

From Manuscript to Printed Page: How to Get Published

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It really thrills me to see so many people interested in writing books — people from *every* slice of the American pie. Your numbers are impressive, but it is your passion that motivates me to encourage you. Your work, whether academic, literary, genre fiction, self-help or the most basic how-to, is valuable, and you should work as tirelessly on behalf of its publication as you did for its creation. However, you may receive mixed messages from publishing professionals about how to get published. Many publishers and editors contend that only highly literary works deserve ink, and they believe that only full-time, professional writers are publishable — and will piously tell you so. Authors, too, have their misconceptions and frequently believe there are only ten to twenty publishers worth approaching with any project, and they identify all others as vanity presses. Over the past forty years, however, things have changed in book publishing, and it is good news for writers.

Today there are over 80,000 book publishers in the United States. Ten to twenty are huge corporations with myriad imprints, 200+ are substantial presses of all kinds. The rest vary in both size and function, and they include tens of thousands of small presses and self-publishers. The Association of American Publishers (www.publishers.org), with some 300+ members located throughout the United States, is the principal trade association of the book publishing industry, and it has developed descriptions of the many types of publishers for its publishing careers website, BookJobs.com.

No longer is the publishing palette simply black or white, major press or vanity press. The BookJobs.com descriptions, which I include below with the permission of AAP, clearly demonstrate that there are more opportunities for publication today than ever before.

TYPES OF PUBLISHERS

Book publishing is not just about novels. From a college textbook to a paperback in the supermarket, publishing offers a place to express your interests and showcase your talents. What kind of publishing best suits you?

TRADE PUBLISHING

Maybe you've never wondered what people in the publishing industry call the books that you find in a bookstore or local library, but there is a term. They are called trade books and they are designed for the general consumer. Trade publishers sell their books through the channels that have been specifically established for books — bookstores, libraries, and wholesalers. Trade books are published for children, teenagers, and adults. They can be works of fiction or nonfiction, hardcover or paperback. Generally, trade publishing is the most high profile type of publishing as it is the most commercially focused.

PROFESSIONAL AND SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

Does working with professional studies and dissertations sound intriguing? Then professional and scholarly publishing is for you! Professional and scholarly publishers produce books and journals specifically written for and marketed to professionals in a wide variety of industries, such as medicine, law, business, technology, science, and the humanities. Professional and scholarly publishing is often referred to as STM — scientific, technical, and medical publishing. For more information, visit the website of the AAP Professional/Scholarly Publishing Division, www.pspcentral.org.

EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHING

Textbooks are published by what the industry calls educational publishers. In addition to textbooks, educational publishers also publish all of the materials that complement the textbook — such as workbooks, tests, software, CD-ROMs, and maps. As you probably know, textbooks are published for all levels of students, from kindergartners through postgraduate students. “School” publishers publish textbooks and materials for kindergarten through 12th grade and “higher education” publishers publish for college and university students.

UNIVERSITY PRESSES

Arguably the most difficult type of publishing house to define, university presses wear several hats. For the most part, they are not-for-profit departments of universities, colleges, and museums that publish books for scholars and specialists. Nevertheless, university presses sometimes engage in trade publishing as well, marketing their books to the general consumer. To learn more about university presses, log on to the Web site of the Association of American University Presses, www.aaupnet.org.

INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS

An independent publisher is privately held rather than being owned by a parent company or by a conglomerate. Independent publishers exist in all sizes and publish all types of books. One of the great things about independent presses is that they often have considerably more freedom to publish the books about which they are most passionate. No one knows exactly how many independent presses are out there, but estimates are in the range of 50,000 and up.

ALTERNATIVE MEDIA (E-BOOKS AND AUDIOBOOKS)

E-Books An e-book is a book distributed and read in electronic format. Instead of walking into a bookstore, to buy a book in an e-book format, you visit a Web site and purchase and download the digital file. You can then read the book on a computerized device such as a Palm Pilot, Pocket PC, laptop computer, or other device. There are all sorts of e-books available today (including popular fiction and nonfiction, textbooks, reference books, and most other genres), and they can be stored in a virtual library on your reading device — which can certainly make it easier to carry a lot of books on vacation or to school.

Audiobooks As the name implies, audiobooks are books presented in recorded audio format. Generally, audiobooks are recorded onto cassette tapes, CDs, or other digital files such as MP3s. The Audio Publishers Association defines audiobooks as “any audio recording that is primarily spoken word rather than music.” Audiobooks are available in a myriad of categories, from novels to self-help books to language instruction. Some publishing houses have internal audiobook departments whereas other companies publish only audiobooks. You can learn more about audiobooks by logging on to the Audio Publishers Association Web site at www.audiopub.org.

OTHER TYPES OF PUBLISHING AND RELATED BUSINESSES

Subsidy Press/Vanity Publisher

A publishing company that offers publication services for a fee paid by the author, and holds the copyright to the book, but does not generally promote or market the book. Bookstores often refuse to carry books published by subsidy/vanity presses, and such books are rarely reviewed.

Contract Publisher

A publisher that helps authors edit, design, market, and distribute their book for a fee paid by the author.

Self-Publishing

A method of publishing in which the author does all the things a publisher does — from editing to printing and distribution.

Regional Publisher

A publisher who specializes in subjects relevant to a particular part of the country, and sells its books mostly or entirely in that area.

Fulfillment House

A company that handles the entire ordering process for books, such as storing, packing, mailing, maintaining records, and other sales-related operations for the author or publisher.

Packagers (Also known as Book Producers or Book Developers)

Companies specializing in creating books up to the printing stage, at which point a publishing company takes over handling the book. Although publishers most often contract directly with freelance authors and use their own staffs to prepare books for publication, publishers sometimes take on books prepared by packagers. The packager’s name may appear on the copyright page, but the publisher is always identified on the spine.

(The material excerpted above can be found at <http://www.bookjobs.com/page.php?prmID=8>)

A list of AAP house members appears at www.publishers.org/main/Membership/member_02.htm. A list of the imprints of AAP member companies, including AAP’s Professional/Scholarly Publishers, can be downloaded in PDF format at www.publishers.org/main/Membership/member_03.htm.

Get Ready to Be Published

Now you know about the various types of publishers, and it is the kind of knowledge that makes clear the spectrum of your publishing opportunities. It can be overwhelming to consider approaching even twenty publishers, no less sorting out 80,000 of them. Knowledge, again, will help make your choices clear, and much will depend on your reasons for seeking publication and your book’s target audience. For example, if you have written a popular mystery fiction manuscript, several imprints of the twenty major houses may be right for you. Are you previously published? If not, the top twenty might not even give you the time of day without agency representation. Some agencies may require that you be previously published (the first-time author’s “Catch 22”) before they’ll represent your work. If you are a first-time, un-agented author, you are left with the dilemma of identifying appropriate publishers from the remaining tens of thousands.

To help you research publishers, I recommend that you work with an experienced librarian, either a reference librarian or one who specializes in your book’s genre. Provide the librarian with a concise synopsis of your book and ask for assistance in identifying publishers with similar types of books — books that have been well reviewed in trade publications, such as *Library Journal* (www.libraryjournal.com), *Publishers Weekly* (www.publishersweekly.com), *Kirkus Reviews* (www.kirkusreviews.com), *Booklist* (www.ala.org/booklist) and *ForeWord* (www.forewordmagazine.com, specifically for independent presses). Learn about other prepublication review periodicals that might exist for specific genres, such as Christian, children’s and other types of works. Identify

publishers' current and forthcoming titles in the *Books In Print* series (RR Bowker). As you complete these tasks, you will whittle down your list to a manageable number, and you will know that the publishers are right for your work.

Once you have a list prepared, you must then ready your submission packages. Research publishers' websites (and their imprint websites) for writer's guidelines or write for the guidelines and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE). You can find listings of publishers at www.literarymarketplace.com (use the free version).

After you have either found online or received by mail the publishers' writer's guidelines, send out a submissions query letter to each publisher and adhere strictly to the guidelines, which may differ from publisher to publisher. Don't wait to hear from the first publisher before sending to the rest. To let each know that the submissions query is being sent to many publishers at once, indicate in your cover letter that yours is a *simultaneous* submission.

Whether you're preparing your query letter and manuscript for publishers or agents, or you're preparing to self-publish, it pays to be professional, prepared and realistic.

Be Professional

Remember that you are presenting your work with the expectation that a publisher will purchase it and agree to spend *at least* five figures producing and marketing the finished product. Because of the amount of money to be invested, you will reasonably expect the publisher to do a professional job producing and selling your work. Therefore, it shouldn't surprise you to learn that the publisher expects to receive from you a professionally prepared submission that contains the elements needed to evaluate both you, as a writer, and your work, as a product with sales potential. Even small presses and university presses will want to be correctly approached.

When you approach a publisher with your manuscript, you have assumed a sales role. You may not have any experience in sales, and you might even wonder why an appropriate presentation is even necessary, no less essential. After all, you have what a publisher wants, right? It's the raw material that will be used to create a saleable product. You may even think, *The acquisitions editor will either like it or not* and *The only thing that matters is the book's content*. In the end, it will come down to something close to that, but your initial sales efforts are expended to get your manuscript *read*.

Once read, your book will either make the cut or it won't; it will be published based on its quality (and often your qualifications to write it). Toward that end, you must:

- Adhere to the publisher's writer's guidelines for submission. More isn't better, and less is wasted effort.
- Print your cover letter on great-looking, professionally produced letterhead. No handwritten letters on notebook paper with holes. No legal pads. No illegible or cursive fonts.
- Learn about how to create a cover letter that gives your book its best chance to be read. This is your sales letter. No begging, no whining. No sidebars about your personal problems unless they're relevant to the book's topic. No rave reviews from relatives and neighbors. Do not give the acquisitions editor a lecture about copyright infringement or theft.
- Prepare three synopses: a brief, one-paragraph blurb (like catalog copy); page-length copy (similar to back cover copy); and a three-page treatment. Use the one that best meets the publisher's writer's guidelines requirements.
- Prepare a literary bio and describe *all* of your writing experiences. For nonfiction authors in professional fields, two bios should be written. One should be similar to the one that appears in your book's "About the Author" page, while the other should be a longer read, much like a curriculum vita.
- Deliver a professionally produced manuscript. Your work must be technically correct (grammar, spelling, voice) and formatted according to the publisher's writer's guidelines. Understand that some publishers will want to see only a few sample chapters. Again, more is not better, and less is wasted effort.

Professionalism should be your goal in every detail of your package. Spell names correctly when addressing, include a SASE (self-addressed, stamped envelope) for the publisher's reply and a postage-paid return mailer if you want rejected materials returned. Be patient for a reply. Wash your hands *before* handling *anything* if you smoke. Do not harass the acquisitions editor or the editorial staff with repeated phone calls (although I know authors who

have been published, including one of my own company's authors, from doing just that). Expect delays during holidays and during times of national book events (end of May, beginning of June).

If you feel like you don't know enough about publishing, you could be correct, and you might consider dedicating yourself to learning more.

Be Prepared

The wise first-time author seeks information about writing, publishing and marketing. Publishing reference books can provide a wealth of information. The style manual for the book industry tends to be *The Chicago Manual of Style* (University of Chicago Press), and using it as a reference can help you learn such basic information as the parts of a book and their correct order, manuscript formatting, correct usage and grammar, the editorial process and much more. Even if you have no plan to self-publish, a read of Dan Poynter's *The Self-Publishing Manual* (Para Publishing) can teach you essential information about publishing time-lines, marketing and distribution, and prepublication reviews. John Kremer's *1001 Ways to Market Your Books* (Open Horizons) is a must-read for all authors, especially those who do not fully understand the role of the author in creating demand for the book. Many other books specifically address book events, publishing contracts and other important publishing elements.

Your manuscript should be as ready as it can be for publication. Do not rely on Word or another word-processing program to ferret out mistakes and misspellings. It can't act as a substitute for common sense with words like to, too and two, and it can't make sure your fictional characters are wearing clothes and moving from place to place (two big flaws in first-time-author fiction). Nothing replaces many serious, slow reads. Consider the following tips for preparation:

- If you need editorial assistance — and almost every author does — hire a professional book editor (someone who makes a living working as a book editor). Here are some examples of folks who *are not* good substitutes for professional editors:
 - * Your cousin, Vinny, who got straight A's in high school English.
 - * Your sister, Susan, who has a degree in English Literature.
 - * Your neighbor, Mark, who edits the local *Auto Trader*.
 - * Your mother, who speaks perfect English.

Find professional editors listed in many directories, including *Literary Market Place* (RR Bowker), which can be found in the reference section of the library or online at www.literarymarketplace.com. Read professional editor Chris Roerden's "How to Take Advantage of an Editor," which can be found on her website at www.marketsavvybookediting.com/editing.html.

- Illustration works much the same way as editing. If you plan to submit your manuscript to a publisher for consideration, don't waste time doing illustrations. Know that most publishing houses use either an in-house stable of artists or freelance, professional illustrators. It is a rare situation in which the author can provide illustration that would meet professional standards. If you plan to self-publish, consider using a professional illustrator, *not* one of the following:
 - * Your grown son, David, whose occasional scribblings are "just so cute!"
 - * Your niece, Patty, who made A's in college art.
 - * Your friend, James, the tattoo artist, who said he'd illustrate your book for free.
 - * Your coworker, Margaret, who is taking an adult education course in figure drawing.

Professional illustrators are frequently represented by agencies and display their work both on websites and in agency sample books. Artists and agencies can be found listed in books, such as *Graphic Artists Guild's Directory of Illustration* (Serbin Communications, www.gag.org), or at a searchable website, such as www.blackbook.com/illustration/index.html. There are many others, some of which display specific genres of art, such as children's illustration (<http://picture-book.com>, www.childrensillustrators.com). Naturally, a librarian can help you research other sources.

- Understand your responsibilities as a writer. Getting permissions, providing bibliographical information, creating a list of words to be indexed, and other details are often the responsibility of the author. Know what is expected of you before you submit your work for consideration to a publisher.
- Keep abreast of the business of writing by regularly reading periodicals, such as *The Writer* (www.writermag.com), *Children's Writer* (www.childrenswriter.com) and others that may be specific to your writing genre. Ask a librarian for help identifying the perfect periodical for you.
- Plan for acceptance of your work and, if you are not currently agented, determine whether or not you will use an agent to help you with the contract. You should have no trouble getting an agent's attention if you have a contract in hand. If you don't plan to use an agent, make sure you know the ins and outs of publishing contracts and be ready to look for "issue" areas, such as copyright ownership, subrights percentages, refundable advances and other sticky wickets. The stickiest of wickets these days is for the publisher to offer a very high (over 10%) royalty on the net profit. Most first-time authors don't realize that a royalty is traditionally a percentage of the retail price. A royalty on the *net* (or the amount left over after expenses) is not as good a deal as a royalty on the retail price.

If you plan to use a lawyer to review your contract, use *only* an intellectual properties attorney who handles book publishing contracts, not a bankruptcy attorney or your brother-in-law, the med-mal attorney.

The Author's Guild offers its members a free contract review from Legal Services, and it offers advice (without membership) on its website at www.authorsguild.org/?p=101. Getting experienced assistance with your contract is even more important when working with a small press. I recommend that you read, "What Not to Miss when Drafting & Negotiating Your Book Publishing Contract," by Intellectual Properties Attorney Lloyd J. Jassin (www.copylaw.com/new_articles/final.three.html). Other great articles can be found at that site.

Writing is a profession and publishing is an industry. There is no substitute for personal professionalism and a good understanding of industry protocol. Always treat publishers in a professional and prepared manner. Doing so will keep you from developing unrealistic expectations and from becoming disappointed and disillusioned.

Be Realistic

Understand what to expect in the publishing process. Try not to get stars in your eyes. The following tips might help keep you grounded.

- Keep in mind that every author can't be on *Oprah!* or *The Today Show*.
- Know that not every publishing house pays huge advances. Don't name the amount you'd like for an advance, and don't be offended if an independent press doesn't offer one at all.
- Expensive book tours are the exception, not the rule, and bookstores are lousy places to sell books.
- Remember that you are responsible for helping create demand for the book.
- Don't be shocked when your nonfiction book contract (even from major presses) calls for you to cough up over a thousand dollars for a professionally prepared index.
- Don't quit your day job in anticipation of royalties. If you read up on the publishing world's inner workings, such as described in *Dan Poynter's Self-Publishing Manual*, you'll have a good idea of how long it will be before you see money in your account.
- Do know that your work has only begun!

Tips for Those Who Want to Approach Small Presses

Small presses are not "less than" presses. Almost every major publishing company today began as a small press. In fact, the Association of American Publishers reports that over 73 percent of its membership qualifies as small or independent press. However, understand that some small presses have not been in business very long, others have

not enjoyed much success, and many may not be familiar with working with outside authors. In fact, a small press may simply be the expanding company of a successful self-publisher.

These presses do not come with red flags to help you recognize their flaws. If a small press wants to publish your book, or if you are discussing co-publishing or contract publishing with a small press, find out about the following *before* you sign a contract:

- Years in business. A company in business less than two years may not be in business next year, due to bookstore returns, and wholesalers and distributors that are historically slow to pay. Unless the company is appropriately funded to endure the first two years of business, they might not be right for you.
- Cataloging-In-Publication. According to the Library of Congress, CIP data is “a bibliographic record prepared by the Library of Congress for a book that has not yet been published. When the book is published, the publisher includes the CIP data on the copyright page thereby facilitating book processing for libraries and book dealers.” With exceptions dictated by the LOC, most publishers participate in the CIP program with the Library of Congress. The cataloging data will appear on the verso (copyright) page of their books. An LCCN number is not the same as a CIP; rather, it is “a unique identification number that the Library of Congress assigns to the catalog record created for each book in its cataloged collections.” (www.loc.gov/cip) Self-publishers are not allowed to participate in the LC-CIP and must use other sources, such as Quality Books, Inc. (www.quality-books.com), to provide a P-CIP, or Publishers Cataloging-In-Publication.
- Well-reviewed books. A publishing company that is doing its job correctly garners great reviews, regularly, for its books. Especially important are prepublication reviews from publications such as *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, *School Library Journal*, *KLIATT*, *Publishers Weekly*, *ForeWord Magazine* and others. Ask a librarian for help in learning if a particular publisher’s books have been reviewed favorably and regularly.
- Distribution outlets. A publishing company with over ten titles in print should have distribution with Ingram Book Company and Baker & Taylor Books. If they do not, they may not create enough demand, they may not have saleable books, or they may have too many returns. The chain bookstores order small press titles exclusively from such wholesalers.
- Nontraditional (non-bookstore) sales. There is more than one way to buy a book; books are ordered from many more places than bookstores. Sales to catalogs are a good example of a non-bookstore sale. Savvy small presses pursue nontraditional sales outlets with vigor.
- Subrights sales. Subrights are those rights from a book that a publisher will license to others. Foreign translation rights, book club rights, audiobook rights, ebook rights — and much more — are all part of a publisher’s work when selling a book. A small press should actively seek subrights sales on its titles.
- Author contracts. A substantial small press should have a professionally written author contract that has been vetted by an intellectual properties attorney who specializes in books. Will you recognize such a contract when you see one? If not, get your own experienced agent (or Intellectual Properties attorney) to review the contract for you. Remember, only an intellectual properties attorney who specializes in books has the publishing contract experience to recognize an industry-standard contract. An attorney specializing in business, even in contracts, is not specialized enough.

Tips for Those Who Choose to Pay

If you want to self-publish, or otherwise pay for publication, there are many choices, all dictated by your budget and your reasons for wanting to self-publish. But understand this: *You are only self-publishing if you own the ISBN (International Standard Book Number) on the book.* This means that you’ve gone to www.ISBN.org and purchased a bank of ISBNs or have bought one from an authorized reseller. You are *not* self-published just because you are paying for publication with one of the so-called POD publishers. This is a very important distinction. View the list of publishers who have the right to sell single ISBNs to a self-publishing author at www.isbn.org/standards/home/Pubresellers.asp. Note that some big-name POD publishers are not listed.

Being a self-publisher also means that you will do all the things a traditional publisher does with regard to production and sales of books. Most self-publishers choose to subcontract much of the editorial, production and distribution work to specialized companies, and subcontracting is encouraged over doing it all yourself. Doing it yourself often results in a homespun product that has little chance for sales because many do-it-yourselfers cannot tolerate the steep learning curve of book publishing. For example, professionally produced books are not designed in Word software; instead, Adobe's InDesign is an industry-standard page-layout program.

Remember that every publishing choice carries the responsibility of professional delivery. If you choose to self-publish, or any of its for-pay equivalents — and want to be professional — you too will spend much money on the employ of editors, typesetters, cover designers, printing, and other overhead costs involved in creating a professional product. You will almost always get what you pay for (or don't pay for) in publishing.

If you don't want to become a self-publisher but want to control your product's production, you can choose a standard vanity publisher or one of the inexpensive, print-on-demand versions to get into print (research carefully the low incidence of success doing this). You can even approach an existing, successful independent press with a co-venture proposal (this is *not* the same as vanity publishing) and share expenses and profits.

No matter your choice, do not blindly go into publishing. When *your* money is at stake, it's even more important that you learn about the industry and thoroughly understand the publishing process before you spend a substantial sum. Take your ego out of the "I want to be published" equation and thoroughly learn the market for your book's genre. Put on paper both your reasons for wanting to self-publish and your publishing expectations, then study books, such as *Dan Poynter's Self-Publishing Manual* (Para Publishing), *1001 Ways to Market Your Books* by John Kremer (Open Horizons).

Visit the websites of national and regional publishing associations, such as IBPA, the Independent Book Publishers Association (www.ibpa-online.org) and Small Publishers Association of North America (www.SPANnet.org), and state or regional organizations, such as the Florida Publishers Association (www.FLbookpub.org), or genre-specific groups, such as Sisters in Crime (www.sistersincrime.org). Get a good grasp on what kind of time and money it's going to take to compete with the other 80,000+ publishers in the marketplace. One great place to start is to attend the IBPA Publishing University, held just before BookExpo America (www.bookexpoamerica.com), coming this May to New York City.

Do not jeopardize your future or your children's future by "betting the farm" on the success of a book. If a book's success were predictable or happened according to a formula, no publisher would ever be *unsuccessful* with any title. Think of book publishing as a gamble, like the stock market (*gasp*), a gamble for which the odds increase in your favor for every minute of in-depth research you do and for every step of professional advice you follow.

Extra Resources

International Trademark Association (Is fiberglass a trademarked word? How about laundromat?)
www.inta.org/index.php?option=com_trademarkchecklist&func=display&catid=123&getcontent=1&Itemid=133

Clueless.com (all things mystery; check out *The Deadly Directory Online*) www.clueless.com

Chicago Manual of Style (for-pay, online access) www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/contents.html

PR Newswire's Guide to Writing a Feature Release (great for getting media on books)
www.prnewswire.com/features/featurewritingguide.shtml

The 9-point print:

Betsy Lampe has 20 years of experience in the book publishing industry. She is president and editorial director of Rainbow Books, Inc., a 30-year-old, family-owned, independent publisher of self-help/how-to nonfiction and a very small line of mystery fiction (character-driven medical murder mysteries and cozies). Rainbow publishes approximately 20 titles per year. It is a house member of AAP, PAS (founding members) and FPA (founding members), and its books are distributed by Ingram, Baker & Taylor and many, many other specialty distributors. Betsy also works as association executive of the Florida Publishers Association, Inc. She can be reached at BetsyLampe@aol.com.