

Editor or Agent: What comes first?

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/editor-agent-comes-first/>

This entry is part 2 of 5 in the series [Editing Refined](#)

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If you're not sure who you should be querying right now, an editor or agent - then this is for you.

I got an interesting email from a writer who was confused about who she should approach first with her manuscript: an editor or agent.

And actually, the answer isn't so cut-and-dry, though you'll find very strong and very conflicting answers from different sources.

Artwork by Jonny Lindner.

Here's what you need to know about when to work with an editor (and why) and when to work with an agent (and why).

Why the Answer isn't so Pat

The reason this isn't a simple "this or that" type of 2-second answer is because as a writer, **you'll always work with editors.** [There are all kinds.](#) However, you may well work (and you really should) with an agent. (I'll explain below.)

So how do you know *what* to do *when*? That's what I'm going to tell you, in a step-by-step – this will show you what is perhaps the *ideal* way to build your career as a writer.

That doesn't mean this is what you must do, just what I would recommend because it's *awesome* (and

because if I could go back and do things over again, this is what I would do).

Step 1: hire/find a Beta Reader

A beta reader is the first type of editor you need. This is someone who reads what you believe is your “final draft” before you start querying editors and agents.

The beta reader is someone who points out what works and what doesn't work in your story. If the protagonist is too flat or the plot too thin the beta reader will catch these types of problems. You can also look to a group of beta readers, [as in a creative writing group](#).

To read more about [what a beta reader does](#), go [HERE](#).

NOTE: Beta readers *do not correct spelling and grammar*. A copy editor does that. Once you've fixed the sort of problems a beta reader finds, you need a copy editor.

Step 2: hire/find a Copy Editor

Again, your copy editor can be someone you know personally – but it must be a native speaker of the language (whatever language your manuscript is) and it must be someone who is nitpicking. It cannot be someone who says, “whatever you think is fine” when it's down to questions like whether to use “storey” or “story.”

A copy editor has to be specific, unrelenting and aware of differences in spelling and grammar when crossing borders.

NOTE: Your beta reader and copy editor can indeed be the same person (or people), but it's my experience that it works best if they aren't.

Step 3: query Acquisitions Editors and Agents

If you're specifically interested in having your books published by major publishing houses, **then you absolutely must query an agent first.** [Acquisitions Editors](#) (the editors who decide what manuscripts should be considered for publication) for major houses won't even sniff at a writer without an agent.

How do you know if the publisher will consider a writer who does not have an agent?

That part is simple. Every publisher has a Submissions Guidelines somewhere on their site. Those publishers who do not accept submissions directly from writers will simply state as much, and oftentimes they will suggest something like, “[go find out how to get an agent](#).”

However, if you are just as happy with the idea of your books being published by a small indie press or perhaps a small-ish publishing house, **there are publishers who don't require an agent.** It's true that the list is thinning here, and equally true that your wait for a response (if any comes at all) is very long (read: months).

But there's no reason to believe they wouldn't be interested in your work (assuming it's as polished as it should be, after having been reworked and reworked and fine tuned at this point). So why not give it a try?

So you need to make 2 lists.

1. You'll need to [research the agents](#) you think best suited to represent your work. (NOTE: The agent should not only represent what you have written up until now, but [also what you plan to write](#) in the future.)
2. Then you'll make another list, of all the publishers you think might be interested in publishing your manuscript.

WARNING: Some publishers have a firm **No Multiple Submissions Policy** – meaning you should only submit to them and no one else. If you do decide to submit, you need to respect their policy and allow the time they request [3 months or less]. If you feel that's too long a wait, don't put them on your list.

My best advice here is this: **be picky**. Don't submit your work everywhere, that's a complete waste of time. If you don't honestly think a publisher is right for your project – well, they probably aren't!

It really is that simple.

With an Agent

When you land an agent then your agent will - for the most part - determine which editors should see your manuscripts. Not that you'll be cut out of the process, but it will primarily be your agent who then pitches on your behalf.

From that point on, you'll work with various editors based on which publishing houses decide to carry your titles. In some cases, you won't communicate with the editor that much (if at all). It depends on the publisher's policies and general decisions about "how things are done." That can vary greatly.

Some writers develop closer working relationships with their editors, and from my perspective, that's really best. You can learn much more as a writer if you actually have a relationship with your editor(s).

Are YOU Querying? Editor or Agent or BOTH?

Every few months or so I give a boost to my query efforts, and that means I'm making a new list right now. How about you? Are you querying? Write below, let me know – or, as ever, send me an email. I love reading those!

Keep creating, no matter what.

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