

How to get Published

Stewart Ferris

Writers write from the heart.

- Strong central character
- Sub-plot?



THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Finding an agent.
- Overcoming writer's block.

Writer should always  
have a notebook & pen.

# How to get **Published**

Secrets from the inside

Stewart Ferris

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## **Introduction**

GETTING PUBLISHED IS the dream of every unpublished writer. Despite their determination and ambition, however, most writers will remain unpublished because they pay attention only to the quality of the writing in the manuscript itself. That may seem a strange observation to make. Writing is all about words, after all. Words are carefully selected and polished by a writer in order to create a wonderful manuscript. From the author's point of view that manuscript is all that's needed to create a book. Authors think their manuscript is well written, therefore it 'deserves' to find its way into print, and that it probably will do so the moment it falls into the hands of a publisher.

The concept that a good book will find a publisher is outdated and over-simplistic. Writing is just about words, but publishing is not. It's like saying babies come from a man and a woman. Technically yes, they do, but the reality is that a baby comes from going to a bar, blurting out a

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

nervous chat-up line followed by hours of flirtation, weeks of dating, dancing, expensive meals and optional marriage and a large bottle of wine. Publishing involves far more than just printing nice arrangements of words. The quality of an author's writing is an important factor in a publisher's decision to gamble a significant sum of money in signing up a book, but it isn't the whole story.

It's essential to put yourself in a publisher's shoes for a moment and think about what else a publishing decision is based upon. What, apart from the quality of your writing, do you think would influence an editor to give you a contract? I have identified fifteen other crucial factors that a publisher takes into consideration, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Can't think of any of them right now other than a fat cash bribe? Then you've picked the right book to help you make that leap from the world of unpaid writers to that exclusive group of people in possession of publishing contracts. I've commissioned five hundred books, rejected



## INTRODUCTION

ten thousand submissions, and I've had a few books of my own published, so I know all the industry secrets. These secrets are factors that always form part of a publisher's decision-making process, but which new authors never consider. Those secrets, plus other crucial tips and advice on getting published, will be revealed in this book.

Before I reveal the industry secrets I'll explain the inner workings of the publishing business itself because understanding how publishers think and operate, what excites them, what reassures them and what scares them will give you a valuable advantage over other writers. You'll be able to produce the right kind of book for the right publisher, you'll present them with exactly the format they require, you'll be realistic in your expectations of what they can do for you and you'll

**It's worth noting that fiction and non fiction writing require slightly different skills and approaches when attempting to get published. Most tips in this book are applicable to both fiction and non fiction proposals, but some will be specific to one or the other.**

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be professional and confident in your contractual negotiations.

Publishers are business people. Their job is to make money from selling products, and that product happens to be books. If they don't sell books at a profit then they can't stay in business. They know that high quality writing isn't necessarily going to make a profitable book, so when choosing which manuscripts to sign up for publication they think about many more elements than just the words on the page.

This makes the publishing decision-making process very difficult to predict from the outside. It's a minefield of potential obstacles that can result in rejection at any moment. Fortunately it is possible for an author to adopt tactics to help them get around many of those obstacles, and these will be explained later in the book. Sadly, some of the reasons for rejection encountered by writers are entirely beyond their control. The failure of a book proposal to navigate the treacherous waters between submission and acceptance is entirely normal. It only gets easier

## **INTRODUCTION**

for established authors – the lucky ones who can reach the point when publishers phone them up to ask them to write a book. That's when you know you've made it. But they all got their breaks somehow, and throughout this book I'll explain the techniques writers can benefit from in order to create the right conditions for their own 'lucky break' to happen.

ways write from the heart.

- Strong central character

- Sub-plot?



THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Finding an agent
- Overcoming writer's block

Writer should always  
have a notebook & pen.

## Part I

# What makes a publisher decide to publish a book?

## **The whole picture**

THE PUBLISHING DECISION is based on the ‘whole picture’, not just the book. The whole picture consists of all the different things a publisher or commissioning editor must take into account when making a decision to publish.

**There are four main parts to this picture:**

- 1. The book**
- 2. The author**
- 3. The market**
- 4. The publisher**

I have also identified four subsidiary parts in each of those areas, all of which will be examined in the following pages. No single part is sufficiently important to guarantee that your book will be published, but combined they have the power to

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

influence an editor's decision either for or against you.

Getting published comes down to improving your chances with all of the sixteen factors, but, given the fundamental randomness with which some publishing decisions are made, occasionally the advice is going to appear contradictory.

**At times I'll make it seem like it's impossible to get published, at other times I'll make it seem easy. This is because in some cases, for some books and some authors, it is, frankly, impossible. In other circumstances it's easier than falling off a greasy, rotating log. It all boils down to your talent, your age, your persistence, market trends and luck.**

Most authors get better at writing over time. As with most crafts, experience results in increased skill levels. Given enough time anyone can write to a professional standard – we all start from nothing as children, after all. This doesn't mean you have to achieve the standards of Thomas Hardy or Virginia Woolf. Jeffrey Archer will do.

## **THE WHOLE PICTURE**

The problem comes when, having achieved the requisite writing skills, an author fails to learn enough about the business of publishing to have a hope of ever selling their work. They don't follow the fairly simple rules that would enable them to place their submission immediately in the top 10%. These are the few manuscripts that get serious consideration by editors. The rest get rejected after no more than one, two or three pages have been read. Sometimes the cover letter alone is enough to trigger a rejection. I'll explain why later in this book.

Getting published is about maximising your chances of being considered, of making it to a short list. This is something over which you have control, and it accounts for 90% of the journey. Successfully making the final leap from submission to acceptance will always be a matter of luck, but getting your book proposal into the final 10% of submissions with a number of publishers will make it mathematically likely that your name will end up in print.

## **The sixteen elements that influence a publishing decision:**

### **The book**

Quality of writing  
Fresh ideas and a new angle  
Format of the book  
Title and subtitle of the book

### **The author**

Reputation  
Personality  
Previous books  
Self-publicity

### **The market**

Competition  
Trends  
Related events  
Niche

### **The publisher**

Size of company  
Direction of company  
State of company  
Internal politics



## **The book**

LET'S START BY looking at the most obvious part of a publisher's decision-making process and how you can maximise the saleability of your product.

Only a quarter of the publishing decision will be based on your book proposal. Publishers are often faced with many equally well-written manuscripts from which they must choose one to sign up – that's when the other three-quarters of the decision-making process kick in. But in order to get into that position of being considered against all the other submissions, your book must first satisfy the following criteria: high quality of writing; fresh ideas and a new angle; appropriate format; great title and subtitle.

### **1. Quality of writing**

There is no excuse for submitting a poorly written manuscript. If you send a publisher a first draft of your book without bothering to work on it again and again until it's so polished that the publisher needs sunglasses to look at it, then

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

I'm afraid you deserve to be rejected. In my book *How to be a Writer* I explain the ten drafts that a fiction writer must work through in order to be confident that their manuscript is as polished as it can be. Here's a summary of the drafts a novel should go through:

**Draft 1**

Type out a rough version of the whole book

**Draft 2**

Tighten the structure, fill in holes

**Draft 3**

Develop the characters

**Draft 4**

Improve the dialogue

**Draft 5**

Work on the language and imagery

**Draft 6**

Restructure parts of the work

**Draft 7**

Add layers of conflict

**Draft 8**

Improve the crucial opening pages

## QUALITY OF WRITING

**Draft 9**

More work on the character development

**Draft 10**

Proofread for mistakes

A non fiction book such as this one needs to be tackled differently – something like this:

**Draft 1**

Type out a rough version of the whole book

**Draft 2**

Tighten the structure, fill in holes

**Draft 3**

Improve the vocabulary and rewrite awkward phrases

**Draft 4**

Check the facts, add references, websites, and footnotes

**Draft 5**

Read through noting problems, then fix them

**Draft 6**

Restructure parts of the work to fit the desired format and word count

**Draft 7**

Improve the crucial opening pages

**Draft 8**

Proofread for mistakes

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

Writers frequently make the mistake of thinking that publishers will accept a manuscript despite it being poorly structured, inconsistent, clichéd or rambling. Fixing that is the editor's job, right? Surely the editors can see the potential in their work and fix it for them? But publishers don't have enough time to deal with writers who take this attitude. They would have to be *really* excited about a book idea to be prepared to work with an author who apparently cannot write to a professional standard.

So don't rely only on the strength of your book's central concept to get you a deal. The quality of your writing must also be as high as you can possibly raise it prior to submitting it to an editor. Would you try to sell your car without washing it, or your house without tidying it? Your manuscript or proposal is a product that you are trying to sell to a publisher, so make it a quality product. It will earn you respect, it will make the editor see you are talented, and it will increase your chances of acceptance.

## FRESH IDEAS AND A NEW ANGLE

**The quality of your writing extends beyond your book itself. It's crucial that you spell correctly the name of the editor to whom you are submitting the work, that the text of your covering letter is succinct and accurate, and that your synopsis and list of chapters won't let you down with silly errors and awkward phrases.**

### **2. Fresh ideas and a new angle**

There are thousands of subjects about which books can be written. The problem is that most of them have already been done, so if you want to cover ground where others have been before then it helps to be able to introduce fresh ideas. Saying something new will encourage readers of similar books to pick up yours too. Publishers won't mind releasing books on subjects that have been written about before provided they can convince the booksellers and the public that you have something new to say.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

I published a book of cheap and simple recipes called *Student Grub* back when there was strong competition in that sector consisting of three or four similarly titled books. But because this book was fresh, witty and more relevant to students than the others that were already out there, I felt confident it would hold its own in the bookshops. Even though its subject was not original, *Student Grub* succeeded due to the freshness of its approach. It is still selling in an updated form fourteen years later, and has gone from being the underdog to the market leader.

I'm clearly using the word 'subject' here in a very narrow sense to mean something more specific than just the genre. *Student Grub* is a cookery book, which is its genre. Its subject is recipes for students. Publishers of cookery books would not object to another cookery book being submitted to them, but they would need to be given good reasons why they should sign up a particular kind of cookery book that covers the same subjects as their other titles.

## **FORMAT OF THE BOOK**

Having fresh ideas in a book enables you to present the subject from a new angle. There were already several books written about the ideas behind Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* when I wrote *The Key to The Da Vinci Code*, but my book tackled the subject from a fresh angle which covered areas ignored by the competition. My book was also of a different size and price to any of the others, which helped it immediately to find its niche. This brings us onto the next factor: format.

### **3. Format of the book**

The format of a book is its size, binding (hardback or paperback), price, number of pages, illustrations (whether colour, black and white, drawings, cartoons, paintings, photos or diagrams). It's all too easy to assume these decisions have nothing to do with the author. You write the book and it's up to the publisher to squeeze your book into whatever format they choose, right? To some extent that's true, but a publisher's options are limited by what you as the author provide for them.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

The most significant variable is the number of words in your manuscript. You should always aim for a word count that matches (to within a reasonable amount – perhaps plus or minus 10%) the word counts of similar books already on sale by your target publisher.

Counting the words of a book in print isn't all that hard: just find a page that looks typical in terms of its page coverage and count the words on that page then multiply it by the number of pages in the book.

If it's a novel, choose a page that has mostly description and a little dialogue because that will provide a more realistic average than a page of staccato dialogue. If the book is illustrated the calculation becomes a little more complicated: first add up the approximate number of pages of illustrations and deduct them from the page count before multiplying the pages by the average number of words on a page.



## TITLE AND SUBTITLE OF BOOK

### 4. Title and subtitle of book

How many books have you enthusiastically picked up on the basis of the title alone? The title and subtitle of a book can form the most powerful selling tool available to a publisher. It's a kind of advertising message. The title shouts out what the book is about, and the subtitle tells you why you should buy it. 'How to Get Published' is the title of this book, but a major reason to buy it is that it contains 'Secrets from the Inside'. The subtitle explains enough about the book to help customers make their buying decisions in a couple of seconds. Most customers will then read the third selling tool, the blurb on the back cover or inside flap, and this will confirm or confound the view that they had already formed that this is the book for them.

If the title and subtitle have a strong impact on potential customers in a bookshop, then they have the same effect

**Clever title and subtitle combinations will impress an editor and will make them want to like your book.**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

on editors who receive your proposal. Publishers have been known to issue announcements to the trade that they will publish a book of a certain title and subtitle even though the book hasn't been written. *How to Get Published*, in fact, existed only as a title and subtitle plus a short blurb when it was entered into Summersdale's catalogue and pre-sold into the bookshops. Not a single word of the text had been written until after the shops had already placed their orders (this doesn't usually happen for new authors, by the way.)

This is the power of the title/subtitle combination. Get them right and your book will stand out from the others in the dreaded slushpile – that teetering mountain of manuscripts that blocks the light on every editor's desk. But what is the right title for your book? How can you know if it's correct? The first thing to do is to look at the titles of competing books. Do they use wordplay? Do they contain double entendres or use a vocabulary that is unique to that genre?

If your book is a light-hearted account of your experiences living abroad, for instance, you may

## TITLE AND SUBTITLE OF BOOK

notice a distinct fruit theme among recent rival titles: *Snowball Oranges*; *Driving Over Lemons*; *The Olive Farm*. Publishers on the lookout for more successes like these may pay more attention to your book if it has the same kind of title.

The title should be as brief as possible. Two or three words is ideal. Of course there are plenty of examples of popular books with long titles: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*; *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*; *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. But short titles are easier to remember and can have a stronger impact. There is always room to explain more with a subtitle. *Snowball Oranges*, for instance, doesn't tell you much about the book, but when the subtitle *One Mallorcan Winter* is added the subject is much more obvious.

The hit book from Lynne Truss *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* is another example of a snappy, clever title that doesn't mean much until combined with its subtitle: *The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. Then you realise the title is a play on words to demonstrate the difference a comma can make to the meaning of a phrase.

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If your book is fiction then normally a subtitle isn't needed, but instead a 'tag line' can help illuminate the potential reader as to what they might be letting themselves in for. The tag line wouldn't necessarily make it onto the cover of the printed book, so think of it as a way of whetting the editor's appetite.

For inspiration look at film posters. The movie industry is very good at encapsulating the theme of a film in one short sentence: *Jurassic Park* – 'An adventure 65 million years in the making'; *Bridget Jones's Diary* – 'It's Monday morning, Bridget has woken up with a headache, a hangover and her boss'.

## **The author**

YOU, AS THE author of a manuscript, can play a significant role in influencing an editor's decision. They will consider your reputation as a writer or expert, your personality, your previous books (if any) and whatever publicity you may have achieved about yourself and your writing.

### **I. Reputation**

An author is a brand. Your name stands for something when you become a published writer. People read your work and form an opinion about you – that is your reputation. If they enjoyed your book they will be predisposed to consider purchasing your next book, just as if a person buys a particular brand of car and has a good experience owning that car they will be likely to buy that brand again.

So building a reputation under your name is a way to ensure a guaranteed readership for your future books. You are building a brand name, and brand names have value. That is the reason why

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

successful authors can command higher royalty advances than first time authors. The brand building is already done. The publisher hasn't got to go through the expensive business of promoting a new book on the basis of its contents – simply announcing 'the new Dan Brown thriller' or 'the new Delia Smith cookbook' is enough to get booksellers racing to their shelves to make space for something they know is going to be popular.

But 'the first Joe Bloggs book' won't generate the same kind of excitement. Therefore the risks are higher for the publisher because they have to spend more money to tell the public about this author.

**It's an uphill struggle promoting authors without a proven track record and without an existing readership or a fanbase from other media.**

Promoting a new book by a famous author is cheap and easy: television chat shows will interview the author and plug the book; newspaper and magazine reviewers will feature it; bookshops will place it prominently; the

## REPUTATION

Amazon website will make sure there are plenty of links to it.

Everything is tougher with a new author. Television appearances are not out of the question (I've plugged many of my books on television, starting way back with my first book – all it took was a press release sent to the production companies of various chat shows) but it's not something that can be counted on because it depends on the type of book and whether it can be presented to the media with an interesting angle. Reviews will be shorter, smaller and fewer. Bookshops will stock a single copy, spine-on, if at all. Amazon will have a page for the book, as they do for all registered books, but won't make a big song and dance about it.

So the only option left for the publisher who wants to achieve high sales for this new author is to spend money (which they hate doing) on advertising and promotional materials to bring the book to the attention of the public.

This is all very well, but you're reading this book because you want to get published for the

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

first time so there's no way for you to develop a following of thousands of devoted readers beforehand. Don't panic: an author's reputation doesn't necessarily have to come from previous books. There are a few more ways in which a reputation can help you, but they still only apply to a minority of writers.

Reputation as a specialist or expert in any field will make it far easier to get a book on your area of expertise published. For example, a reputation within the scientific or academic community is helpful when attempting to get a science textbook published. Reputation as a stand-up comedian will open doors when trying to get a joke book published. Reputation as a record-breaking solo yachtsman will help to get your sailing memoirs accepted.

That's the kind of thing that can help swing the publishing decision in your favour. The trouble is we're heading towards celebrity territory here, which by definition rules out the majority of us. Virtually any celebrity will be able to get a book published, unless they are regarded



## PERSONALITY

as ‘has-beens’ or unless their book has nothing to do with the reason for their celebrity.

When the late Buster Merryfield who played Uncle Albert in the sitcom *Only Fools and Horses* asked if I would be interested in publishing his book, I was pleased to see that it was a memoir called *During the War*, which was his television character’s famous catchphrase at the time.

I published it because he had a reputation on television and because the title was right. If he had presented me with a book he’d written about someone else, with a different title, chances are I would have rejected it.

### **2. Personality**

A commissioning editor has to enter into a business relationship lasting several years with any author that gets signed up. Editors know that although these relationships are often at arm’s length they can be fraught with problems. Authors are sensitive creatures with delicate egos that need praising. They need attention and

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

sympathy. Sometimes they just need someone to talk to (it's a lonely business, writing, after all).

Editors, on the other hand, are very busy people. They work hard preparing the text of every book to make them as perfect as possible prior to publication and it's difficult to concentrate when an author they published a couple of years earlier angrily rings up and starts complaining because a friend's aunt went into a bookshop and couldn't find their book and was erroneously told by the bookseller that it was out of print. This scenario happens all the time, by the way.

With many pressures on their time it's hard for an editor to give every author the attention they indubitably deserve. Editors can get defensive of their time: experience teaches them to steer clear of timewasters.

What kind of personality are we talking about here? How can you avoid being tarred with this grossly unfair brush that is 'timewaster'? The answer lies less in how nice a person you may be, and more in your ability to understand

## PERSONALITY

the publishing and bookselling industries. It's about whether you can communicate with a publisher on a professional level. You must give them the space to do their job and

**When a new author comes along who might be more trouble than they're worth, this author's personality can become a negative factor in the decision whether to sign up their book.**

be able to turn complaints into a positive communication. Instead of moaning that your book isn't in stock somewhere, e-mail or write to the sales manager (it's less intrusive than phoning) pointing out that a potential sale could be made in this particular shop.

This kind of thing applies once you're already a published author, so what about the first contacts with the publisher? How do you avoid being considered a potential troublemaker? This is where knowledge of the industry you are attempting to join will be invaluable. An author who understands how bookselling and publishing works will appear more relaxed, more professional, and more experienced. The editor

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will feel that there will be less time wasted explaining away pointless questions arising from the author's lack of understanding of industry procedures. It's not the most important factor in making a publishing decision, but it's something that any author can turn to their advantage by demonstrating knowledge and understanding of how publishing works. Part 2 of this book explains everything you need to know about this.

### **3. Previous books**

A publisher will consider your previous experience as a writer. If you already have books published it will only really help you if they are relevant to the current proposal. Having a cookbook in print won't help you much in your attempt to become a novelist. The publisher is looking for evidence of previous books by you in a related subject in order to ascertain the likely sales levels for your current proposal. Strong previous sales will sway the publishing decision in your favour. Being the author of a flop or two will only make things tougher.

## SELF-PUBLICITY

If you're trying to get your first book in print then you can increase your chances by demonstrating that you've been published in journals, magazines, newspapers or websites.

Anything that is relevant to your book proposal and shows some degree of acceptance as a writer by a third party will help to increase your credibility and ensure that your book idea is taken more seriously.

### **4. Self-publicity**

Anyone serious about getting published should get articles about themselves, their writing and their ambitions printed in the local press. Even though your town's newspaper won't make you nationally famous, it's nevertheless impressive to receive a book proposal together with newspaper clippings showing that you're not afraid to promote yourself and your book. A pro-active author will sell more books than a timid author, so evidence of self-promotion is a big tick in your favour.

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Getting your face in a newspaper is easier than you might think. Local papers always run features on local writers – all they need is an angle, and that angle could be that after years of research you're now ready to find a publisher. Just phone them up or write to them asking if they're interested in running an interview about you and your work.

One of the factors that impressed me when Geoff Thompson approached me with his first book, *Watch My Back*, was the publicity he had obtained for himself. He phoned me up to ask if I would like to see his book and mentioned that he had received substantial press coverage about it. Although it wasn't the kind of book I was publishing at the time, I was intrigued enough to ask to see the manuscript because I was certain that he would make a hard working and dedicated author who wasn't afraid to promote himself and his book. The manuscript arrived together with impressive press cuttings from regional newspapers profiling the author and his book. Twenty-five Geoff Thompson books, several films and a BAFTA award later I'm certain this was the right decision.

## **SELF-PUBLICITY**

Another way to gain publicity and credibility at the same time is to win a writing competition. Increase your chances of this simply by entering as many as you can and if you win anything at all then make sure your target publishers know about it! The more prestigious the award the bigger the influence it will have on an editor because they know the sales manager can use your win to help them sell your book into the bookshops.

## **The market**

A QUARTER OF the publishing decision is based on what is happening in the book market and in the economy as a whole. Publishers consider the success of competing books and authors. They examine shopping and literary trends, and they pay attention to events in the outside world. Finally, they consider whether your book fits an identifiable niche.

### **I. Competition**

When a publisher looks at your proposal they will do a little research to find out how many competing books are currently in print. Editors will usually be familiar with the competition if your proposal is in a subject area that they publish all the time, but sometimes they will have a steep learning curve to climb.

It doesn't hurt to do your own market research into competing books and to present that to an editor with your proposal. Giving the dates of publication of rival books will help: generally



## TRENDS

speaking the older the title, the less significant will be its market share.

Explain in your analysis of the market any shortcomings of rival books and tell the editor specifically why you are better qualified to write on the subject than the other authors, and why your book will tackle the subject in a more authoritative and interesting way.

### **2. Trends**

Fashions, crazes and trends all manage to twist the buying patterns of the book-buying public. Remember those ‘magic eye’ books that swamped the market, sold millions then disappeared? That’s a classic craze. Anyone able to push a new magic eye book in front of a publisher in those heady days would have walked home that evening with a fat contract in their pocket.

OK, so that’s not really about writing, but I’ve published many successful books about people buying houses in hot countries and their experiences living there. In doing so I was

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reacting to the market trend which indicated that people had an insatiable appetite for this kind of book and as long as they continue to sell I'll be following that trend and looking to publish more of them.

### 3. Related events

If you propose a book about a historical event and its publication date could coincide with a significant anniversary of that event, then the publisher has an extra angle upon which to get publicity and more sales.

I recently published a book called *Arthur: King of the Britons*. It was a fascinating exploration of the King Arthur character and attempted to find out what historical truth existed behind the legend. But the quality of the writing was not the only factor in deciding to publish this book: the author wisely pointed out in his initial proposal that a major Hollywood film about Arthur was currently in production. The film would be getting publicity for itself and raising the profile of Arthur in the media, and we knew

## RELATED EVENTS

we could benefit from that ‘free ride’ of publicity to sell more books.

The paperback edition of *The Age of Scurvy* was brought out to coincide with the double centenary of the battle of Trafalgar. The

**I published a (short-lived) humorous book about surviving the Millennium in reaction to the end-of-century hype. It was an easy publishing decision to make because the Millennium was *the* topic in the media at the time and there was an obvious market for it.**

media hype gave the book a free publicity ride and increased sales because people saw documentaries about the battle on television or read about the anniversary in the press and then went into bookshops looking for books on the subject.

Whenever I mention that I published a book for this kind of reason, don't think that the book was accepted just for those external reasons. Every book was also well written and researched. They fitted our publishing programme, they had fresh ideas with an original angle. But they also had that extra magic ingredient of being tied to

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

events that were about to happen. Hundreds of other books that were also well written and researched would have been under consideration by my editors at the same time, but it was those external factors that in some cases made the difference and helped us to choose one book over another when combined with the other factors listed in this chapter.

Publishers who jump onto passing bandwagons in this way can achieve impressive book sales very quickly, but they can also lose money if they jump on too late and find themselves left with thousands of books that won't sell. Print runs to satisfy the demands of market hype have to be huge. When the fourth and long-awaited *Star Wars* film was released the publisher of the official tie-in books overestimated the demand and was nearly crippled by hundreds of thousands of books that were returned unsold from the shops.

Despite occasional bad experiences publishers in general will be keen to sign up a book that they think can hitch a ride on a bandwagon because they want to be in with a chance of a hit

## NICHE

publication. If you're aware of any forthcoming dates, films, television series, sporting events or anything else that is relevant to your book proposal, let the publisher know about it, preferably a year or two in advance.

### **4. Niche**

My publishing career started in 1990 with a self published book called *The Busker's Guide to Europe* which revealed the best spots throughout the continent for earning money from street entertainment.

I knew at the time that the market for such a book would be limited, but I was reassured by a book I'd read about self publishing which stated that a book would succeed provided it fitted a niche, no matter how small. I would now qualify that advice by pointing out that the smaller the niche the more important it is to be able to contact potential readers within that niche easily.

Buskers are not the easiest group to contact by mailshot: I found myself visiting town centres and dropping order forms for my book into buskers' guitar cases and hats (I still remember

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

the hundreds of disappointed faces when they realised it wasn't cash I was giving them). The thousand copies I printed took about six years to sell, which is not a rate of sale that could be considered a success in the publishing business.

Be aware of the best way to contact your

**Ensure that if your book fits a niche market, rather than being suitable for everyone, it is at least a niche that can be contacted cost-effectively.**

potential readers and list those ways in your cover letter to publishers.

Examples of ways to contact niche

readers could be through:

1. Specialist magazines
2. Clubs
3. Unions
4. Societies
5. Charities
6. Colleges
7. Websites
8. Extended families
9. Local communities

## NICHE

**How many guaranteed or highly likely potential sales to niche customers would persuade a publisher to keep your manuscript out of the rejection pile?**

<b>Number of sales</b>	<b>Effect on the editor</b>
<b>10</b> copies	won't make a difference.
<b>100</b> copies	would be nice but won't swing things your way.
<b>500</b> copies	will make an editor think twice.
<b>1,000</b> copies	would put a smile on their bespectacled faces.

When you present a book submission with clear evidence of a quantifiable market you know that the niche aspect of the decision making process will go in your favour.

## **The publisher**

THE EMPLOYEES OF the publishing company make the decisions that will determine whether your book is to be printed or not, and these people consider not only the book, the author and the market but also internal factors such as the size and direction of the company, its state of financial health and issues of internal politics.

### **1. Size of a publishing company**

The size of a publishing company will affect how many people are in each department and whether it even has any departments. One person can run a small publishing company, either doing everything themselves or using freelance workers as needed. Large publishing houses employ hundreds of staff.

The larger the company, the greater the number of people who need to be convinced of the viability of your book in order for it to be accepted. The Assistant Editor has to convince one or two more senior editors, who in turn have



## SIZE OF A PUBLISHING COMPANY

to convince an Editorial Director that your book will be right for their list, will increase the company's reputation and will earn it money.

Offer it to a one-man band and there's only one obstacle in the way of publication: the owner of the company. The trouble is that the amount of money on offer from a large company will usually be much higher, as will the chances of the book being a success.

So how does the size of a publishing house fit into the decision-making process? On one level, the size affects the number of titles they are

**Don't ignore small publishers. I was one once, and my company grew along with the success of its early authors such as Geoff Thompson. You can find the smaller presses listed in writers' guides such as *The Writer's Handbook* and *The Writers' and Artists' Yearbook*. They're generally more open to submissions by new writers than the larger publishers.**

able to release in a year. Budget and human resource restrictions will mean that some small publishers would be spreading themselves too thinly if they signed up more than ten books a

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

year. Of those ten books, typically two of them might be by authors who have already been published by that firm and one will be a new edition of an older book. Two more might come from publishers in another country (rights purchases). That leaves just five books to be selected from the slush pile each year.

Small firms receive fewer submissions than the big boys, perhaps ten per week instead of a hundred, but that still means they *have to* reject about 98% of everything they receive, regardless of its quality or suitability. Do the odds get any more favourable for the author when looking at the statistics of large publishers? Actually, no they don't. Very roughly, 98% of submissions will, in fact, be rejected from all publishers.

### **2. Direction of a publishing company**

Managers at the helm of a publishing company normally want to take the firm in a particular direction. That's because publishing isn't just about the money; it's also about the branding. Publishers won't take on any old book that they

## **DIRECTION OF A PUBLISHING COMPANY**

think will make money, regardless of genre. They are constantly thinking about the 'direction' in which their company is going. That is to say they are conscious of the kind of book they publish, the kind of readership they attract, and the profile of their brand in the trade. OK, so branding is also about money, but in the wider sense than the profitability of individual titles. Strong branding helps to increase the value of the company, which keeps the shareholders happy.

The idea of a publisher worrying about their brand perception seems a little odd to the average book reader who would be hard pressed to name any publisher other than Penguin Books. But to overseas publishers who regularly buy translation rights, to freelance sales reps who have learned how to sell that company's products into the shops, and to the bookshop workers who know which companies have made a reputation for a certain kind of book, the branding is essential. Gaining a reputation in a particular subject area enables a publisher to attract better-known authors. It makes it easier for them to sell their

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

books into the shops and it makes direct marketing more cost-effective. This book, for instance, is part of a series of books on various aspects of writing. This is more cost-effective than having just a single title of interest to authors because it costs the same to promote ten books as it does to advertise one.

The direction in which a company is led means that certain kinds of books will be off-limits to its editors. The directors may decree that a genre of books is to be dropped. Perhaps fiction is to be their speciality and all non-fiction titles are to be phased out. Equally they may actively encourage their editors to sign up authors in a particular genre. On a whim or for carefully researched commercial reasons a publishing director may decide to add a science list, a range of gift books or a children's list. Editors will know in what direction their company is headed and will consider this factor when commissioning new books.

## **THE PUBLISHER'S FINANCIAL HEALTH**

### **3. The publisher's financial health**

It's possible for a company to shrink as well as to grow. Publishers can suffer cashflow problems, especially in their early years, and the financial state of the firm can influence publishing decisions. When times are hard there has to be a reduction in the number of new books signed up. Lower royalty advances will be offered. It's even possible for books already contracted to be postponed or cancelled.

A publishing house riding on the back of recent bestsellers will have enough cash in the bank to be able to take risks with new books. Risky books can bring greater than average rewards if successful, but can also flop disastrously. Publishers can afford a few failures every year so long as they have enough hits to cover the losses. But when a publisher is suffering from too many misses and not enough hits, they analyse potential risk very carefully before signing up a new title. The following list contains the most important factors they take into account when deciding on the relative risk of a title.

## **How a publisher perceives risk**

### **High risk**

- New author
- Author has no agent
- Author has no reputation in the subject
- Author is paid an advance on royalties
- Book is expensive to print
- Book comes with only single country rights
- Book has no chance of sub-rights sales
- Book requires higher than average editorial input
- Book needs marketing campaign
- Book subject is outside of the publisher's experience
- Potential readership is disparate

### **Low risk**

- Established author
- Author has an agent
- Author is an acknowledged expert in the subject
- Author works for flat fee (or for free!)
- Book is cheap to print
- Book comes with world rights
- Book has potential for many rights sales
- Book requires little editing
- Book sells on the back of pre-existing publicity or demand
- Book is similar to previous titles successfully published
- Potential readership is easy to target

## **INTERNAL POLITICS**

### **4. Internal politics**

Editors are trying to build a reputation and a career in publishing. They want to get noticed by their boss for being the first to spot a potential bestseller. The last thing they want is to make the mistake of overlooking your proposal if you subsequently send it to a rival publisher who turns you into a celebrity author. Internal publishing company politics is on your side from this perspective. At the same time, editors want to protect their positions by not signing up too many books that don't sell. To safeguard their jobs they try not to take too many risks with new kinds of writing. Sticking to a writing formula that works or to subject areas or authors that they know will work for them is a safe option that many editors will take.

Also, individuals have agendas. They know the prejudices and foibles of their boss and may try to sign up books that they know will earn that boss's respect and appreciation. Or an editor may disagree with an author's world viewpoint sufficiently to reject a book before anyone in the company has a chance to see it.

Always write from the heart.

• Strong central character

• Sub-plot?



THINGS TO CONSIDER

• Finding an agent

• Overcoming writer's block

• Writer should always

• have a notebook & pen.

## Part 2

# How the publishing and bookselling industries work



## **The perils of publishing**

EVERY BOOK PUBLISHED is a new product, so publishers have to keep on finding, developing, perfecting and releasing new products. New products are inherently risky. No one knows in advance how many copies will be sold or whether the readers will like it. It costs money to get the new product known to the public. So publishers are gambling large sums of money with every book they bring out.

Compare this to other industries, such as producers of food or drink. They can rely on sales of the same product for decades. Customers will buy the same beer, orange juice, bread or chocolate all of their lives. But no one (in their right mind) buys the same book more than once, and certainly not every week for sixty years.

Publishing is a tough business, but it does have its rewards. After years of struggling, a publisher can release a surprise bestseller and its profits can go through the roof. But this success

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

brings its own problems. Firstly, there is the disappointment that comes the following year when there is no bestseller and the company's income drops back down again. Secondly, if extra staff and financial commitments are taken on during a period of success, this can act like a lead lifebelt when that run of success is over. No books remain in the bestseller charts forever, and no one can guarantee to publish books that will duplicate the success of previous winners.

The cashflow of a publishing business is challenging at the best of times. Almost three quarters of all book sales occur in the run-up to Christmas. Therefore during most of the year a publisher's income is limited. When an author is paid an advance on royalties, that money comes out of the publisher's pocket up to two years before any income is received from sales of that book. If too many expensive authors are signed up in quick succession, the negative effect on the publisher's cashflow can be devastating.

## **The publishing process in a nutshell**

THE PRECISE DETAILS vary according to the size of publishing company involved, but the following twenty stages are fairly typical of most companies.

- 1. Manuscripts are submitted by authors and agents to the editorial department for consideration for publication.**
- 2. Some are rejected instantly, others are discussed at editorial meetings.**
- 3. In-house or external readers will read and report on the merits of the manuscript.**
- 4. If the reader's report is positive, the sales department will be consulted regarding the book's selling potential.**
- 5. Many factors are taken into account when comparing manuscripts shortlisted for publication.**
- 6. An offer to publish may then be made, usually with a view to printing the book a year or two from that date.**

## **HOW TO GET PUBLISHED**

- 7. This gives enough time for the editor to work on the manuscript, suggesting rewrites, re-structuring and correcting errors.**
- 8. Meanwhile a designer will work on a cover image.**
- 9. The publicist will request a photo and biographical information from the author to help create the press release.**
- 10. Other editors will write a blurb for the book's jacket and will register an ISBN from which a bar code can be generated for the back cover.**
- 11. The sales department will create an Advance Information (AI) sheet consisting of the cover design, the ISBN, the title and author details, the blurb, and the book's price, dimensions, binding, release date and selling points.**
- 12. This AI sheet will be duplicated for the sales reps to take into bookshops in order to achieve advance orders.**
- 13. The company website will be updated to include details of the forthcoming book,**

## **THE PUBLISHING PROCESS IN A NUTSHELL**

**and an entry will be included in its next printed catalogue.**

- 14. All of the book information will be submitted to the publisher's warehousing company and to the industry databases from which Amazon and high street shops obtain their computer book data.**
- 15. A small number of uncorrected 'proof' copies of the book may be quickly typeset and printed some months ahead of the publication date and sent to key reviewers and book trade buyers.**
- 16. The book will be typeset.**
- 17. A final proofread is done.**
- 18. The book is sent to the printing presses.**
- 19. A month or so later it arrives in the warehouse with a few weeks to spare before it is delivered to the shops.**
- 20. In the couple of weeks following the publication date the publicist will attempt to get the author interviewed as widely as possible.**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

After that, there is little the publisher can do. The book has to make its own way in the harsh world of retail bookselling. The publisher has given it a strong push, but doesn't have the resources to keep pushing it forever. After all, there are other books coming along which need its attention.

If a publisher releases fifty titles a year, that's about one per week going through its system. Every person working on that book must get their job done in less than forty hours, otherwise they'll fall behind schedule. That's why as an author it's important to be realistic about what a publisher will be able to do for you after the book is printed. You will only be the number one priority for forty working hours!

### **Editorial**

The most senior editor is usually the commissioning editor. The choice of which books a company should publish is crucial to its success, so that role tends to be reserved for

## **EDITORIAL**

experienced individuals. Editors nurture relationships with authors and agents, sometimes working with the same authors for many years.

Editors work on manuscripts through various stages. Initially there may be structural editing, involving the rearrangement of the order of chapters or the elimination or addition of an entire theme. Usually suggestions are made and the author carries out the actual restructuring, but sometimes the editor will do the work. Following the structural edit comes the copy edit, in which the text is examined at a closer level. An editor may recommend rephrasing of paragraphs with repetitive vocabulary, for instance, or they may identify inconsistencies of style. Zooming in still closer the editor finally comes to the proofreading stage. This often happens after the typesetting of the book has been completed, enabling them to spot layout errors as well as spelling and grammatical errors that have slipped through the net.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### Sales

The sales department consists of a sales manager and teams of national and international sales representatives. The sales manager will ensure the reps on the road are kept supplied with up-to-date sales literature and samples, and may also visit the head offices of key accounts such as wholesalers and major bookshop chains. The reps themselves visit individual shops and other head offices to show the buyers what is coming out in the next few months and to take orders. The orders are then sent to the warehouse to be entered into a computerised invoicing system. Long before the publisher sends the book to be printed they know the number of orders already achieved and can adjust their print run accordingly.

**Normally the number of advance orders will be multiplied by at least three to take account of late arriving orders and reorders from shops where the initial stocks of the book sell through quickly. Publishers aim to print about six to twelve months' worth of stock at a time.**



## **WAREHOUSING AND DISTRIBUTION**

### **Warehousing and distribution**

Publishers normally employ third party distributors to handle their book storage, invoicing and despatch. This tends to be more cost effective than doing it themselves because distributors can take advantage of lower postage costs by bundling orders from various publishers into the same box to be delivered to a bookshop. So when books are printed only a small quantity of them is actually seen by the publishers: the rest are delivered into a warehouse many miles away from their offices.

### **Publicity**

Selling a new title into the bookshops is only halfway to making a genuine sale because unsold stock will be returned for credit. The best way to avoid returns is to make sure the public hears about the book and makes the effort to visit the bookshop specifically to buy that title. Publishers employ in-house or freelance publicists to liaise with press, radio and television media in order to get coverage for the book or the author in the form of reviews, competitions, interviews, news

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

stories, extracts or features. The process begins with a press release that is posted or e-mailed to suitable recipients, and may be followed by a launch party and schmoozing lunches. Don't assume all new books are celebrated by launch parties, though. It usually doesn't benefit sales very much, so unless you're prepared to fund and organise it yourself the chances of your first published book having the honour of a launch party are only slightly better than the odds of getting published in the first place.

### **Design**

The design department has the crucial task of typesetting attractive pages, creating irresistible covers, designing trade catalogues, adverts, leaflets, posters and press releases. This work is sometimes outsourced to freelancers or design companies. The success of a book product hangs almost entirely on its design. Over-eager authors have been known to put pressure on their publishers to use their own artwork despite its inappropriateness for the market. Publishers, too,

## **ACCOUNTING**

make mistakes in the design of their book covers. It's an art, not a science, and it's very easy to get the look of a book so wrong that it doesn't sell. Publishers appreciate ideas for cover designs from authors, and it's useful when the writer provides quality photos or artwork that can be used on the front cover, but ultimately the publisher must decide whether it is in everyone's best interests to use those materials or not.

### **Accounting**

Authors who receive royalties for their books will be sent statements of sales either annually or every six months. In larger publishing houses there will be a department that deals with these reports and their subsequent payments. Editors and owners of smaller publishers tend to work out the royalties themselves. Most contracts will state that the publisher is obliged to pay any royalties within three months of the statement date. My publishing company always tries to pay royalties with the statement, which usually means the author receives their money more than two

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

months early. But I'm aware of other companies (which I won't name) where the unofficial policy has been to prepare a royalty statement only when the author chases it.

Keep a note in your diary as to when the statement is due and don't be afraid to chase late payments. It's also vital to keep the publisher informed when you change your address because royalties often get sent to the wrong place.

### **Rights**

Publishers have two ways of earning money from books. One way is to sell copies of the book, either printed or electronic, and the other way is to sell rights. The kinds of rights that are commonly sold are translation, large print, extract, serial, film options, and overseas English language. No physical product has to be produced by the publisher when these rights are sold, so their profit margin per transaction is high and that is why the author usually receives a higher percentage of the income than they do for the sales of the printed book.

## WHAT HAPPENS TO PRINT RUNS?

### **What happens to the books?**

It's not quite as simple as saying that all the copies printed will be sold and the author will receive some money for every one. Let's say an author is told by their publisher that 3,000 copies of their book will be printed. How many copies are likely to be available for sale?

The following numbers are typical of what could happen:

- For technical reasons the printer is not obliged to deliver the correct amount – it can vary by about 5% up or down, and in this instance only 2,900 books are delivered.
- The publicist will send 50 copies to reviewers.
- The sales manager will send 30 copies to key bookshop managers.
- The author will receive 10 free copies.
- The sales reps (let's say 8 of them) will each have 3 copies to show off to the bookshops.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

- The rights manager will send 30 copies to publishers in other countries who may be interested in buying translation or territorial rights and will keep 20 copies available to take to book fairs.
- The publisher will also keep a small stack of 20 copies of the book in their office just in case they receive enquiries from other reviewers or potential customers in the months after publication.
- 10 copies will be damaged in transit or in storage.
- 6 copies will be bound incorrectly by the printer.

That amounts to 200 copies that are not available for sale, plus the 100 copies that the printer delivered short, which comes to 300 copies in total.

So in this example, 10% of the stated print run never makes it onto the author's royalty statement. The percentage can be much higher if books are lost, the warehouse is flooded, half of the print run arrives with the covers bound upside-down, or the publisher decides to spray free copies of the book at every reviewer in the land. They, not

## **WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BOOK STOPS SELLING?**

the author, own the books after all. The publisher pays for the books and can give away as many as they like. But they have the same interest as the author in selling as many as possible, so however many they give away it's probably in the expectation that the freebies will lead to extra sales.

### **What happens when a book stops selling?**

Most publishing contracts permit the publisher to remainder unsold books if they deem it necessary, usually not less than two years after the date of publication.

They will only do this if they consider your book to be no longer commercially viable. Sales will have dropped to about zero (or may even be negative due to returns) and the cost of storing the books will outweigh the income from them.

Remainder dealers buy this kind of 'dead' stock at knock-down prices, often just token amounts of money, and sell the books in discount book stores. When this happens, authors are normally entitled to purchase as many copies as they want at the discounted remainder price.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

If no buyer can be found for the stock then the publisher will offer it to the author for free. If the author is not excited at the prospect of clogging up their house with dusty boxes of unsaleable books then the publisher will arrange for them to be pulped.

In the past, the sale of stock to a remainder dealer or the pulping of every last copy meant the end of the life of the book. But new technology has created other options for books at this stage of their life.

Print-on-demand means that a book is officially available as far as Amazon and high street bookshops are concerned, but the publisher holds no stock at all. When an order arrives it is automatically diverted to a specialist printer who holds digital files for that book, from which they can print and despatch one copy direct to the bookshop.

This sounds so simple that you'd expect publishers to do that automatically so that they can do away with their warehousing expenses,



## **BOOK FAIRS**

but unfortunately the cost of printing a single copy of a book is many times more than the unit cost of a print run of several thousand.

The other ways in which a book can continue to live beyond its physical print run are as an eBook, an audio book, or as an edition published in another country.

### **Book fairs**

Publishers get together at trade fairs to meet with each other and agents to buy and sell book rights. The London Book Fair, the Frankfurt Book Fair and Book Expo America attract the highest attendance, but there are also many others around the world.

A publisher based in one country may choose to sell the right to translate (if necessary) and sell one of their books in another country. It's possible for a book published in one country to be sold to a dozen or more publishers in other countries,

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

each of which will arrange their own translations. Authors do well from foreign rights sales, usually earning at least half of the net income received.

Book fairs are ideal opportunities to chat with the smaller publishers and if you're lucky you'll be able to pitch your book to them. But publishers aren't there to sign up new books – they're there to sell rights to their existing list and they hate being cornered by an author who talks for so long that a potential rights customer walks away. So publishers are often wary of catching the eye of any passing writer.

**You may feel anonymous walking around a busy book fair but actually it's very easy for a publisher to spot an author amongst the suits. Apart from the fact that authors have to wear a badge with their name and the word 'AUTHOR' on it, they tend to wear hats, carry small rucksacks and dress in a way that is uniquely *authorian*. Publishers have been known to pretend to be in a meeting simply to avoid having to talk to them.**

## BOOK FAIRS

At a recent London Book Fair one of my own authors came up to me wearing a suit and a badge with his company name on it, rather than his own name. He told me it was easier to get to talk to publishers when hiding behind a company name (albeit the company consists solely of him) because they prefer talking to perceived professional business people rather than writers. He wrote humorous books – I don't think this approach could be applied to weightier books like novels. If you want to take advantage of trade fairs to get useful networking time with publishers, just remember three things: editors of larger companies don't always attend the fairs, so you might not meet the right people; dress like a publisher (smart, but not too smart); leave your hat at home.

Creating a (fake) company to hide behind is simple. Just call it something like YOUR NAME LITERARY SERVICES and explain that you write books to order. I know it's silly, but for some reason it can open more doors for you than simply calling yourself an author.

## **The business of bookshops**

IT'S USEFUL FOR an author to understand the workings of the high street bookshops in order to have a realistic sense of what publishers have to do to sell books and how you can help them to develop the products they need.

### **Buying decisions**

Bookshop staff need to make commercial decisions regarding which new and old books they want to stock in their shops. Some will meet regularly with representatives of publishing companies and wholesalers to be shown information about forthcoming books; others will buy from catalogues, customer requests or the Internet. Choosing which books to keep in stock is a tricky art. The bookseller needs to be aware of the social class and ethnicity of its customer base, who the 'hot' authors of the day happen to be, and whether there are local reasons why particular titles need to be stocked such as those related to courses at local colleges. The track record of an author, publisher, or series of books

## BUYING DECISIONS

is also taken into account together with the limitations of a monthly purchasing budget.

**I spent many years ‘repping’ new books into bookshops, and it was often a struggle. It could never be guaranteed that every book I published would be stocked by every bookshop. Frequently as many as half the shops I visited would say ‘no thanks’ to a forthcoming book. Some shops would be sufficiently excited to order enough copies to create a pile on a table or a ‘pocket’ on the shelf (where the books are face-out instead of spine-on), but others would reluctantly take a single copy. Buying decisions appeared arbitrary, so each book’s coverage of the country would be patchy at best. In some towns it would be impossible to find our books. In others we’d find everyone was buying them.**

Some of the problems I had in persuading buyers to stock the book in their shops were related to personal opinions or prejudice. Understandably, we all tend to make purchasing decisions based on what we like, and booksellers are no different. It’s their job to be objective and to select books

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

for their customers, not themselves, but inevitably personal preferences get in the way. Many bookshop workers I encountered were poorly paid and not sufficiently motivated to care too much about being objective. But this is understandable because profit margins for bookshops are very tight and, like publishing, it's a risky, investment-heavy business.

When a publisher attempts to sell their new titles to a bookshop they face a similar challenge to that of an author trying to sell their book concept to a publisher. The publisher, like the bookseller, should be objective and neutral in their commissioning decisions. But that isn't the way the world works. Publishers have preferences and prejudices too and they will reject books they simply don't like or don't approve of, even though other readers might like them. But in the same way that a publisher simply visits another bookshop after failing to make a sale, an author must try another publisher as soon as the book proposal is rejected.

## SHELF SPACE

### Shelf space

Go into any bookshop and the chances are that every shelf and table is full of books. It makes sense: the shops are trying to offer the widest range of books possible in order to attract the most customers, so all the space in the shop is used to its fullest extent.

Many authors and customers assume that what you see on the shelves is just the tip of the iceberg of a shop's available stock, and that for every copy at the front of the store there will be ten or twenty hidden away in their stockroom out the back. Bookshops do have stock rooms, but they are for processing incoming parcels and outgoing unsold books. Only exceptionally fast-selling books will have spare stock kept out of sight of the public.

So if the shelves are full, how can they order new books? Fortunately,

**It makes no economic sense for booksellers to order more copies than they can fit on the shelf. They can obtain re-supplies within days if they need to, so they only order what they think will sell within a short period, usually about three months.**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

customers buy books each day. That creates just enough slack in the system to be able to slot in the new stock. It's a difficult balancing act, frequently requiring older books to be returned to the publishers in order to make way for the new ones. And that is why a newly published author is often shocked and disappointed to discover that their book is not in stock in all bookshops and where it is stocked there is only a single copy available.

### **Subject areas**

Bookshops have to divide and label their shelf space according to standard subject areas. This enables the customer to find the right kind of book easily. History is on one shelf, cookery is on another. Easy.

Complications arise when a book is published that is about the history of cooking. Which section should it go in? The bookseller may make a random decision between the available options, which means a customer who reads a review and



## **TIME GIVEN FOR A BOOK TO SELL**

comes in looking for that book only has a 50% chance of finding it unless they visit both shelves (which might be on different floors of the building). For this reason it is vital to write a book that will fit into a pre-existing genre. Don't try to invent a new genre: there won't be a shelf for it and it won't sell.

### **Time given for a book to sell**

Bookshops have agreements with the publishers whose books they stock allowing them to return unsold books after a certain minimum amount of time. Books fail to sell for a number of reasons. It could be that the shop arranges a particular subject alphabetically by the author's name, resulting in books by a writer whose surname begins with a Y being placed on the bottom shelf where no one can see it without getting down on their knees. It could be that the book is wrong for the kind of population in the bookshop's catchment area. Maybe it received bad reviews or didn't get any publicity at all. Thin books

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

placed spine-on can get lost amongst larger books. The bookseller may have placed the book on the correct shelf only for a browsing customer to pick it up and place it on a different shelf so that no one finds it again.

These and dozens of other reasons explain why at least a fifth of all books sold into bookshops by publishers are returned some months later. This can have interesting effects on royalty statements, because the author is paid when a bookshop makes a purchase but if the books ‘sold’ are subsequently returned and there are more returns than sales in a subsequent royalty period then there could be negative royalty due. This will be carried forward to the next statement – the author won’t normally have to hand the money back.

If a bookshop was not able to return unsold stock they would gradually clog up with books, forcing them to cut back on purchases of new books until their business ground to a halt.

## **PRIME SPACE**

### **Prime space**

Certain areas of bookshops are regarded as prime selling space: the till points, the entrance, the windows and the tables on the ground floor. Prime space represents less than 1% of the available space for books. Most new authors imagine that their book will automatically be positioned in prime selling space and feel let down by their publishers when this doesn't happen.

Prime space in the large bookshop chains is often allocated for in-store promotions, such as '3 for 2' (buy two books, get one free). Publishers are asked to pay a share of the cost of the promotion and to give extra discount to compensate the bookseller who is effectively giving away some of their stock for free. But however keen a publisher may be to promote a particular title in this way, the bookshop's head office will make the final decision as to which titles to include. That's one reason why your book may not appear in the promotion. Another reason is that the costs to the publisher of including it are simply uneconomical and the publisher refuses to take part.

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### Seasons

Bookselling is a seasonal business. More books are bought as gifts for others than are bought by people who actually want to read them themselves. So gift books and humour books sell particularly well as Christmas stocking-fillers. Little romantic books sell in early February just before St Valentine's Day. Travel guides sell in huge numbers in early summer as people prepare to go on holiday. Exam guides sell prior to any exam dates.

To make the most of this seasonal effect, booksellers sometimes have to clear out books in order to make space for the big seasonal titles. As an author, this means you might see your book disappear from the shelves only to return a few months later.

**Very few books sell evenly throughout the year, and this is primarily due to the huge market distortion caused by Christmas.**

## **DIFFICULTIES OF BEING A BOOKSELLER**

### **The difficulties of being a bookseller**

A typical bookshop stocks 70,000 titles (out of almost a couple of million currently in print). Many of them are steady backlist sellers that any customer would expect to find, such as Shakespeare plays, Jane Austen novels and Wordsworth poems. In order to stock new titles a bookseller has to drop old ones. Making decisions like that whilst dealing with customer questions and operating till points and unpacking stock parcels is not easy. How many new titles should the shop take on when there are over 100,000 new books published each year?

In order to be able to keep in stock the range of backlist titles that customers expect the choice of new titles is limited to as little as 5,000. So 95% of new books will not be stocked and the bookseller has to reject new titles presented to them every day.

However, it's not quite the case that 95% of new books are turned down: many books are not intended for sale in high street shops in the first place and the bookshops are never told about

## **HOW TO GET PUBLISHED**

them. Specialist text books, for instance, are sold to libraries and through other channels. Some publishers don't have reps to show the books to the shops. Some of the 'new' books are, in fact, new editions of older books and don't need to be re-sold into the trade.

### **Wholesalers**

A wholesaler stocks books from all publishers, thus providing a useful service for any shops that want to lower their administration costs by only dealing with one supplier instead of hundreds of publishers. The publisher sells books to the wholesaler, and the wholesaler then sell the books to the shops.

### **The Internet**

Currently the dominant player in Internet bookselling is Amazon, which has sites catering for several countries. Its drawbacks include the inability to hold a book and flick through its pages before buying and the delay between purchasing the book and its arrival by post. But the

## INTERNET

advantages of this business model are considerable. Firstly, every book in print (and even those not in print) is listed on the website. Armchair shopping is an obvious bonus, and the listing of reviews by readers of each book adds a dimension that high street shops could not match.

Amazon buys some of its stock from wholesalers, but many of its titles are kept in its warehouses 'on consignment'. This means that publishers deliver stock to them without an invoice: Amazon only pays the publisher once the books have been sold. This can create a distortion in royalty accounts if the author knows the initial print run and the current stock levels because significant amounts of stock can disappear from the publisher's warehouse without the author apparently receiving royalties from it. The royalties from Amazon sales will appear in later statements once Amazon has provided its own statements to the publisher for books sold.

## **eBooks**

COMPARED TO THE printed version of a book, the eBook offers several benefits:

- The eBook can be downloaded instantly from a website into a computer, mobile phone, PDA or soon into an iPod.
- The text is searchable.
- The eBook can contain hyperlinks to relevant websites for further information.

In the same way that people are ‘ripping’ their CD collection into their iPods, boxing up the old discs and putting them into the attic, we now have the same option available to us for our book collections.

It’s not a concept that appeals to everyone, but the ability to carry an entire library in your pocket will at least lighten a few holiday suitcases that were previously stuffed with heavy novels.



## INTERNET PUBLISHING

### **Internet publishing**

There are publishers who only produce eBooks. Their investment in each title published is much lower than in the traditional model because they avoid print, storage and delivery costs for their products. Therefore they can publish more books than other firms and do not need to reject such high percentages of the submissions they receive. But most authors don't want to let go of the dream of seeing copies of their book on the shelves of a bookshop and are reluctant to accept publication only in eBook formats.

**I've published books that have gone straight into eBook editions for sale on the Internet. No printed copies were ever made. This was done because the market for them seemed too risky to warrant any investment in a physical print run. Internet publishing eliminates 90% of the costs associated with bringing out a book, and therefore enables more authors to have their work read by readers than would otherwise be possible.**

## Agents

A LITERARY AGENT provides a filtering service for publishers. They select only the best writers and attempt to sell the work of those writers to the major publishing houses. Agents develop working relationships with the publishers in order to ensure they are able to supply the right kind of book each time.

The largest publishers will only look at book proposals submitted by agents, so if you want to get published in a big way then you need an agent. They'll take a percentage of any earnings you make, but they'll probably be able to negotiate a better deal for you in the first place so there's no doubt that they earn their money.

The trouble is that getting a deal with an agent is just as hard as getting one with a publisher. They won't sign you up unless they are confident that they can sell your writing. In order to continue to provide a good service to all of their existing client authors, an agent won't sign up too many new writers.

## **AGENTS**

Realistically, then, the top agents present a closed door to most new authors. You won't have so much difficulty getting signed up by a new agency or one that is based in a small town, but their clout with publishers won't be much stronger than your own.

Agents are listed in the same writing directories as the publishers, and usually they want to see the same kind of proposals. Bear in mind that agents like to nurture long-term relationships with writers, so if you can persuade them that you will be a full-time author with a string of exciting forthcoming books lined up then the proposition becomes more attractive to them.

## Self publishing

BECOMING A PUBLISHER in your own right is a legitimate way of getting published. If your book is an autobiography, poetry or short stories then you have practically no other option anyway. You don't need to know about typesetting, cover design or printing – just employ one of the many firms who specialise in providing these services for authors who want to get into print. When the books are delivered to you they belong to you, so all the income from sales is yours to keep.

**Don't expect to make money from printing your own book. You might get back some of your investment, but it isn't possible to make a real profit from a short print run (less than a thousand copies) of a book. Selling more than a thousand is possible and I've seen plenty of self published writers do so, but it takes dedication to achieve it.**

Self publishing can be a step towards getting a major publishing deal. Some editors prefer to see

## VANITY PUBLISHING

a bound book because it helps them to visualise what their edition could look like, or they might like your impressive sales figures. Others, however, might be put off by the fact that your book has already appeared in the shops and may be concerned that you've tapped the market for yourself and there's nothing left.

There's a new trend amongst the bigger publishing houses towards looking at self published books in the hope of finding a gem that they can take on. *A Year in the Merde* by Stephen Clarke and *The Sea on Our Left* by Shally Hunt are both examples of self published books that became bestsellers when taken on by larger publishing companies.

### **Vanity publishing**

This is when authors pay a publisher to take on their book. The vanity publisher makes a profit out of the author and therefore doesn't need to sell any copies of the book to make a living. Any copies they actually print belong to them, not the author, so if the author wants stock to sell to friends and family they have to pay for it (again).

Always write from the heart.

- Strong central character

- Sub-plot?



THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Finding an agent
- Overcoming writer's block

Writer should always

have a notebook & pen.

## Part 3

# Finding a publisher for your book

## **Why it's vital to target the right kind of publisher**

A BOOK IS not just a book. Publishers' reputations are not built on the fact that they can simply publish books. Their skills, expertise and reputation are all based on the kinds of books in which they specialise. Even the larger publishing houses, whose lists cover many genres, are usually divided into internal 'imprints'. Each imprint can be a specialist division with their own editors who are experts in their subjects. These imprints are sometimes created by the parent company, but often they are the remnants of smaller companies that were swallowed up during a takeover or merger.

So you're not going to send your book proposal to every publisher you can find. It's a waste of your time and money, not to mention theirs. You're going to find the right publisher, a company that from the outside appears to be a perfect match for your book. And then you're going to find lots of other firms that would be equally good matches.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### **Do publishers sometimes commission books from genres in which they haven't published before?**

Yes, they do. If no one occasionally tried something new the industry would be very static and dull. But the jump from one genre to another has to be fairly close, otherwise the publisher will lack the courage to attempt it.

You might be able to persuade a publisher of local history books to take on a military history title, but you'll be wasting your time asking them to sign up a historical novel. This is because local and military history are both subsets of the same genre and will be sold to the same bookshop department manager. But a historical novel is fiction and will be sold into the fiction buyer. That can mean an extra appointment for the sales rep, which isn't cost effective for a single book. Fiction is also an entirely different and challenging market that the average non fiction publisher wouldn't enter without first imbibing a stiff drink to steady their nerves.

Generally it's not worth the effort of trying to tempt publishers away from their comfort zones.



## **COMPARE YOUR BOOK TO OTHERS**

The decision to try something new is not always in reaction to specific book proposals anyway (often it's a managerial choice). There are already enough publishers specialising in whatever genre you want to write and those are the ones you need to target.

### **Compare your book to others**

Read other books by each publisher on your target list and think about what those books contain that may have encouraged an editor to sign them up. Would your book fit in well amongst them? If you don't think your book is in the same calibre then go back to the re-drafting stage. If your book matches the quality but not the genre, look for different publishers.

### **Writing for an existing series**

If your aim is to write a book that stands completely alone from other books already on sale then it will be statistically more difficult for you to get it published than if you were to write for an existing series, style or subject area.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

Publishers of non fiction series are always looking for new writers to help them expand their list, so if you have the expertise and ability to assist them in that process you just need to tell them. Writing a novel that fits a precise and identifiable sub-genre such as one of the Mills and Boon romantic fiction imprints will make it easier to get published than writing a novel that can't be compared to anything already out there.

### **Sending your proposal to more than one publisher at a time**

Authors are often nervous about this. It seems discourteous, unfaithful even, to send out a proposal to more than one publisher. The trouble is that it can take three months to hear a reply, even a negative one. Ironically the more they like your submission the longer it will take for them to reject it because it will get read by various people, talked about in meetings, forgotten about for a bit while the publisher gets ready for a book fair, and then found again and finally decided against. If you go through this process with one

## BIDDING WARS

publisher at a time it could take ten years for the book to fall into the right hands.

Take care to inform a publisher of any genuine interest from rival companies at the earliest

possible point. No one likes to spend hours debating the merits of a manuscript only to be told it has been sold to someone else.

**Sending copies of a proposal to multiple targets at once is a good thing from the author's perspective because it can shorten the time taken to get published.**

### **Bidding wars**

A bidding war is the main way in which a first time author can achieve a six figure advance (the other way is for them to be a high profile celebrity). When an agent is really excited about their newly signed author – usually we're talking about a novelist – and they successfully manage to convey that excitement to more than one publisher at a time, a situation arises in which publishers try to outbid each other in order to sign up the book. Their normal caution and

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

powers of reason melt away amid the heat of excitement and suddenly a new author is fast-tracked to superstardom.

Bidding wars where agents are not involved tend to be at a more mundane level, but still result in higher than average royalty advances for the author.

### **How to find the right publisher**

Most authors identify one publisher that they think might be appropriate for them and they pin all of their hopes on that one submission. As often as not, this publisher isn't actually interested in that kind of book anyway. The author receives a rejection letter and gets disillusioned by the whole business of being a writer. They give up.

But that won't happen to you. You're going to be systematic and professional in your approach. First, you need to create a target list of publishers. Aim to send your proposal to no more than ten of them at a time in order to keep things manageable.

## **HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT PUBLISHER**

You can find suitable publishers for your book using the following methods:

### **Bookshop**

Browse among the shelves, noting the imprints and addresses of books that are similar to yours.

### **Internet**

Search the book's subject to see if any publishing company names crop up.

### **Amazon**

Search for comparable books to yours then look up other books by those publishers to see if it is a one-off or something in which they specialise. Note whether the similar books were published recently or not.

### **Book fair**

Walk around the booths looking for displays of books that appear similar to yours, then stop and chat to the publishers about whether they're interested in seeing new books in that genre.

### **Listings in writing guides**

Publishers are sometimes listed by subject category, but since these can be vague it's worth double checking on the Internet or in bookshops.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### **Personal contacts and networking**

An editor develops a working relationship with every writer they commission. We all want to work with people we like, so it's only natural for editors to want to work with authors they already know. And this doesn't only mean authors they have already published – it could be friends they have made at a party or business event.

Networking is about finding ways to meet the right people who can help you in your career. Introductions made at social events where editors are relaxed (and preferably intoxicated) are

**I often meet people who are fellow guests on television and radio shows with me. I'm there to plug a book, but they are there to tell their interesting and, as yet, unpublished story. On several occasions I have gone on to publish their story for them.**

perfect ways for authors to quiz them about their publishing programme, what they're looking for and whether they would like to see your efforts. It's a way of forming friendships that will develop into working relationships in the future. Getting a personal

## **PERSONAL CONTACTS AND NETWORKING**

introduction to a publisher at a party will more than double your chances of selling your writing. Even if they don't buy it from you they may be prepared to give you their expert opinion for free.

I've been known to give my opinion on books submitted to me via friends of friends. If it's not suitable for my company I sometimes pass it on to other publishers who might be interested. This wouldn't happen for a submission that arrives from a stranger.

Use any legitimate tactics you can think of to gain access to the inner circle of publishers. It isn't an impregnable fortress. They're nice people who live ordinary lives. If you're not in the same town as they are, travel. Find out where they hang out. Go to their offices for a quick chat, even if it's just with the receptionist: you might learn something valuable (remember not to waste anyone's time, though, because there's a fine line between a brief business-like conversation and being a nuisance). If you can't get to their location use the phone. People often phone me out of the blue for advice or to ask if I'd like to see their

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

book. It takes courage to do that, but what's the worst that will happen? A brush-off is all you'll get if they don't want to speak to you. It won't end your career.

Go to the international book fairs to meet publishers. Chat to the people on the booths. Find out what kinds of books they want to publish next year. Take their cards. Hang out at the parties in the hotels – the networking opportunities really begin when the wine starts to flow. Flirting skills are a bonus here!

### **Working in publishing or bookselling**

I've emphasised in this book the importance of understanding the publishing and bookselling industries in order to assist your attempts at entering this literary world on a professional level. Writing the book is just the first step: a basic grounding in the terminology and procedures of the business you're trying to become a part of will help you to get the deal in the first place. It will also enable you to maximise sales and to increase your chances of being asked to write a follow-up.



## **WORKING IN PUBLISHING OR BOOKSELLING**

But will it help you to get published if you go the extra mile and actually get a job in the book industry? Absolutely it will, provided you choose your employer carefully and are prepared to exploit your position.

Working for a publishing company is your best bet, but it stands to reason that the company you try to work for should be one that already publishes the kind of book you're writing.

When I attend editorial meetings at which the editors discuss the submissions recently received and the kinds of books they would like to publish, I know that if I were an undercover author I would be able to go home and prepare a proposal that would get them very excited the next day. In fact I once did this as a joke – I listened to what my editors were saying that they would like to sign up, then went home and prepared a couple of proposals in a different name and sent them to the commissioning editor. He came to see me the next day looking very excited and proceeded to show me this proposal which was miraculously what he had been looking for.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

Access to the inner sanctum of a publishing house is a great way to generate book ideas that will have a guaranteed positive response. But it doesn't have to involve subterfuge because many publishers come up with ideas for books in-house and ask their editors to find a suitable writer. Sometimes editors or other staff within the company will offer to write the book themselves, and even unpaid work experience staff have been known to make contributions to the odd book or to assemble collections of quotations for anthologies during their internships.

Getting a job as a bookseller has different advantages. Your contact with publishers is limited to their sales representatives, but you have the opportunity to quiz them on whether they think your idea for a book has legs. Their opinion is part of the publisher's decision-making process so if you can quote a positive response from a rep in your proposal then your book can at least avoid instant rejection.

## **WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PROPOSAL HAS BEEN DESPATCHED TO SUITABLE PUBLISHERS**

Working in a bookshop you also have the chance to study sales patterns, noting which of your potential rivals is selling the best and talking to customers and colleagues about whether they like the sound of your idea for a book. And of course it wouldn't hurt to tell the publisher to whom you submit your manuscript that you might be able to influence your employer to order large quantities of the book when it comes out.

### **What to do when your proposal has been despatched to suitable publishers**

If the book is not written, start writing it. If you sent just a book outline with no actual samples then you should aim to have three chapters ready within the next month or two in case a publisher asks to see them. If you have already sent three chapters then crack on with the rest of it in case they want to read the whole thing.

If your entire book is already complete and has been re-drafted sufficient times then use your waiting period to give it a final proofread.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

The next thing to do is to prepare your target list for the second batch of publishers you want to approach. Start collecting names, numbers and addresses, call them all to find the name of the appropriate editor and to ask if they are interested in principle in viewing your proposal. Then as soon as you receive a rejection letter send out a proposal to someone else.

And when that is done? Keep up the writing routine. Think up a new book idea, but don't write the book. Just the idea.

Then think of another idea.

And then ten more.

Make some of the ideas fit a series theme if possible.

Don't write any of those ideas into full books, just type them up in no more than a hundred words per proposal and send them to some suitable publishers asking if they'd like to see samples of any of them.

Rejection at this early stage is relatively painless. It's also less likely because you're

## **WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR PROPOSAL HAS BEEN DESPATCHED TO SUITABLE PUBLISHERS**

offering a range of potential products to each publisher.

If they ask for samples then write them and send them off. This route is far less likely to lead to rejection because you're virtually writing to order. You know the editor is already interested in the idea and the only thing that might trip you up from then on is if your execution of that idea differs from how the editor expected it to turn out.

On many occasions I have asked to see samples from a list of excellent book ideas, only to be disappointed when those samples arrived. But I've also received samples from idea lists that have led to published books.

## **What to submit to a publisher**

WHAT PRECISELY COMPRISES a book proposal will vary according to the publisher. Most companies state clearly on their website what would-be authors should supply to them.

You'll find that some of the largest publishers actually say they won't even consider submissions that don't arrive via agents. This is an unfortunate obstacle for unpublished, unagented writers but it's a fact of the industry that cannot be avoided.

The smaller publishers will usually ask for a single page proposal or a covering letter, a synopsis and between one and three sample chapters.

Your sample chapters must be cleanly printed on fresh paper. If your toner or ink is running low make sure you replace it before printing anything. Publishers don't want to read weak and smeary text.

That's straightforward enough, but it doesn't tell the whole story. The purpose of a proposal is

## WHAT TO SUBMIT TO A PUBLISHER

to give enough information to an editor about your manuscript for them to make a judgement as to whether they would like to read more.

But there are other ways to tantalise a publisher, as we'll see later.

**Accompanying the submission with a large envelope and sufficient postage for the sample chapters to be returned is actually a pointless thing to do because you should never re-use those samples anyway. It's far better to enclose a postcard (with a stamp on it) addressed to you so that the publisher can acknowledge receipt of your submission. If the proposal is rejected the sample chapters can then be thrown away or recycled by the publisher. Make sure your e-mail address is included in your covering letter so that the publisher can send you a reply without incurring any costs.**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### What to put in your covering letter

Three things should be in your covering letter:

1. **You**
2. **Your book**
3. **Reasons to publish it.**

#### **You**

When writing about yourself, aim for a paragraph summarising relevant points about what qualifies you to write this book. If you want to say lots more about yourself constrain the extra words to a separate C.V. to make sure your covering letter isn't so long that it gets confused with the book itself.

The publisher needs to know if you have had any publishing successes before, if you have any relevant qualifications for writing your book, and if you plan to write any more books on the same subject.



## **WHAT TO PUT IN YOUR COVERING LETTER**

### **Your book**

Describe the book in one short paragraph. There is plenty of space to explain its intricacies in more detail in the synopsis. Here is where you write a short ‘teaser’ that will intrigue the editor sufficiently to make them want to know more.

Imagine you’re writing the publisher’s blurb that they will use to describe your book on the back cover, in their catalogue and on their website. There’s no need to give away the full plot – leave it open for the editor to wonder how it resolves.

Then add a short line to describe how you envisage the book in its printed form. For example you might see the book as a bargain paperback or a lavish hardback.

If the book is similar to a bestselling book or to another book by the publisher you’re writing to then make that comparison. It makes it easier for an editor to visualise the kind of book you’re proposing.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### Reasons to publish it

List any significant reasons why the publisher's risk will be small in taking on your book. Perhaps you have contacts in the media who have promised to help you publicise the book. Or you've done some research into the likely level of demand for your book and can demonstrate that the market is crying out for it because there is a gap in the market. Maybe you're involved in a society whose membership is sufficiently large to create enough guaranteed sales to justify a full print run. Or you're a lecturer on a subject and are sure the students at your college and others will all buy this book. Or you have the ability to sell the book through your own business.

Taking this principle further, imagine you planned to purchase a substantial number of copies of your book at the author's discount (usually between 35% and 50%) for selling privately to friends, family and colleagues or to sell in your own shop.

You mention to the publisher that you think you can sell 500 copies of the book, should it get

## **WHAT TO PUT IN YOUR COVERING LETTER**

into print, and that you would make a firm order to buy those copies, non returnable, so that they can be delivered direct from the printer.

If your book is up against similar, equally well-written manuscripts for consideration, this kind of offer could clinch the deal for you. It won't help you if the book isn't good enough, or it's wrong for the market, or the publisher doesn't specialise in that kind of book, but it can make a difference in the right circumstances.

What kind of a difference does a guaranteed sale of 500 copies make to a publisher? Actually quite a lot. It depends on the size and price of the book, but in most cases it's enough to cover as much as half of the printing costs and therefore reduces the chances that the book will lose money.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### How to write a synopsis

Generally speaking, one paragraph per chapter is adequate. As long as the synopsis fills one or two pages and no more then it's the right length. It's not easy to distil your masterpiece down to a few hundred words unless you're clear in your mind as to what the important themes and concepts are.

Leave out all unnecessary detail. As with the 'blurb' you wrote in your covering letter, don't feel the need to answer all questions – leave some things hanging tantalisingly in the air so the editor wants to read the whole book to find out more.

### **10 ways to leapfrog other submissions**

- 1. Call the publishing company and ask for the name of the appropriate editor for your genre of book.**
- 2. Ask to speak to that editor. If you get through to them, summarise your proposal in a couple of sentences and ask if they'd like to see it.**

## **10 WAYS TO LEAPFROG OTHER SUBMISSIONS**

- 3. Make sure your submission is personally addressed to that person.**
- 4. The covering letter inside must not be a generic, photocopied 'Dear sir/madam'. If you've already spoken on the phone, mention it.**
- 5. If you have enough relevant experience and qualifications, include a separate C.V. Otherwise, don't bother. Leave out jobs, swimming certificates and exams that have nothing to do with your book.**
- 6. Think of a stonking title and subtitle combination, or an enticing tag line if the book is fiction.**
- 7. Schmooze with publishers at book fairs, launch parties and award ceremonies.**
- 8. Use 'friend of a friend' contacts mercilessly.**
- 9. Offer to buy a chunk of the print run.**
- 10. Prove to the publisher that you can attract publicity for yourself.**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### **Gimmicks**

Submissions are often made to publishers in a gimmicky way. I've seen a proposal written on a scroll wrapped up in a cardboard tube, submissions printed on expensive coloured paper (a gold cover page is the worst offender), and ideas for books packaged with ribbons and bows. Needless to say, all were rejected.

You might think a gimmick is an effective way to get noticed in the slush pile – it *will* get your proposal noticed, but for the wrong reasons. Editors sigh at the sight of coloured paper and fancy packaging. They know from experience that authors who wrap their submission in such a decorative way are, either consciously or unconsciously, trying to divert attention from weaknesses in their writing. Such attempts have never worked and never will. Keep your proposal looking professional, and that means print it on standard 80gsm white paper. If you need to bind a few pages, use a staple in the top corner. If there are more pages than a stapler can manage, bind them in a simple and plain way that won't attract attention.

## GENERATING A COVER DESIGN

### Generating a cover design

Some authors go to the extent of designing a cover for their book when sending in a proposal. This can help the editor to imagine your book in print and how attractive it would look, but only if your design is of a professional standard. If you've never designed a book cover it might be advisable to avoid attempting one to send in with your idea. Instead, you could commission a design from a local

**Even publishers judge books by their covers.**

graphic designer or art student. If the design turns out to be stunning, giving the book a similar style to a bestseller in its genre, then things could start to go your way more easily. You should supply the designer with any high quality photos or artwork you possess that might be suitable, advise them on the target audience and show them similar book covers that you like. This will help them to understand the style of drawing or design they should aim for.

A mock-up of your book cover is not essential, since most books that are published do not come from illustrated proposals, and the wrong kind

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

of design can actually put editors off. But if you can get a design that excites a publisher in the same way that customers in bookshops get excited by attractive designs that make them want to buy books, then you're a little further on your way towards being a published author.

### **How long to wait for a response**

Wait a reasonable period before chasing the publisher for a response: this means at least a month. It takes time to make publishing decisions. Books aren't picked on a daily basis. Even after a month you may not get a very satisfactory answer. Finding an editor who knows about your submission (or pretends to) is a challenge in itself. Many rejections occur quickly, as do requests to see more of a book if only a sample chapter was received initially. But the wheels of publishing turn slowly because so many factors besides the quality of the writing have to be taken into account before making a decision. It's better to think of your submission as planting a seed that may bear fruit after many months. Don't sit around waiting to see if it grows: keep making and planting new seeds all the time.



## **COPYRIGHT PROTECTION**

### **Copyright protection**

Anything you write is automatically your copyright and will remain so until seventy years after you die. But if someone tries to steal your work that's of no help to you unless you can prove that you wrote it. Digital technology is making theft of writing texts much easier than in the past, so if you want peace of mind just follow these basic procedures:

1. Keep copies of all your different drafts. They show the progression of ideas as you developed the writing. The person who stole your writing would not be able to show the court any evidence of how the writing evolved.
2. Mail a completed copy to yourself and if it arrives with a clearly dated postmark leave it unopened. It's not a failsafe system, but if you open it in front of the judge it can help to demonstrate that at that date you were in possession of the writing.
3. Register your work with a copyright protection agency, either online or with a physical copy of the manuscript.
4. Clearly write your name, contact details and copyright date on all copies of your work that you send out.

ways write from the heart.

- Strong central character
- Sub-plot?



#### THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Finding an agent
- Overcoming writer's block

Writer should always  
have a notebook & pen.

## Part 4

**What happens if  
a publisher offers  
you a contract?**

## Haggling

CAN A WRITER haggle over their first contract? Will it seem ungrateful or egotistical if you ask for better terms? Will it put the publisher off altogether?

The answers to these questions all depend on how desperately the publisher wants your book. If they are in any way indifferent to whether they get you signed up or not then your negotiating powers will be nil. The deal will be take it or leave it. If they think your book concept is gold dust then they'll play along with your requests for better terms.

The problem is that you have no way of knowing how much they really care about your book. You don't know if they see it as central to their growth for the next financial year and are planning for it to be a lead title, or whether it's just one extra book to add to the list that may or may not sell and they're wondering if they've already signed up too many books for their staff to cope with anyway.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

The only way to test the waters in these instances is to read the contract and suggest a slightly higher royalty rate, a slightly lower sales quantity threshold at which the royalty rate increases, a slightly higher advance, slightly better percentages for rights sales and a few extra free copies. If they want you badly they'll agree to everything. Chances are they'll agree to some, but not all, of your requests. They might meet you halfway on some items. Just ask nicely and you might be lucky.

Publishers often begin by negotiating the basic terms of a contract before the author actually gets to read the contract itself. These terms are outlined in the following chapters. If you receive a full contract make sure you take the time to read it carefully and ask questions about any sections you don't understand.

## **Specific points to negotiate**

### **I. The royalty rate**

It's normal for a publisher to offer a low rate to first time authors. If your attempt at asking for it to be increased doesn't work for your first book, you should ask for a higher royalty rate if you are subsequently contracted by them to write a second book. Suggest an increase of one or two percentage points on their offer.

The basis for calculating the royalty rate is either a percentage of the book's cover price or a percentage of net income from sales. Basing the rate on cover price harks back to an earlier age when bookshop discounts were small and consistent. The last twenty years have seen shops demanding ever higher discounts, but the old royalty calculation system meant that authors received the same amount of money per book sold regardless of the price at which it was bought by the bookshop. This can lead to the ridiculous situation where the publisher makes a loss because it has to pay the author more than it

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

received for the sale of the book. This is usually avoided by switching to a reduced royalty amount when discounts hit a certain level, usually 50–55%.

Royalties based on cover price have traditionally averaged 7.5% for a paperback and 10% for a hardback (profit margins are higher on hardbacks). But from the publisher's point of view it's much fairer to give the author a percentage of whatever they earn. Since they give away up to half of the book's cover price in discount this means the author receives a slice of a smaller cake, so to make up for it the percentage is usually higher, ranging from 10–15%.

**Modern publishers don't bother distinguishing between rates for paperback and hardback editions, but traditional ones may still offer a higher percentage for hardbacks.**

Some contracts include an option clause giving the publisher the right to acquire the author's next book on the same terms. Don't agree to this if you want to keep your negotiating options open for the next book.

## **SPECIFIC POINTS TO NEGOTIATE**

### **2. The threshold at which the royalty rate increases**

A book has a break-even point. This is a number of copies that need to be sold before the publisher has made any profit.

It isn't possible to say that the first copy sold has a profit margin of 10%, for example. The first copy sold has a loss of 10,000%! But the losses decrease as sales increase until eventually enough copies have been sold to cover the costs of editing, design, printing, marketing, a share of the office administration and rent, and the author's advance. Depending on the publisher's overheads and the price of the book this break-even point can happen at sales of between 1,000 and 10,000 copies.

To reflect the greater financial exposure the publisher faces prior to reaching the break-even point it's normal to offer a lower royalty rate on the first few thousand sales. The rate will increase by one or two points once sales exceed, for instance, 5,000 copies, and may then increase again if sales exceed 10,000 or 20,000 copies.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

Having covered the initial investment, the publisher's only significant ongoing costs are the reprints, which are cheaper per copy for successful books due to economies of scale. The bulk of printing costs are incurred in setting up the presses, and once they're running it's cheap to keep them going a little longer to produce more copies.

So publishers should always offer a higher royalty for books once they have broken even, unless they were generous enough to start on a high rate at the beginning.

If you don't get offered a rising scale of royalty rates, ask for one. The publisher will have a figure in mind of how many books they expect to sell, and if the royalty increases above this amount then they won't mind agreeing to it because they won't expect sales to trigger it. But if you have written a surprise bestseller then the financial reward will be significant.



## SPECIFIC POINTS TO NEGOTIATE

### **3. The royalty advance**

An advance is not money paid *in addition* to your royalty: it *is* your royalty. The publisher takes a chance that the book will sell by paying a chunk of your royalties to you before the book is even printed. You won't get any more money until the advance has been earned back through sales. Once this has happened you will receive payments once or twice a year. But it's common for an author to receive nothing from the publisher after the advance. This happens when the advance was particularly high or when the book didn't sell too well.

The advance is usually split into two or three payments. A chunk is paid upon signature of the contract, followed some months later by another chunk when you deliver a complete manuscript of acceptable quality, and then you'll get the rest when the book is published. If the book is already complete at the time of signing the contract then the full amount is split between the advance on signature and the advance on publication.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

It might be worth asking for the percentages paid on each occasion to be weighted towards the earlier dates so that you get most of the money sooner, but for business cashflow reasons it's unlikely that the publisher will agree to give you the entire advance immediately.

Size matters when it comes to royalty advances. Indirectly, a large advance means that the book is more likely to be a success. By 'large' advance, I mean an amount that is large for the publisher concerned. It could be a four, five or six figure sum, depending on the size of the publishing house. Books do tend to sell better if the author is paid more up front. Hooray, you're thinking – surely that's in everyone's best interests and so you're bound to get a high advance for your first book? Ideally that would be the case, but publishers would quickly run out of money.

By definition, not every book can be a bestseller. Not every book can be hyped up by the publisher as the next *Harry Potter*. They have to select a small number of lead titles to focus

## **SPECIFIC POINTS TO NEGOTIATE**

their sales campaign on. And the lead titles are usually those for which the highest advances were paid. Publishers will only offer large advances on books they think have the potential to be their lead titles, and having committed so much money it's in their interests to work hard to make sure they earn it back.

**If a publisher offers you a low advance, it might reflect the low priority they have set for your book. Their risk is lower so they have less incentive to push your book hard. If you can persuade them to pay you more then they will have to work harder to earn their money back and you have a greater chance of being a bestselling author.**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### **4. The percentages for rights sales**

The contract will usually contain a long list of rights that the publisher will try to sell for your book, together with the amount you will receive from any such sales. The rights include large print, translation, film, extract, merchandising and others. You shouldn't receive less than 50% of the publisher's net income from any of these, and depending on the size of the company you can potentially go far higher with your share of some of the rights: 'first serial rights' can be as high as 90%. But bear in mind that most books don't sell most of the rights in the list. The most likely ones to be sold are translation rights, but unfortunately those rights tend to offer the lowest rates.

### **5. The accounting period**

This is the length of time you will have to wait between royalty payments. If this is set at one year you should ask for six monthly reports, at least for the first couple of years of the book's life.

## **SPECIFIC POINTS TO NEGOTIATE**

### **6. The number of free copies sent to you**

This is usually set at ten free copies. It's a reasonable quantity for an expensive hardback book and for larger paperbacks, but if your book is a small or cheap paperback then it's worth asking for the contract to be changed to allow you to receive twenty copies instead of ten.

ways write from the heart.

• Strong central character

• Sub-plot?

THINGS TO CONSIDER

• Finding an agent

• Overcoming writer's block

• A writer should always

• have a notebook & pen.



## Part 5

**What happens  
if a publisher  
*doesn't* offer  
you a contract?**

## Why books get rejected

EARLIER IN THIS book I mentioned that publishers reject about 98% of book proposals and manuscripts. It sounds like it must be almost impossible to get published with statistics like that. Actually, things are not so bleak. Many of the rejections will be for reasons that are entirely avoidable. This is a list of reasons for rejection that need not happen:

- 1. The author fails to read the publisher's website and submits the wrong genre of book.**
- 2. The author fails to follow the publisher's submission guidelines.**
- 3. The cover letter is photocopied or generic.**
- 4. The cover letter contains spelling or grammatical errors.**
- 5. The envelope was sent without sufficient postage and the publisher had to collect it from the sorting office in the rain, and had to pay for the privilege.**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

- 6. The sample chapters are not sufficiently edited and checked.**
- 7. The author angrily demands a response a couple of weeks after submitting the proposal.**
- 8. The author phones the editor and talks too much or too slowly, so the editor decides against initiating a working relationship with an author who seems likely to take up too much of their time.**
- 9. The author fails to mention positive factors that might influence the publishing decision, such as guaranteed sales, self-publicity, related external events or previously published books.**
- 10. The author's envelope and cover letter displays evidence that they are clearly mad. Using a purple felt-tip pen to address the envelope is a sure sign of this!**
- 11. The proposal is hand-written.**
- 12. The proposal is typed on a typewriter.**
- 13. The author doesn't have an e-mail address. Authors without e-mail cost more to contact and cause delays in the editing process.**



## QUALITY OF WRITING

- 14. The cover letter quotes praise from other publisher's rejection letters.**
- 15. The sample chapters have obviously been submitted elsewhere and returned.**
- 16. The author has not obtained permission to use photos or quotes taken from other writings, and the publisher shies away from the administrative hassle and additional cost involved in buying those permissions.**

### **Quality of writing**

The rejection rate is always going to be the same regardless of the quality of the books involved. Even if every author was able to write at a professional level there is no way that publishers have the infrastructure or cash to sign up every good book that comes their way. It's similar to the exam qualifications needed to get into a top university: even if all the candidates achieve the entry grades it doesn't mean the college has more places to offer. Poor quality of writing is only one of the factors in the decision to reject the majority of book submissions, and still the high rejection rate will always remain whether or not quality of writing improves.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### **How to avoid rejection on the grounds of quality of writing**

From a publisher's point of view, top quality writing is surprisingly hard to find in new submissions. Rejecting the bulk of them is easy. Selecting for further consideration the rare gems that really sparkle is easy.

The tough part of the publishing process is selecting the books in between: submissions that are not badly written, but are not brilliant either. Working hard at your craft to improve your writing can make a difference here.

It's not hard to avoid being instantly rejected for absent literary skills. OK, for some people it can be hard to write moderately well. It depends on your writing skills at the outset. Anyone can eventually write at a professional standard, but whether it takes one year or twenty years of effort depends on your starting point.

Read plenty of books that are similar to your own kind of writing. Join a writing group and get feedback. Above all, just write and keep writing.

## IMPROVING THE STATISTICS

### **Improving the statistics**

The 98% rejection rate doesn't mean you only have a 2% chance of getting published. Actually the odds are better than that because you have a 2% chance every time you submit the same book to a different publisher. Assuming your book is appropriate for every publisher you send it to and that your writing is good enough, if you submit it to ten publishers then your 2% chance is multiplied by ten, giving you 20%.

The logic doesn't quite extend as far as giving you a 100% chance of getting published if you submit to fifty publishers. The odds definitely get better for you, but it's unlikely that there are as many as fifty publishers for whom your book is suitable.

Even if there are that many out there you could still trip up each time on the other factors that come into play each time a publishing decision is made.

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### **Automatic rejection**

Many book ideas are rejected on the phone or by e-mail before the author even sends in a proposal or manuscript. Sensible authors call or e-mail the publisher before submitting to ask if their idea for a book is something the publisher would like to look at. If the idea is entirely inappropriate then the author can be told immediately.

Usually this will be due to the book's genre: a novel suggested to a publisher that doesn't want fiction; poems offered to virtually any publisher other than the handful of specialists who actually handle that kind of work; trade books offered to a science publisher. These are all examples of automatic rejection. Nothing is read or considered in these cases. The genre of the book is enough for the publisher to say no. This shouldn't really happen in the first place because the author should carefully research potential publishers before calling, but sometimes a change of policy will mean a company that seems promising from examination of their backlist will not be interested in your type of book after all.

## REJECTION BY MISTAKE

### Rejection by mistake

Authors like to assume that their book proposal was rejected by mistake, due to the idiocy or lack of foresight of the publisher. Mistakes are a real problem, partly due to the mass of material that flows through a publisher's offices. It's hard for them to track and evaluate the piles of submissions and ideas fairly and evenly.

The top people in all but the smallest publishing companies have too many pressures on their time to be able to look at every submission that is received. They have to employ editors to look

**Some proposals get more attention than others. Some proposals fall off the back of the desk and get discovered many months later when an editor happens to be on the floor looking for dropped chocolates. Without looking at it the editor might throw it away assuming someone else had already contacted the author.**

at the proposals and filter them so that only the best ones come their way (perhaps 5% of the total). It wouldn't be possible to publish books if senior publishers did nothing but read manuscripts. A side effect of this inescapable

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

reality is that the most junior people are making rejection decisions. Sometimes unpaid work experience staff make rejection decisions in order to clear slushpile backlogs. Inevitably mistakes get made and potential bestsellers are overlooked by inexperienced staff.

As an author there are only limited things you can do to minimise the effect of mistakes. Firstly, you can send your proposal to as many publishers as your research indicates could be interested.

**When books are submitted to me directly I don't read them because that's the job of my editors and I don't have time to read them all, but I might glance at the concept and title and will sometimes write a comment on a Post-It note such as 'please reject' or 'sounds interesting'.**

Secondly, you can attempt to leapfrog the most junior editorial assistants by phoning each publishing company and asking for the name of the commissioning editor or other editors and addressing your

proposal directly to a named individual. They may pass it on to a junior editor, but if they glance at it and the title grabs their attention they may ask for the submission to be given careful consideration.

## REJECTION BY MISTAKE

A final option open to an author who thinks they may have been rejected by mistake is to re-submit to the same publisher. Larger publishers keep databases of authors and book titles, so they'll know if something comes back again. So if you do re-submit, be honest about it and say so in your letter. It doesn't impress a publisher to see an author sending a proposal back that they've already rejected so you have to work extra hard to win them over, otherwise they'll think you're wasting their time. So how can you avoid annoying them?

- 1. Rewrite the book in accordance with any constructive criticism you may have received in the original rejection.**
- 2. Inform the publisher that some external factors have changed since you first submitted your proposal. Perhaps a similar book to yours has become a hit and you think the publisher could compete by taking on your book.**
- 3. Inform the publisher that your public profile has increased or is about to increase due to publicity you have achieved.**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### Rejection letters

If they contain constructive criticism, should you follow their advice? The value of a rejection letter as a free critique depends on whether anyone in the editorial office has actually read your submission in full, or whether your book's concept alone triggered an automatic rejection. If the letter seems genuine and refers to specific aspects of your writing (and the same comments could not be applied to any other book) then you should take notice and consider those comments in a rewrite. Ideally you should discuss the feedback with other members of a writing group before committing to massive changes in your text.

Some rejection letters actually express an interest in seeing the proposal again subject to changes being made. These are always worth following up and you should do everything they ask you to do.



## **DEALING WITH REJECTION**

### **Dealing with rejection**

People drive different cars, wear different clothes and eat different food. They also watch different films and read different books. There's never been any product or literary work that manages to please everyone. If everything written appealed to every reader the world would be a pretty dull place. I mention this purely to give you a sense of perspective when you receive the inevitable rejections to your writing. I use the word inevitable because rejection is part of the learning process as well as part of the selling process. Negative feedback with constructive criticism can help you to remould your writing into a product that someone with influence in the market likes. It's not enough that your dentist thinks you should be published: you need to convince a publisher.

The problem for all writers is that even when your writing is perfect and your manuscript is professionally presented you may still encounter rejections. When a publisher tries to sell a new book into the bookshops many of those shops

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

will reject it. But this doesn't necessarily reflect any inherent flaw in the book, which may still go on to be a bestseller amongst those shops with the sense to stock it.

Part of the reason for good manuscripts to be rejected is that most writers create their works of art in a vacuum, with little regard for what the publishers actually want. They then waste valuable time trying to hammer a triangular peg into a semicircular hole that's probably boarded up anyway.

For the average new writer it's not easy to find what publishers are looking for. They certainly won't get a phone call asking if they can come up with a book on X by Y date for Z amount of money like some established writers. A writer who comes up with the apparently brilliant idea of a novel written entirely in rhyming couplets with twenty bonus recipes at the end is going to be highly disappointed by the rejections that will follow. Although you don't have access to a publisher's editorial meeting in which they discuss what kind of books they want to look out

## DEALING WITH REJECTION

for in the next season, you can be sure they won't be looking for rhyming novels with recipes. The way to be sure is easy. Go to a bookshop. Look at the shelves and how they are labelled. Where is the shelf that says 'rhyming novels with recipes'? Exactly. If the book doesn't fit squarely on one particular shelf, the bookseller won't know where to place it. And if the bookseller doesn't know where to place it the buyer doesn't know where to find it.

The only thing you can do is to look closely at the actual labels of the shelves, look at the books on those shelves and see how similar they are within each genre. Commercial writing is not about art for art's sake. It's about creating a product that can be marketed and sold as easily and quickly as possible in order to create a profit for the publisher and the bookseller. Without that profit they can't survive, and they're looking to you to provide them with the raw materials for their next slice of profit.

So learn what you can from each individual rejection. Try to re-read your work from the point

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

of view of the person who rejected it. (And remember they rejected *it*, not *you*.) If they provided any feedback it's vital to read the work with their comments at the forefront of your mind. Are they right? Can you think of a way to fix it?

They may not be right, of course. Your writing could be rejected for a number of reasons aside from its inherent quality. During many years as a publisher I've rejected books because they were similar to books that had just flopped, and I didn't want to risk losing more money with another book like it. I've declined books on the grounds that my acquisition budget is fully allocated for the foreseeable future (which meant that we'd run out of money and couldn't pay any more advances or print bills for a time). I've said no to writers because despite my personal interest in the book others in the company have persuaded me not to publish it. I've had to reject authors who are quite clearly mad and unprofessional in their approach and who would be too much effort to deal with. Sometimes the rejections have

## DEALING WITH REJECTION

been because we had already decided to produce a similar book either in-house or using our existing author contacts. Or it could be that I'd decided on a change of direction and was no longer interested in commissioning new titles in a particular genre which I felt wasn't right for my company. I'm sure there are editors out there who have rejected books simply because they're having a bad day and want to take it out on someone. And don't forget, of course, that most books are rejected because they are simply not good enough to publish.

Laugh off the rejections. Frame them and mount them on the wall of your bathroom. When you're a bestseller they'll be priceless. And remember you're in good company – the company of virtually every other writer on the planet.

**Visit my website for reassurance – I have links to rejection letters received by other writers: [www.stewartferris.com](http://www.stewartferris.com).**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### **Should authors ever give up?**

Writing a book is such an intense and personal experience that it's hard to be objectively critical about your own work. No matter how hard you try to make it a great work of literature there may be fundamental reasons why it will never sell.

What I'm about to say is going to sound harsh, but it's true. If you've written your autobiography and you're not famous then it will never sell. If you've written a book of poems or short stories it will never sell. Your efforts to bring fictional characters to life in a novel may fail despite your opinion that they succeeded. Perhaps you write fiction with no sense of conflict or drama, or you write non fiction with no sense of authority.

Publishers see these weaknesses but you don't because you're too close to your pride and joy.

I've seen it happen far too often and it's a shame that some writers reach a skills plateau beyond which they do not progress, or they put an enormous amount of effort into writing books that fundamentally have no market.

## SHOULD AUTHORS EVER GIVE UP?

The paradox is that if you are aware of any such shortcomings in your writing then you are in a position to do something about it. There's no need to give up your dreams if you can recognise what needs to be fixed in your work, even if it means starting a brand new book in another genre altogether – a marketable one this time. It is only those who are not aware of the problems who should give up, but they won't stop trying to get their book published because they don't realise they have no chance of success.

There is another way out of this situation, however. Self publishing is a means for books with insufficient commercial market to get into print. Your autobiography, poems and short stories can *only* be self published. Don't waste your energy trying to get someone else to pay for getting them into print. Do it yourself so that you can enjoy seeing your name on the front cover, and sell it to friends and family. You won't make a profit but it doesn't cost much more than the price of a holiday to get a few hundred copies printed and it's a fun process.

## **HOW TO GET PUBLISHED**

Self publishing is also a way for books to show their potential. An author with just one book to sell can achieve better sales figures than a publisher trying to promote fifty books at once. All you need is the time and energy to travel and meet bookshop staff plus the courage to ask them to buy it and to remind them to reorder when it sells.

If you self publish books in genres that could potentially be taken on by other publishers, this isn't giving up: it's giving your book a leg-up to the point where you can impress those publishers with genuine sales figures that might entice them to sign you up.



## **Useful websites and software**

THERE ARE LINKS to websites and organisations, other books and some great writing software (some of which is free) on my website that can help you to launch your writing career in any direction you choose.

Just visit [www.stewartferris.com](http://www.stewartferris.com) for these links.

**Also on my website you'll find some very useful free downloads that I've made available, plus updates for this book and links to other titles in this series.**

## HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

# Definitions

### **Advance**

An amount of royalties paid to a writer before the product is released.

### **Agent**

A specialist sales person trusted by publishers to filter out bad or uncommercial writing. Agents will handle all contractual negotiations, chase royalty payments and take a percentage of the author's income for their troubles.

### **AI sheet**

Advance Information sheet. A single page document produced by publishers to alert the trade to a forthcoming title.

### **Back list**

Titles already in print by a particular publisher. These should be studied, together with their *front list*, before submitting proposals to them.

### **Blurb**

The short description of a book that is usually printed on the back cover or in the jacket sleeve.

### **Cover**

This refers to the outer layer of paperback books only. Hardbacks have *jackets*.

### **Draft**

A stage in the life of a manuscript. The first draft is the first complete (or almost complete) version of the manuscript. Early drafts are sometimes called *rough* drafts because they're not fully developed or

## DEFINITIONS

polished. A final draft occurs many drafts later when the work is deemed to be finished. Differences between drafts can vary from just a few spelling corrections to a fundamental rewrite of the entire body of the text.

### **eBook**

A version of a book designed to be sold as an electronic download from the Internet.

### **Front list**

The list of books a publisher is planning to launch in the coming year or so.

### **ISBN**

International Standard Book Number. This identifies every edition of every book to enable efficient ordering and stock control in the bookstores.

### **Jacket**

The loose paper jacket that wraps around some hardback books.

### **Manuscript**

Literally means a handwritten book, but the word is in general use today to mean any unpublished work whether typed or in a word processed format.

### **Proposal**

A suggestion of a book idea made by an author to a publisher. Similar to a *submission*, but sometimes relating to a book not yet in existence.

### **Proofreading**

Carefully reading a manuscript to look for errors.

## **HOW TO GET PUBLISHED**

### **Royalty**

A payment made to an author based on sales quantity or sales income.

### **Self publishing**

When an author arranges and pays for the publication of their own book, either in print or on the Internet, and in effect becomes a publisher in their own right.

### **Slush pile**

The pile of book proposals, samples and manuscripts that sits on an editor's desk. Usually it refers to unsolicited manuscripts which hang around for longer because they are a lower priority than submissions that the publisher has actually asked to see.

### **Spine-on**

A bookshop shelf can display books either face-out with the covers showing, or spine-on, where only the spines are visible.

### **Submission**

Typically a covering letter, synopsis and a couple of sample chapters submitted to a publisher.

### **Synopsis**

A summary of a book or other written work, usually not much more than a page in length. Typically a book chapter would be summarised in no more than one paragraph in the synopsis.

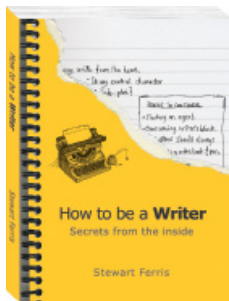
### **Typescript**

Refers to an unpublished book in typed form, although usually synonymous with 'manuscript'.

### **Vanity publishing**

When an author pays a publishing company to publish their book.

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# How to be a Writer

## *Secrets from the Inside* Stewart Ferris

A writer is someone who writes. It sounds obvious, but many people who call themselves writers don't produce enough words in a year to fill a postcard. Other writers churn out thousands of words but never sell their work. This book tackles both problems: it gets you writing, easily and painlessly guiding you through the dreaded 'writer's block', and it divulges industry secrets that will help you to raise the quality of your work to a professional level.

Writing is a business like any other. Successful writers know the rules and conventions that make their work stand out from the rest of the 'slush pile' – rules Stewart Ferris now reveals in *How to be a Writer* that will help launch your writing career.

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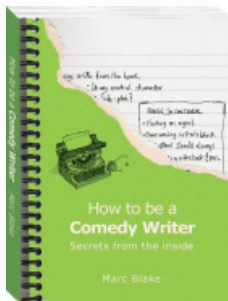
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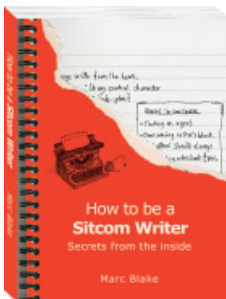


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