me of high school dating. I like him but does he like me? Will she call? Should I call? How long should I wait? Here are my tips for working with agents and editors both before and after you have one.

If an agent or editor has expressed interest in your work, then get it to them as quickly as you can. But not before it's ready. I had a friend tell me an agent got excited about her work and asked her to "send it even if it's rough." I advised her not to. Sure enough, she received the work back with a note saying it was too rough. I guess my friend had reason to be upset. But my rule of thumb is: don't send anything you wouldn't be happy to see in print.

The other almost overwhelming temptation for newbies is to send a series of corrected versions of their manuscript. A pro finds errors too, but they grit their teeth, correct them, and save the corrected version for later. Trust me: if someone wants to represent your work or buy it, they always ask for changes. And you'll want to accommodate them so they have some ownership in development of the work.

I know a writer who pitched her book, got an invitation, then learned some valuable information at a conference which took her a year to implement. Since it had been so long, she sent a letter asking the agent if she could still submit. The agent said yes and eventually represented her. Professional courtesy like that goes a long way in this business.

Also, when an agent or editor turned me down, I sent a thank-you note. I've since made friends with agents and editors who told me they rarely saw someone who could look past their own disappointment long enough to recognize the time and effort they put in.

Further, I found postcards to be invaluable when I was shopping for an agent. When I sent a requested manuscript by snail mail, I included everything they asked for plus a self-addressed stamped postcard. It included the name of the project, my name as author, and these lines: "Received by \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ (date)" and "When may I follow up? \_\_\_\_\_ (date)." I did this because I found out that Express or Priority mail services are insulting in the book publishing world when querying. It sends the message that you don't respect the agent or editor's time.

When it was time to follow up, I used a postcard as well. It had my contact information, thanked them for looking over my material, reminded them I had their permission to follow up by this date, and asked if there was anything else they needed. Postcards have a number of advantages. They don't have to be opened, they're easy to handle and quick to read. Since I have lousy handwriting, I buy printable ones. I also use a particular font for my name, so I'm always branding.

When asked to use e-mail, I never set the software to ask for a delivery or read receipt. That says, "I don't trust you." Instead, in the text of the e-mail ask the agent or editor to let you know when they've received it, and to give you a follow-up time frame. I still do that now with my fiction and nonfiction agents.

I had a guy tell me he had an agent, but the agent died and none of the other

agents in the office took him on. As I talked to him further, I discovered why. He told me he and his agent had pleasant conversations every week for over a year about the status of his manuscript when he called. Mistake. I'm sure his agent was kind to him, but no agent or editor wants to hold the hand of a new author every week.

One way I stay in contact with my agents is when I publish an article or do a workshop that's particularly successful, either my intern or I send my agents an e-mail about it. I also send that information to the publicists at my publishing houses. I do this regularly enough that they get something every month or so. Otherwise, I don't bug them unless there's something to bug them about. This sends a couple of messages. The first is that I'm working, and the second is that I trust them to get back to me on new work when they have something. And they always do.

You've heard a lot of tips at the PPWC. I hope you can use these tips as well to put you in a better position with editors and agents.

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