



Module 13 : How to Deal with Publishers and Selling your Stories

- The importance of perfecting your manuscript before you submit it
- How conventional publishing and self-publishing compare
- The process of getting your book published by a publishing house
- Whether you need a literary agent

In this chapter we will cover:

- The importance of perfecting your manuscript before you submit it
- How conventional publishing and self-publishing compare
- The process of getting your book published by a publishing house
- Whether you need a literary agent
- How to self-publish your book

13.1 Introduction



You have reached the point where you have a completed manuscript; the product of months, maybe years, of hard work.

Congratulations!

This is a real achievement.

But before you consider sending your work to publishers or self-publishing it is very important that you get your manuscript to as high a standard as you possibly can.

This usually starts with leaving it for a while, at least a few days, a week or even a month, before you read through it again. You will have become so familiar with its every twist and turn that you will find it difficult to highlight any mistakes you have made if you skip this step. After the waiting period, read through your manuscript slowly, not just taking in the sense of what you are saying but reading every single word. You must check for spelling, grammar, punctuation, coherence, syntax, and internal consistency in both plot and technical aspects.

Once you believe that it is perfect you can give it to a trusted friend or family member to read, preferably someone whose opinion is valuable in this context. Consider giving it to some children to read too, to get their opinions. Although it can be hard, do not rush this stage. Many editors find that authors submit their manuscripts hurriedly, under the impression that there is some time limit that they need to keep to. This can often lead to work being submitted with mistakes, thus causing the manuscript to be rejected. It is better to take two months more to make your book the best that it can be rather than submit early and be rejected.

If you can afford it, it is a good idea to pay a professional proof reader to read through your manuscript to check for mistakes.

This can be done fairly cheaply and proof readers abound on freelancing sites like Upwork. You enter a description of the work you need doing on the site for potential proof readers to submit proposals to you, outlining their expertise and how much they will charge you. It is not a good idea to simply go for the cheapest bidder here; choose someone who has proven expertise in proof reading your type of book and pay the little bit extra to ensure you get an excellent finished product.

Once your manuscript is in tip-top condition you can consider which route you wish to take: self-publishing or conventional publishing with a publishing house. Each has its advantages and drawbacks, and we will discuss the process for each so you can decide which suits you.

FACT



Dr Seuss' first book was rejected by over 20 publishers; his books have now sold over 500 million copies worldwide.

Interestingliterature.com

13.2 Self-Publishing



This is an option which is gaining popularity and eliminates the need for your book to be approved of by publishers.

You will not face the long and agonising wait after you have submitted your manuscript to a publishing house, or the difficulty of receiving multiple rejection letters, or hearing nothing at all.

It might be an option for those of you that have taken the conventional publishing route and had no success, despite persevering with dozens of submissions.

If this is the case, however, think carefully about why your book has not been taken up by a publishing house.

Have you had much feedback? If you have, is there a common theme to it? Consider amending your manuscript if you believe the editors may have a point. Do not just stick to the original version through stubbornness, however, if you truly believe that your book should not be changed then you are entitled to stick to your laurels.

Although the advantages of self-publishing outlined above are significant, there are also drawbacks that you must consider before taking this route. It is expensive to self-publish, and the price will be even higher if you are producing a picture book with colour illustrations. You must either have a significant amount of money to hand to consider this venture, or be prepared to launch a campaign to raise money on a crowdfunding site like Kickstarter.

Once you have your book published you will not have the advantage of being represented by a publishing house who market your book and have contacts with bookshops and similar. You will effectively be running a business, continually promoting your book online and in person.

13.3 Here are the Steps for Self-publishing:

1. Perfect your manuscript

We talked about this above. Remember that with self-publishing the lack of editor standing between you and publication also means that you do not have someone telling you where you have gone wrong. If you make a mistake it will go to print like that. Consider getting a freelance editor to format and analyse your book before you take it to publication; you can achieve this on freelancing sites, as with proof reading.

2. Decide with type of printing you want

There are two structures you can employ for getting your book published. One is with a publisher called a 'vanity press', who will charge you a set amount of money for a finite number of books to be printed, usually 50 or 100 as a minimum. These will be sent to you and you will then send them to your buyers as they are purchased. The other is print on demand, where you submit your manuscript and a book is only printed when someone orders one.

3. Research which company you want to go with

Choosing a good printer can be a bit of a minefield, so you must research thoroughly and only go with a company that you can trust. When you have a shortlist consider contacting people who have had a book produced by them, rather than just going with the testimonials on their website. Look into whether you will retain all the rights to your book and what the company can offer you alongside the printing, in the form of marketing or other helpful services.

4. Price up the project

Find out exactly how much it will cost, not forgetting the services of an illustrator if you need one.

5. Raise the money

If you have the money to hand, that is great. If not, and this is probably the majority of us, consider launching a campaign on a crowdfunding site like Kickstarter to raise the money. This is where you

have a page that gives potential funders information about your book and your situation. It is a good idea to include a video and photos, to humanise the process and appeal to people's emotional generosity. You offer incentives or rewards for each donation, which could range from a signed postcard of the book for a £3 donation, to a first edition signed hardback copy of the book with a personal dedication in the front for a £50 donation.

6. Get printed

Go ahead and get your book printed and bask in the pleasure of holding the product of all your hard work in your hands.

7. Market

Don't bask for too long though, as now you have to market your book. Create a website where you can sell your book, a twitter account, and a Facebook page for you as an author. Spread the word far and wide about your fabulous new book, starting with family and friends. Consider starting a blog or YouTube channel to increase public exposure. Approach bookshops and offer them a commission of your sale price to stock your book on their shelves (large, chain bookshops are less likely to agree to this than smaller, independent types). Donate copies to libraries and schools, offering to do a reading at each. Use your imagination and drive to promote your book at every opportunity.

13.4 Conventional Publishing



As with self-publishing, this route has its challenges and perks.

The process of getting a manuscript accepted can be gruelling and disheartening. Every publishing house receives dozens, if not hundreds, of manuscripts every day, and even if you have written a fabulous book you may never get it published. You must learn to deal with criticism and rejection, and persevere in the knowledge that you have produced something worth fighting for. Once published, the publishing house will take a cut of the profit your book makes.

On the plus side, once your manuscript has been accepted the publisher will undertake much of the marketing side of the business, and although there will still be work ahead for you in advertising yourself and your book, they will get it on the shelves of bookshops and also structure the marketing campaign. There is a chance you will get a contract of varying length to have more work published by them.

Here is how you would go about getting your book published by a publishing house:

1. Make a list of publishers

There are two types of publishing houses.

Open - those that will accept unsolicited manuscripts, i.e. those who have not been asked for from the author.

Closed - those that will not read an unsolicited manuscript, but who may request a partial or complete manuscript from you upon receiving your query letter.

Research online for sources of lists of each, looking initially for those that publish children's books in the genre that you have written in. See who has published books that are similar to yours and add these to the list too.

2. Consider getting an agent

There are some publishing houses that are completely closed to independent submissions or even query letters, and will only read manuscripts submitted to them through an agent. An agent is someone that you employ to approach publishing houses for you; they are industry professionals who will also give you critique on your manuscript, help you obtain a contract with a publishing house, and negotiate the contract with them on your behalf.

It is not strictly necessary to have an agent in order to get your book published, but the process can be easier if you do. Agents take a percentage of what you earn from the book once it is published, usually around 15%, and do not normally receive any money until your manuscript is accepted. Because of this you may find that well-reputed agents will not take you on as a client unless they are reasonably sure that you will get a contract from the publishers that is worth their while. If you do choose to go through an agent, be cautious and get first hand testimonials from their clients; there are many unscrupulous characters out there who will exploit your longing to get your book published.

3. Submit manuscripts to open publishers

Start by submitting your book to publishers that accept unsolicited manuscripts. Follow the publishing houses' submission guidelines and tips to the letter; if the font is wrong, or you have included a lengthy synopsis without them wanting one, it is the only excuse they need to discard your manuscript without a second glance. If you cannot find their submission guidelines, inquire rather than guessing.

4. Send query letters to closed publishers

Some publishers may not accept unsolicited manuscripts, but will accept a query letter. This will generally include your name and address, the word count of your book, the age range that you are targeting, the genre, a suggested title for the book, a one or two line synopsis, and your previous publications, if any. You must make the letter as succinct as you can, concisely outlining the pertinent information, as you want to make it as easy as possible for the editor to have a summary of your work without wading through paragraphs of attempted persuasion, at which point they will lose interest altogether.

5. Follow up your submissions

Hope to hear from publishing houses within six months of submission; if you hear nothing, assume that they have rejected your manuscript. You may get a rejection letter and if you are lucky this will include some critique. In response to your query letters to closed publishing houses, you may get a request for a synopsis of your books, a partial manuscript (the first chapter or first several chapters), or even a full manuscript. If this happens, you know your idea is on the right track, even if you get an ultimate rejection.

6. Consider their critique

If you get any feedback from publishing houses, do not ignore it. Advice from the 'guardians' of the publishing world is a valuable thing, even if you choose not to act on it. Use the critique constructively.

7. Be persistent and patient

Unless you are incredibly lucky this will be a long process. Be determined and accept that even if your first book is not successful it has provided you with an opportunity to improve your craft. Your second or even third book is likely to enjoy much greater success.

FACT



Don't be too pessimistic - agents reject 96% of author submissions

Source: huffingtonpost.com - 2013

13.5 When Your Manuscript is Accepted



Celebrate!

Then carefully look at the contract you have been offered. It is best to employ a professional to analyse the legal wording of this document for you, so you fully understand its implications before signing.

In Summary

When you have finished writing your book, put it aside for some time before reading it carefully for sense and technical errors.

Ask a trusted friend to read it too, and consider employing a proof reader or editor to make sure it is polished and perfect.

Decide whether you want to self-publish or go with conventional publishing. The former can be expensive and requires hard marketing for your book to be a success in the long term, but you are guaranteed that your book will be in print. The latter can be a gruelling wait and peppered with rejection, but once your book is accepted offers a more concrete reward.

[Tweet "I just completed Module 13 of the Children's Story Writing Diploma Course"]
