

**AGENTS: REJECTIONS**

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So far we've covered a lot of ground with the agent process and I trust it has been helpful for getting a better idea of how you can better organize your efforts in seeking out an agent. Up until now we've been dealing with the process but haven't really covered the matter of agent rejections—namely trying to figure out what they mean and how to move on with or without them.

So let's start with the most basic form of rejection, that is what many agents seem to be doing now in stressing a timeframe in which if they don't respond by means they aren't interested in taking on your work. Seems pretty simple enough and it can be effective in keeping everyone on the same page, but it isn't really helpful for authors in finding out why their work was passed up or if it even got to the agent to look at in the first place. This is even more challenging if the submission was sent in via snail mail.

So with this aside, since you can't really do more with the subject of no responses, we'll move on to rejections that actually come back from agents. That is, agents sending an email stating that they're not interested in looking at your work. As we've already seen from previous entries, the rejection can come anywhere along the way: from query, to partial, to even fulls. The rejection itself can range from a form letter to a short sentence to even some helpful feedback.

We've not going to get too deep into the form letter here either because, as the name implies, it's a generic form that is just meant to let you know your work was considered but it wasn't something they were looking for at the moment. What they are looking for or why they passed are often left out of the loop unless they include some feedback, which is what we're going to take a look at now.

Remember in the first PDF when I mentioned that agents are looking to find something they can make money with as well as something they would want to read as a consumer themselves? Well, this sort of plays into their rejection phrases they turn out too. Common among them is the often heard or slightly rephrased: "While I liked your work I just didn't love it and so have to pass."

So what does that mean?

Many will also tell you, if you haven't heard me say it already, that agenting and publishing—in fact most of media in general—is a subjective business. That means some will like something for one reason and another group will dislike it for the exact same reason. It's odd and strange at times but that's how the business works. This is because you're working with people who are viewing things through a different prism than many of the writers who send them material.

This sort of tagline response used to confuse me when I got this reply from some agents until the day I had an epiphany. Up until then it didn't seem to make sense why they were praising the work and talking about how much they liked it but in the same breath (or sentence, as the case

might be) turned around and said how they didn't love it.

For those who have been tossed this line in your agent hunting here is what I came to understand. If they don't talk about anything being bad in your work, e.g. bad grammar, poor plot, story, etc., then what they are telling you is they didn't get emotionally invested in your story as much as they thought they should have. Again, this is their thinking, not a reflection on your work as a whole (assuming you got positive comments).

Since we're in a time of elections heating up I'll put it to you this way. Think of a candidate you might have voted for or known in the past that might have said or sided with the things you liked but when you heard them or saw them in person or saw them in action you just didn't have a real connection to them. Something didn't "click" and while you might have voted for them or supported them you didn't really have a "fire in your belly" for them throughout the whole process.

That's what the agents are saying in a nutshell with this reply. The classic "It's not you, but me" analogy can tie into this a little bit as well. More confusing at times can be the feedback you get from agents that just doesn't make sense. Sometimes in meaning to be helpful they share things that don't seem to add up with or make sense for what you want to do with the book. Here you have to vet the feedback by a gut check—taking what you believe to be helpful and disregarding the rest.

And as is the case with such specific feedback, we can't get too specific in our reply as the feedback is going to vary with what your work is about and related to. This said, if an agent is sharing something about how this or that didn't click or you needed to redo some things to make it work better, take it all with a grain of salt. Don't think you're arrived to the point where you can't get better in your work but don't look at pushing off the suggestions whole cloth either. Some of it can be very helpful.

The bottom line is to learn from what isn't working in your queries and submitted works and look to make them better. You're going to have to go through a few rounds of submissions and rejections before it gets smooth enough to get you into the process toward consideration. But if you stick at it and keep honing your craft along with your pitching skills, things should get better in terms of more interest for your work coming your way.

Also, think about offers some agents will make in the rejection process about being willing to look at your work again once revisions have been made and/or being open to looking at other projects you might produce in the future. Just don't expect all agents to make such an offer either if it didn't prove to be a hit with them for whatever reason.

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