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## **Self-Publishing Resources**

## First thing first! Join SCBWI.org

Joining the Society for Children's Book Writer's and Illustrators will be an invaluable resource. Membership in the SCBWI is open to anyone with an active interest in children's literature, from picture books to young adult novels. We welcome aspiring and published writers and illustrators, as well as librarians, educators, translators, artists, students, dramatists, musicians, filmmakers, and others. A passion for children's literature is our number one criterion.

You must be 18 or older to join.

Your first year of membership in the SCBWI is \$95.\* The annual renewal fee is \$80\*. \*US Dollars

## TYPICAL BOOK SIZING

You want your book to be a traditional size if you want it to print most economically. If you choose a non-traditional size it will be much more expensive. You want to look at books similar to yours and choose a size that is comparable.

## Standard book sizes in publishing:

**Fiction:** 4.25 x 6.87, 5 x 8, 5.25 x 8, 5.5 x 8.5, 6 x 9

**Novella:** 5 x 8

**Children's:** 7.5 x 7.5, 7 x 10, 10 x 8 **Textbooks:** 6 x 9, 7 x 10, 8.5 x 11 **Non-fiction:** 5.5 x 8.5, 6 x 9, 7 x 10

**Memoir:** 5.25 x 8, 5.5 x 8.5

## WORD COUNTS

The following are average, general rule word-count ranges by genre.

### **General Fiction**

Flash Fiction: 300–1500 words Short Story: 1500–30,000 words Novellas: 30,000–50,000 words Novels: 50,000–110,000 words

#### **Fiction Genres**

Mainstream Romance: 70,000–100,000 words Subgenre Romance: 40,000–100,000 words

Science Fiction / Fantasy: 90,000–120,000 (and sometimes 150,000) words

Historical Fiction: 80,000–100,000

Thrillers / Horror / Mysteries / Crime: 70,000–90,000 words

Young Adult: 50,000-80,000

#### Children's Books

Picture Books: 300–800 words Early Readers: 200–3500 words Chapter Books: 4000–10,000 words Middle Grade: 25,000–40,000 words

#### **Nonfiction**

Standard Nonfiction (Business, Psychology, History, etc.): 70,000-80,000 words

Memoir: 80,000–100,000 words Biography: 80,000–200,000 words

How-to / Self-Help: 40,000-50,000 words

## **EDITING**

#### **Book Text**

No matter how short or long your book is, you need an editor. YOU NEED AN EDITOR. I use an editor for every book I publish and would not dream of skipping this step. An editor can help you with many things besides just finding typos. As a matter of fact, a copy editor is something different. You hire a copy editor after you have used an editor for developmental editing or an overall assessment. You can usually hire your editor to do a final proofing at the end - they can often do multiple forms of editing.

## Reedsy.com

- I can't say enough good things about Reedsy. There are hundreds of very qualified editors to choose from for your project.
- You can write your book within their website for free in their editing software. I
  use Word to have on my computer.
- Submit a brief of your project and have multiple editors bid on it.
- I hired 3 different editors to edit the first book in my chapter book series and decided who I resonated most with based on their feedback.

Other Editing Resources Fiverr.com Freelancer.com

## INTERIOR LAYOUT AND DESIGN

## **Dummy Books (applies to picture books and early reader chapter books)**

I create dummy books in my layout software (Adobe Indesign). You can also create them with 16 pieces of paper folded in half for an easy peasy one. I find it really helps to create the 'page turn' experience when laying out the text and working out illustrations. Whether you are doing it yourself or hiring an illustrator, this is very helpful to create.

### If You Are Doing it Yourself

**Adobe Indesign** - I use this to layout my final text and illustrations. I am a professional graphic designer and know how to use all the design software. If you cannot do this yourself, you will need to hire a designer to do this for you.

**Microsoft Word:** I do not know Word well enough to do this, but if you are a Microsoft Word wiz, understand how to use it as a layout program and how to safe it as a PDF you can use this.

# Book Design Templates www.bookdesigntemplates.com/

I can't recommend Joel Friedlander's Book Design Templates in Word and Indesign enough. He lays out the template and you just continue it yourself in Word or Indesign. Definitely an economical choice for a do-it-yourself-er. I used one of his templates for my middle grade novel, *Cordelia and the Whale*.

#### If You Cannot Do it Yourself

If you are not a graphic designer nor someone who wants to do that, no worries. You can hire someone to do it for you. However things to think about if you hire for the layout and design:

- Anytime you need to edit your book, you need to be sure your designer is available to do it.
- Make sure you understand all the files you will receive and what each type of file is for.
- Always make sure you get source files in case you decide to make edits yourself or switch a designer.
- Make sure the designer understands exactly what you want your end product to be e.g., print book, ebook, pdf, etc.

## Resources to Find a Graphic/Layout Designer:

Reedsy.com Fiverr.com Upwork.com Freelancer.com

## **ILLUSTRATION**

Depending on what kind of book you are creating, you might have illustrations. Picture books of course have illustrations but so do chapter books, and many middle grade novels. If you are an artist and you can create professional-level art, that's wonderful! If you can't, again, there are resources below.

## How I create my early reader chapter book art:

- Sketch all the thumbnails
- Create final, tight pencil art
- Ink outlines
- Scan line art into the computer with a decent scanner
- Pull art into Adobe Photoshop and clean up art then 'color' art in Photoshop

## Things to Remember When Hiring an Illustrator:

- Be sure the illustrator understands the files you need and in what format and size
- Ask the if they can create a dummy book for you to visualize the layout
- Be sure you have the illustrator signs an agreement that says you own all the artwork
- Your illustrator might also be a designer and can possibly layout your book, it doesn't hurt to ask!
- Make sure you have a solid deadline in place
- Split payments into fourths if possible;, a fourth to start and get thumbnails, a fourth for tight pencils of whole book, a fourth halfway to finished finals, and the last payment upon delivery.
- Make sure you

#### **Resources to Find an Illustrator:**

Reedsy.com
Upwork.com
Guru.com
Fivrr.com
Freelancer.com
LinkedIn
Facebook
ChildrensIllustrators.com

## **PRINTING**

## Ingram Spark IngramSpark.com

Print high quality Paperbacks and Hardbacks and Digital Books I use them for my paper backs and hardbacks

- Can buy directly and sell yourself biggest profit
- They distribute to Barnes and Noble, Target, Walmart, Bookstores, School, Libraries and to Amazon
- You can generate a cover layout based on your book's size and page count and generate a free barcode with your ISBN for your book's back cover here

#### **Other Print on Demand Resources**

(I am not super familiar with these, but like all they have pros and cons, but these have services where they can do a lot of the work for you - costs more but they provide more. If you go in this direction, I urge you to make sure you retain all rights, get your own ISBN, make sure you can get and own all source files and check what your royalty is and what your cost to buy your books is.)

BookBaby.com Blurb.com Lulu.com

# Amazon KDP and Kindle Program - For Print and Ebooks kdp.amazon.com/

I use them for my Ebooks and Paperbacks

- They will market and sell their paperbacks instead of Ingram Sparks, but you are covered either way
- I don't sign up for their exclusive ebooks so I can have them distributed in other places (this is not that big a deal with children's picture books but becomes a bigger decision with middle grade, YA, and adult fiction and nonfiction titles.

## Smashwords for eBooks Smashwords.com

I use them to distribute my ebook to Apple, Kindle, Nook, and other ebook sellers. I honestly get such little sales of my ebooks I stopped uploading my chapter books at book 5. I used someone on Fiverr.com to get my files prepared to upload to them. It only cost me about \$20 a title to have this done, but sales still didn't justify the cost, so I just only use Amazon for ebooks at this poiint. You need to consider if your book is more marketable as an ebook or not.

## Bowker - Get your ISBN https://www.myidentifiers.com

This is where you can buy an ISBN for your book. The ISBN is a unique identifying number to track the sales of your books. An ISBN is essentially a product identifier used by publishers, booksellers, libraries, internet retailers and other supply chain participants for ordering, listing, sales records and stock control purposes.

You can buy ISBNs in bulk or one at a time. You will need a separate ISBN for both a hardback and paperback version of the same book. If you create an ebook anywhere besides Amazon you will need an ISBN for the ebook version as well. Amazon Kindle does not require an ISBN for their ebooks.

## Copyright

## www.copyright-application-online.com/

You do NOT need to copyright your work. In both the U.S. and the U.K., copyright protection on an original work exists the moment you create that work (and extends for 70 years after your death). You could be writing the next Great American Novel, or you could've just written one sentence! Either way, you own the rights to your work the instant you write it.

If you do choose to register your work with the U.S. Copyright Office, you've created a public record of your authorship so the whole world can see that you are the creator of your intellectual property. This is what people mean when they say that you need to "copyright your book." This does cost money however. You can do it at the link above.

# Library of Congress Number or LCCN https://www.loc.gov/

What's a LCCN? Good question—it's the Library of Congress number that shows that you exist, and the one that any library that you are pitching your book to wants to know you have. The good news is that these are free.

## **Traditional Publishing Resources**

## 4 steps to getting a book traditionally published Getting your book traditionally published is a step-by-step process of:

- 1. Determining your genre or category of work.
- 2. Finding appropriate agents or publishers for your work.
- 3. Preparing your submissions materials (a query letter or proposal, usually).
- 4. Submitting your materials to agents or editors.

## Step 1. Determine your work's genre or category.

Publishers and agents often focus or specialize on certain types of work. They may publish only fiction or nonfiction; they may refuse to accept poetry or memoir; and so on. It's important to correctly identify what you've written, at least in broad terms, so you can find the right publisher or agent to approach. Your genre or category also affects what materials you'll be expected to submit.

- Novels and memoirs: Most first-time authors must finish their manuscript before approaching editors/agents. You may be very excited about your story idea, or about having a partial manuscript, but it's almost never a good idea to submit your work at such an early stage. Finish the work first—make it the best you possibly can. Seek out a writing critique group or mentor who can offer you constructive feedback, then revise your story. Be confident that you're submitting your best work. One of the biggest mistakes new writers make is rushing to get published. In 99% of cases, there's no reason to rush.
- For most adult nonfiction (except memoir): Rather than completing a manuscript, you should write a book proposal—like a business plan for your book—that will convince a publisher to contract and pay you to write the book. Find out more information on book proposals and how to write one. You need to methodically research the market for your idea before you begin to write the proposal.
- Children's work: In most cases, you should have a finished manuscript. Children's picture book writers do not need to provide or submit illustrations, only the manuscript.

### An overview of major fiction genres

Some of the most common novel genres are: romance and erotica, women's fiction, historical, mystery, crime, thriller, and science fiction & fantasy. Commercial fiction is a term that's often used interchangeably with "genre fiction" (romance, mystery, thriller, SFF, etc). Work that doesn't fall into a clear genre fiction category is sometimes called "mainstream fiction" by agents and publishers.

Some of the most popular nonfiction categories are: business, self-help, health, advice/relationships, personal development, and memoir.

Within the publishing industry, nonfiction is often discussed as falling under two major, broad categories: prescriptive (how-to, informational, or educational) and narrative (memoir, narrative nonfiction, creative nonfiction). You can get a sense of what nonfiction categories exist by browsing Amazon's categories (see their lefthand navigation) or simply visiting a bookstore.

## **Books that are suitable for Big Five publishing**

There are the "Big Five" publishers in the United States, responsible for publishing the largest number of books for a general audience. You'll need to find a literary agent if you want to be published by the Big Five. The Big Five are Simon & Schuster, Macmillan, Penguin/Random House, Harper Collins and Hachette.

Some books are more commercial than others; anything falling into genre fiction is by default a commercial work. Most nonfiction, if it would be stocked in your average bookstore, is commercial. "Big Five" New York publishers are interested primarily in commercial work—work that is meant to sell in big retailers, big-box stores, etc.

The most important thing to remember is that not every book is cut out to be published by a New York house, or represented by an agent, but most writers have a difficult time being honest with themselves about their work's potential.

## Here are some rules of thumb about what types of books are suitable for a Big Five publisher:

- Genre or commercial fiction: romance, mystery, crime, thriller, science fiction, fantasy, young adult, and so on.
- Nonfiction books that would get shelved in your average Barnes & Noble or indie bookstore—which requires a strong hook or concept and author platform. Usually a New York publisher won't sign a nonfiction book unless they anticipate selling 10,000–20,000 copies.

#### Works that can be difficult to sell:

- Books that exceed 120,000 words, depending on genre
- Poetry, short story, anthologies, or essay collections—unless you're a known writer, or have a platform
- Nonfiction books by authors without expertise, authority, or visibility to the target audience
- Memoirs with common story lines—such as the death of a loved one, mental illness, caring for aging parents—but no unique angle into the story (you haven't sufficiently distinguished your experience—no hook)
- Literary and experimental fiction

If you write fiction or memoir, the writing quality usually matters above all else if you want to be traditionally published. Read in your genre, practice your craft, and polish your work. Repeat this cycle endlessly. It's not likely your first attempt will get published. Your writing gets better with practice and time. You mature and develop.

If you write nonfiction, the marketability of your idea (and your platform) often matter as much as the writing, if not more so. The quality of the writing may only need to be serviceable, depending on the category we're talking about. If your work isn't a good candidate for a New York house, don't despair. There are many mid-size houses, independent publishers, small presses, university presses, regional presses, and digital-only publishers who might be thrilled to have your work. You just need to find them.

## **Deciding If You Need an Agent**

In today's market, probably 80 percent of books that the New York publishing houses acquire are sold to them by agents. Agents are experts in the publishing industry. They have inside contacts with specific editors and know better than writers what editor or publisher would be most likely to buy a particular work. Perhaps most important, agents negotiate the best deal for you, ensure you are paid accurately and fairly, and run interference when necessary between you and the publisher. The best agents are career advisers and managers.

Traditionally, agents get paid only when they sell your work, and receive a 15% commission on everything you get paid (your advance and royalties). Avoid agents who charge fees.

## So ... do you need an agent?

It depends on what you're selling. If you want to be published by one of the Big Five, most certainly. If you're writing for a niche market (e.g., vintage automobiles), or have an academic or literary work, then you might not need one. Agents are motivated to represent clients based on the size of the advance they think they can

get. If your project doesn't command a sizable advance (at least 5 figures), then you may not be worth an agent's time, and you'll have to sell the project on your own.

## **Step 2. Find publishers and agents.**

Once you know what you're selling, it's time to research which publishers or agents accept the type of work you've written. Again, be aware that most New York publishers do not accept unagented submissions—so this list includes where to find both publishers and agents. This is not an exhaustive list of where you can find listings, but a curated list assuming you want to focus on the highest-quality sources.

- Duotrope.com. Since the decline of Writer's Market (see below), this is the best database for identifying publishers. Subscription required.
- PublishersMarketplace.com. This is the best place to research literary agents; not only do many have member pages here, but you can search the publishing deals database by genre, category, and/or keyword to pinpoint the best agents for your work. Subscription required.
- QueryTracker.net. About 200 publisher listings and 1,000 agent listings. Basic service is free.
- WritersMarket.com. Thousands of agent and publisher listings were once found here, but the site is currently inactive. You can try the print edition, or Jeff Herman's competing guide.

## Step 3. Prepare your submission materials.

Every agent and publisher has unique requirements for submitting materials. The most common materials you'll be asked for:

- Query letter. This is a 1-page pitch letter that gives a brief description of your work. (More on this below.)
- Novel synopsis. This is a brief summary (usually no more than 1-2 pages) of your story, from beginning to end. It must reveal the ending. Here's how to write a novel synopsis.
- Nonfiction book proposal. These are complex documents, usually 20-30 pages in length, if not double that. For more explanation, see my comprehensive post.
- Novel proposal. This usually refers to your query letter, a synopsis, and perhaps the first chapter. There is not an industry standard definition of what a "novel proposal" is.
- Sample chapters. When sending sample chapters from your novel or memoir, start from the beginning of the manuscript. (Don't select a middle chapter, even if you think it's your best.) For nonfiction (non-memoir), usually any chapter is acceptable.

## The All-Important Query Letter

The query letter is the time-honored tool for writers seeking publication. It's essentially a sales letter that attempts to persuade an editor or agent to request a full manuscript or proposal.

### Step 4. Submit your materials.

Almost no agent or editor accepts full manuscripts on first contact. This is what "No unsolicited materials" means when you read submission guidelines. However, almost every agent or publisher will accept a one-page query letter unless their guidelines state otherwise. (If they do not accept queries, that means they are a completely closed market.)

After you send out queries, you'll get a mix of responses, including:

- No response at all, which is usually a rejection.
- A request for a partial manuscript and/or a synopsis.
- A request for the full manuscript and/or synopsis.

If you receive no requests for the manuscript or book proposal, then there might be something wrong with your query. Here is how to improve your query letter. If you succeed in getting your material requested, but then get rejected, there may be a weakness in the manuscript or proposal.

## **How Long Should You Keep Querying?**

Some authors are rejected hundreds of times (over a period of years) before they finally get an acceptance. If you put years of time and effort into a project, don't abandon it too quickly. Look at the rejection slips for patterns about what's not working. Rejections can be lessons to improve your writing.

Ultimately, though, some manuscripts have to be put in the drawer because there is no market, or there isn't a way to revise the work successfully. Most authors don't sell their first manuscript, but their second or third (or fourth!). Protecting your rights

You have nothing to fear in submitting your query or manuscript to an agent or publisher. If you're worried about protecting your ideas, well, you're out of luck—ideas can't be protected under copyright, and no publisher or agent will sign a nondisclosure agreement or agree to talk with a paranoid writer who doesn't trust them. (Just being blunt here.)

If you're worried about protecting your copyright, then I have good news: your work, under law, is protected from the moment you put it in tangible form.