



Guide to Literary Agents

WHERE & HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT AGENTS TO REPRESENT YOUR WORK

By Chuck Sambuchino

7 TIPS FOR PITCHING TO AN AGENT OR EDITOR AT A CONFERENCE

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Tip #1: If you can get a pitch session with an agent/editor, do it!

Agents get tons of queries every single day, and a good 90% of them come from people who haven't worked very hard to perfect their craft. Agents know that if you go to conferences, you're likely in the 10% who have. If you go to a conference and pitch, you're likely a top 10% writer who has a book close to being worthy of representation. It also gives both of you a chance to meet each other, and that's invaluable.

Tip #2: If you don't register in time to schedule a pitch session, get on a waiting list.

Pitch sessions fill up quickly. People get nervous, though, or don't get their book ready in time, so they cancel often. They shouldn't, but they do, and this is good for anyone who is on the waiting list.

Tip #3: Figure out what you want to cover during your pitch session.

Don't memorize a script, but do memorize the points you want to cover. Then you can talk like a normal person about it. And definitely practice talking like a normal person about it to everyone who will listen. The more comfortable you feel when talking about your book, the better your pitch session will go.

Tip #4: Go with other questions in mind.

I speed-talked my way through my first pitch session, because when I'm nervous I don't ramble— I leave things out. So my pitch was done in less than 30 seconds. After asking me a few questions, the agent requested my full. Then she said, "Do you have any questions for me?" I hadn't thought about questions for her! I sat there, feeling awkward, said, "Um... Nope?" then shook her hand and left, with seven minutes of our meeting unused. Don't do what I did! Use that time to ask about their agenting style. Ask about the industry. Ask about the process. Ask about craft. Ask questions about your plot. Ask about anything writing related. Chat. See how your personalities mesh. Just don't leave seven minutes early. You paid for that time— use it.

Tip #5: Don't cancel your pitch if your book isn't ready.

When you signed up for a pitch, it was five months before the conference and you thought your novel would be ready, but it isn't. Don't cancel your pitch! (Unless, of course, you've signed with an agent since then.) If your book isn't ready, but you're working hard to get it there, pitch it anyway. When you send a query to an agent and they request pages, you should get it to them within about 24 hours. When you pitch, you have a YEAR to get it to them. A year! So don't stress that it isn't completely ready— there's plenty of time to make it shine. You are pitching to see if the story idea fits with them, if they think it's a marketable enough idea that they want to see pages, and if it's a story that they have the right contacts to sell.

Tip #6: Your pitch session doesn't have to be used to pitch.

That ten minutes you've signed up for is YOUR TIME. Use it wisely. You've bought not only that agent's (or editor's) time, but their expertise. And it is expertise in an area they are incredibly passionate about. They want to help you. If, for whatever reason, you don't want to pitch your book, use that ten minutes in non-pitching ways. Some examples:

- Show them your **query letter**, and ask for a critique.
- Have the agent read the first pages of your manuscript until they would normally stop. Then talk about what stopped them.
- If you're about to start a new novel and are wondering which of your ideas are most marketable, pitch them to the agent, and ask which they think would be best to focus on.

Tip #7: Don't be nervous. Really.

The most important thing: remember that they are just people. It may feel like they're rock stars, but they're actually completely normal. And because they are, they just might be a little nervous, too. It helps to remember that when you're sitting across a table from them. So the next time you get an opportunity to pitch to an agent or editor, make sure you seize it!