



KNEERIM & WILLIAMS

HOW TO FIND AN AGENT

1. In a bookstore, browse through lots of other books in a similar category, books you admire and think are in the same style as yours.

2. Look in those books' acknowledgments sections to see if the author thanks her agent; thereby you will accumulate a list of agents who handle this kind of material.

3. Go online and fill out your list of potential agents with e-mail addresses and names, and submission criteria if helpful.

4. You can then send a highly professional, crisp query to any number of your selected agents at once. However, don't make it look like a blanket submission. Tailor each query letter to the specific agent; mention if possible other work you admire that the agent represents. If you know one of the agent's authors personally, get a personal reference. Be sure your query gives background on you personally and why you are a credible expert on the subject addressed. Publishers think of nothing but "platform" these days -- authors who teach in the field at a reputable institution, who run workshops nationally on the subject, who have already published material on the subject in blogs or national media and thus have a pre-existing audience. Agents and publishers will be very unlikely to find your proposal of interest if you simply like a subject and have gone off to investigate it, unless you are the new Virginia Woolf or have already published successfully (in periodicals or book form) in a related field.

5. If you have more than one idea or book you are working on, pick ONE of them to lead off with, and don't mention the others for a while.

6. To bypass some extra steps, you can attach to your query (or, even better, paste in at the bottom of your note) an outline or short prospectus of your proposed work, together with a short sample of the actual prose. (A sample is important, since summaries often don't make a work sound attractive.)

7. Remember that an agent is running a business and looking for commercially promising projects. Agents will not be interested in helping you develop your ideas, or helping you select good ideas to develop, until you have already proved you can be a solid breadwinner for them. You'd do best to arrive with a very clear, professionally presented package. Good agents are overwhelmed with prospects (we get more than 30 submissions a day) and in many cases they don't even have time to answer a query unless it is irresistible.

And now—good luck. Remember, the gods favor the persistent.