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Bridget's Super-Brief Guide to Publishing Options

In a nutshell, there are four routes to getting your book published:

1. Pitch agents, who in turn pitch publishing companies.
2. Pitch publishing companies directly (only some allow this).
3. Enter your manuscript into contests.
4. Self-publish.

For #1 and #2, the process is essentially the same.

First, you need to research agents and publishers who might be interested in your type of work.

You can do this by looking through *The Writers' Market's* summaries or by researching online. I recommend going to your own bookshelf (and the library's, and the bookshop's) and seeing what publishers put out the books you admire and the books that resemble the book you're pitching. The publisher's name is on the front page. Often, you can find the name of the agent in the acknowledgements.

The best option, if it's available to you, is to ask if friends have contacts in the publishing industry. Communicate with those contacts, asking if they know who would be the best people to pitch. When you have these informal inquiries with contacts, you must have a one-page synopsis ready to send to them so that they have a sense of what your book is about.

Next, you need to find out what the agents' and publishers' query requirements are. These are listed in *The Writers' Market* and on the agents' and publishers' websites.

ALL of the require a QUERY LETTER. This is a one-page, single spaced pitch that consists of:

- an opening/lead line/hook
- a very brief (1-3 sentence) summary of the work, including the title
- the book's platform and audience (Who will buy this? Why is now the time for this book? Why would this agent or publisher care about this work?)
- a sentence or two about the author (if the author is specifically qualified to write this book or has been published before)
- any marketing platforms the author has access to that will help sell the book

In addition, most – but not all – agents and publishers require a FULL BOOK PROPOSAL. This typically consists of:

- the query letter (which, if it is accompanying a proposal, should outline the contents of the proposal packet)
- a one-page overview of the book
- a chapter-by-chapter outline/synopsis of the book (in paragraph form)
- an author info sheet
- up to 3 sample chapters (or 10-30 pages of excerpts from the book)
- a marketing info sheet – This addresses questions like: How is this book ideally positioned in the market? How does it contribute to the conversation? What is its publishing strategy? And, most importantly, Who will buy it and how will you get the word out to those people? Include any platforms you have (mailing lists, social media followers) that will help to promote the book.
- a competitive title analysis – 5-6 titles that have sold over 10,000 copies that are similar to the book being queried

Some agents and publishers will want parts of the above proposal, but not all (for example, some want a query letter + a synopsis + 30 pages; others want a query + a bio + the first two chapters). It is important to provide EXACTLY what they ask for – no more, no less.

There are some that have specific online forms to submit as well – or in place of – the above material.

I can help with any or all of this process. I have written, edited, and collaborated on multiple full proposals and many query letters, and I can provide you with examples of both.

For #3, the process consists of watching for contest deadlines whose themes focus on the kind of material you've written. Then you typically submit a full manuscript along with an online form and some money. These contests are typically promoted on Submittable.com and in the back of *Poets & Writers* magazine. For more info on how to navigate Submittable, see my "Navigating the Lit Mag Maze" resource.

For #4, you want someone to lay out your finished book for you (I can do that) and then find a self-publishing house to upload the manuscript to. You decide how many copies you want to print (and, you can generally print on demand in short runs) and pay for them. Then you attempt to sell them to your friends via word of mouth, social media, etc. You can also put your book on Amazon. If you choose this option, all promotion of your book is up to you, so it's likely your buyers will be your personal, professional, and social media contacts.