

Luigi Bonomi, Literary agent - Managing Director LBA Books Ltd



Course of study	English Lit	Year of graduation	
City / Region / Country	London		

1. Tell us more about your job; an example of day-to-day work, average week, or a recent project (or how would you describe your job to a friend?).

Being a literary agent means finding projects that you believe members of the public will want to read. I work across non-fiction and fiction, for both the adult market and the children's market, and that means I have a wide variety of projects on the go at any one point. There is no such thing as a typical day but today for example I took part in a zoom session with two separate publishers and an investigative journalist to explore him writing a book on a well-known serial killer, I then moved to a zoom session with a large media law firm about possibly representing several of their clients; I got back to the BBC (who I represent) on a number of projects they are keen for me to agent and discussed which of their forthcoming podcasts and radio programmes had book deal potential; I had a long chat with a Professor of Psychology about his book on Paranoia; I edited a press release for a novel just acquired by a publisher and pitched it to a film studio looking for new material; I rejected a cover that a publisher sent me for one of my author's titles and had a chat with their designer about it; all the while replying to the on average 100 emails I get every day from my authors and publishers.

2. What attributes make someone successful in this job (or what skills are involved in your current role)?

You have to have a wide general knowledge in different fields from history, popular science, philosophy, current affairs and of course, literature. You have to be a good people person – diplomatic and charming while also tenacious to fight for your authors' interests.

3. What do you like most about your job?

I love the variety. I currently have several submissions out with publishers for which I am hoping to get book deals – a non-fiction book on the history of a famous Country House, a memoir about a journalist and his encounter with Britain's most notorious serial killer, a book about Paranoia by one of Britain's leading psychologists, a book about gender studies by a highly respected Professor of Gender Studies; a book about maritime trade through the ages. I am also working on a novel about a couple finding love when their respective kids head off to University (!) a crime novel set in the 1970s, and a fantasy middle grade historical adventure series. I don't know any other job where I could get to work on such a breadth of different subjects and it is this variety that excites me.

4. What are the most challenging aspects (role or sector)?

The market is very tough right now and not all the books submitted to publishers can be published. Of those that are published, not all of them succeed. Managing expectations and hopes can be very challenging and needs patience, perseverance and, at times, a thick skin!

5. How did your degree prepare you for your current role (or are there any skills/knowledge you developed which you are using now)?

My degree (English Lit) taught me about the importance of plot and good characterisation and how this is achieved. It made me think why certain novels work and why others don't. Sometimes a novel can be very boring but a character within it is so brilliantly conceived that that character can carry you right through. To learn how this is done and to impart this to writers today has been invaluable.

6. How did you get to where you are now in your career (or what experiences helped you)?

I now run a successful literary agency where we represent around 200 authors but to get here my first job was working on children's picture books for a children's publisher. When I first got the job, my hopes, having just graduated, was to work for one of the major publishers, publishing great fiction, it was not to edit dot to dot books (my first edit was on Noddy goes to the Circus!). The point was I was working in editorial within a publishing house. From children's picture books I moved to working on a new YA fiction list at the same publishing house (romance, crime, thrillers, fantasy); from there I moved to Harlequin Mills & Book where I worked with writers publishing romantic fiction; from there I went to Penguin books where I became an Editorial Director developing commercial fiction and non-fiction titles for a mass market audience and this led to me becoming a literary agent within a respected agency and then setting up my own business several years later. Each step came about from the work I had done in my previous job. All beginning with dot to dot books. If you are creative and imaginative, you should be open to working in all sorts of fields while always keeping an eye on the end goal of where you want to go. And of course, fate and luck will play a part too!

7. What advice would you give to current students about getting into / starting out in your sector? (e.g. relevant experiences, supportive people, necessary education)

These days it is all about doing work experience and internships and reaching out to publishers and literary agents to see if they could give you some experience. You should do this as widely as possible, building a portfolio for your CV which will ultimately land you a job.

8. What is on the horizon within your industry that our students should know about? (positives or negatives)

Publishing is no longer about just publishing books – it is about publishing IP (intellectual property) in all its forms – from audio books to podcasts to tv series, social media influencers, gaming, and exploring new avenues. I think people who are creative and can think outside the box is what publishers will now be looking for.

9. If you could give a current student one piece of advice on something you wish you'd have known prior to starting your career what would it be?

Publishing is a small industry. Everyone knows everyone. So – be charming to everyone, courteous, polite, remember names (take notes after the meetings so you remember them), and create for yourself an identity that people will remember you by. Always get back to people and, finally, know what you love and are good at and celebrate it!

10. Which country and town/ city/ region are you from?

London