

How to get Published

Secrets from the Inside

Stewart Ferris



summersdale

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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GETTING PUBLISHED IS the dream of every unpublished writer. Despite their determination and ambition, however, most writers will remain unpublished because they pay attention only to the quality of the writing in the manuscript itself.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The concept that a good book will find a publisher is outdated and over-simplistic.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

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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

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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

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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

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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.