

My Three Most Frequently Asked Questions

written by Holly
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By Holly Lisle

Here they are in order of popularity – the three questions that make up about a third of my mail from this page, twenty-five percent asking the first question alone. Please, please read the answers.

- Can you read something I wrote?
 - Can you hook me up with a publisher or editor or agent?
 - If I supply the idea, would you collaborate with me on a book?
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Can you read something I wrote?

No. The short answer is that I don't have the time and even if I did, my agent forbids it.

The long answer is that, first, society being what it is today, on my agent's advice I don't look at anything that hasn't already been sold to a publishing house. I have ideas for the next hundred years and have no interest in stealing anyone else's, but if I don't read anything that hasn't already been sold to a publisher, I'll never find myself in a situation where I have to prove that fact in court.

Second, in the nearly two decades it's been around, this site has generated hundreds of thousands of letters. Roughly 25% of

the people who write to me ask me if I'll read their novel, their short story, their poetry, or their background, and tell them how to fix it, and maybe put in a good word with my agent or my publisher for them – and this in spite of the fact that I've noted elsewhere that I don't read manuscripts. If I gave up writing, I could spend every minute of my time doing this, or I could keep writing and give up my family life, but I'm not interested in doing either. I like writing for a living and I love my family.

You don't need to have a writer read your manuscript in order for it to get published. You need to learn to read it with a critical eye, and be willing to change what you see that needs to be fixed. These are essential skills for any professional, and until you've learned them you won't be able to sell. And the only way you can learn them is to work at it. I know this is hard, and hearing it may be disappointing, but there is no easy way to succeed

And because I've discovered that the older you get, the harder you work and the less time you have, this embargo applies also to reading and blurbing published books.

Can you hook me up with a publisher or editor or agent?

No. When you've written something publishable, start sending it around. While it's circulating, start work on the next thing. You will eventually find your agent and your editor and your publisher. But again, there's no easy way. You don't need an in – you just need patience and faith and to have written something good.

If I supply the idea, would you collaborate with me on a book?

No. But we can do it the other way if you'd like. Here's an idea.

The hero is a guy who wakes up one morning to discover that his wife is gone and there's this little doll lying on her side of the bed. No note, no nothing – just the doll. No sign of a break in, no sign of anything missing except his wife, no sign of violence. He's scared, he can't figure out what has happened . . .

...and I'm not sure what happens after that.

You take that idea, and spend nine months or a year or whatever working it into a finished novel, and sell it, and when you're done, credit me with coauthor status because I came up with the idea and send me half of your advance and half of your royalties from now until the end of time. Also half of all subrights sales.

Or better yet, **don't**. You're welcome to the idea – if you use it and sell it, good for you and have fun with the money. You don't owe me anything. But now I hope you can see why writers aren't thrilled when someone asks them this question.

NOTE: If this article resonates with you, and you want to meet other writers who share your passion and who are working in a friendly, supportive environment, come hang out with us and make progress on your writing in my free writing community. Learn how writing fiction for a living really works.

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