

WRITING, EDITING AND PUBLISHING: ADVICE FOR NEW AUTHORS

3rd Edition, 2024

By Jane Smith

Author/Editor

This document is designed to help guide new authors to publication and beyond. It includes background information about the editing and publishing processes, and advice on improving your writing, submitting to agents and publishers, and promoting yourself and your work.

Whether you intend to seek traditional publication or self-publish, you will benefit from having a basic knowledge of how the publishing process works. This document will be helpful regardless of which path you choose.

And whether you're planning self-publication or traditional publication, to have a successful writing career you need to prepare not only your *manuscript* (Section 3) but also *yourself* (Section 4).

But first, what do those terms 'traditional publishing' and 'self-publishing' mean? Section 1 explains.

CONTENTS

1	PUBLISHING MODELS	2
2	AGENTS.....	4
3	PREPARE YOUR MANUSCRIPT	5
4	PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE INDUSTRY	9
5	SUBMITTING TO A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHER OR AGENT.....	15
6	THE PUBLISHING PROCESS	17
7	MAKING MONEY	23
8	REJECTIONS	25
9	A FEW FINAL WORDS	26
10	USEFUL RESOURCES	27

1 PUBLISHING MODELS

1.1 Traditional publishing

Traditional publishers bear the cost of publishing your work and pay you in royalties, which will be a small percentage of the income generated from their sales. They will have a project manager who co-ordinates editing, illustrations, covers, internal design and proofreading. They'll also have a marketing team and take care of the printing, sales and distribution for you.

Here are some points to note:

- They should NOT ask you to pay for ANYTHING. If they're passing themselves off as traditional publishers but ask you for money, be VERY wary. They may actually be a vanity press (see Section 1.3).
- They will have creative control over the final product, but how much control they have depends on the publisher. Bigger publishers tend to be more dictatorial, while smaller publishers *might* give the author more say.
- You'll be paid in royalties, typically every six months, and typically only about 5% to 10% of the recommended retail price (RRP). Unless your book sells really well, it won't amount to huge sum. However, your Educational Lending Rights (ELR) and Public Lending Rights (PLR) payments (see Section 7.5) might make it worth your while, as you're more likely to get a traditionally published book into libraries.
- A *big* traditional publisher will offer you an advance. The size of the advance will vary. It's not an extra sum of money; it's payment up front for the royalties they expect you will earn. You won't start getting royalties until you've 'earned out' the advance. Smaller publishers might not offer an advance at all.
- Traditional publishers have more marketing clout than most individuals; they have contacts in the media, a following on social media, and relationships with book reviewers and distributors. They won't do all the marketing work for you, but they might support you with advice and maybe set up some interviews and/or help with design of posters, etc. A big publisher will have a larger marketing budget and might fund much more promotion. If you like marketing and are good at it, traditional publishers will be more interested in taking you on ... but then again, you might do better financially by self-publishing.
- It is *very* hard to get accepted by a traditional publisher (see Section 8.1).

1.2 Self-publishing

If you self-publish, *you* bear the cost of editing, design, proofreading, typesetting and printing yourself. This can be pricey. On the upside, you won't need to share the profits. On the downside, you'll have to work a lot harder to get sales and make those profits. There is a range of models for self-publishing. I'll outline three main approaches here.

1. You employ a self-publishing company to take your book on as a project. This works a little like the traditional publishing model, except that *you* bear the cost. The publishing house will co-ordinate everything: editing, design, typesetting, proofreading, covers, indexing (if needed), applying for ISBNs and Prepublication Data Service, uploading to eBook platforms, printing. This is a costly exercise but is likely to result in a good quality product. You might be able to negotiate with them to do some of these steps yourself rather than taking the whole

package, thus reducing your costs. It's a good option if you are completely new to the industry and not confident in your knowledge of all the requirements.

2. You co-ordinate the whole thing yourself, but contract your own professionals to work on it. You choose an editor, you choose a designer for the cover, you choose a designer for the internals (layout, illustrations, typesetting), you choose a proofreader, you choose someone to format the file as an eBook and upload it, you select and pay a printer. This is more work than (1) but it will cost less. You'll need to know what's required and you'll need to source the right professionals for each stage.
3. You do it all yourself. You edit it yourself, design it yourself, design the cover, format your own eBook, proofread it yourself, upload it to Amazon. This costs next to nothing ... but, in my opinion, you get what you pay for. If your aim is, for example, to write a memoir or family history and print a few copies for your loved ones, this could be the way to go. If you want a top-quality product or a product that sells well, I'd advise against this approach. At the very least, hire a professional editor and cover designer! Even the best writers benefit from second opinions, and a good cover is essential for sales.

1.3 Vanity presses

Vanity publishers (though they won't call themselves that!) use a similar model to self-publishing companies, but the biggest difference is basically that they're less honest about it. Vanity publishers, like traditional publishers, invite authors to submit manuscripts, but they'll rarely – if ever – reject a manuscript. They might flatter you by implying that they selected your book for its quality, but the truth is that they'll publish anything as long as you pay them. They charge authors to publish their books, but often retain some creative control AND might pay only royalties, so the author has the worst of both worlds. There's no financial risk for the publisher, and the publisher has no incentive to market the book, so sales won't necessarily be great. Some people who have used a vanity press and regretted it have had to fight for a long time to regain the rights to their own work in order to publish it elsewhere.

1.4 Hybrid publishers

Publishing models are always changing, and the lines between models are becoming blurred. 'Hybrid' publishing is becoming more common. A hybrid publisher might operate in a similar way to a traditional publisher in that they'll co-ordinate the editing, design and some marketing for you, but they'll expect you to stump up some of the financial burden. They might, for example, require the author to buy a certain number of copies to cover their costs, thereby eliminating or reducing risk for themselves. This might be worthwhile, especially if they've got good distribution channels and can get your books into shops. You need to read the fine print carefully, check out the quality of their products, and research their reputation. To confuse matters further, some traditional publishers also provide a self-publishing service and/or a hybrid service.

1.5 In summary ...

There are pros and cons for traditional publishing and for self-publishing. Some people try traditional publishers first but decide to self-publish when their manuscript is widely rejected. But some choose self-publishing from the outset. Self-publishing might be the best option if you want the book ready quickly (the time between when you start submitting to traditional publishers and when you see

your book on the shelves can be years); if you want more creative control; if your book is for a limited audience.

Regardless of the type of publishing you intend to pursue, you will need to learn how to prepare your manuscript, how to find the right publisher and how to market your book. You'll need to learn all you can about the industry and make connections. If you intend to submit to a traditional publisher or an agent, you'll need to know how to submit your manuscript. If you intend to self-publish, you'll need to know the steps in the process. A traditional publisher will guide you through the process of publication, but it's still best to learn as much as you can in preparation.

2 AGENTS

Should you get an agent?

There's no right answer to this question. In Australia, if you want to be published by one of the bigger traditional publishers, you might want the help of an agent. Some bigger publishers won't take unsolicited submissions, but many of them will, even if it's only on specified days of the week or in a small window of the year. However, in Australia many smaller publishers (and some larger ones) will look at unsolicited submissions, and you might have yours accepted without the need for an agent. In other countries, the situation might be a little different; in the UK, for example, few publishers seem to take unsolicited submissions.

If you're self-publishing, of course, you don't need an agent.

2.1 Pros of having an agent

- An agent might help you negotiate a better deal.
- An agent can increase your chances of being published by a bigger traditional publisher.
- An agent can help you develop your career, possibly taking you further than you might have done alone.

2.2 Cons of having an agent

- An agent will take a cut of your income ... but then again, an agent might help you to earn a higher income.
- Agents are very hard to get! There aren't many literary agents in Australia, and those that do exist usually specialise in a particular genre, which makes the pool even smaller.

One word of advice: if you think you'd like to try getting an agent, don't try submitting to multiple publishers first. You're unlikely to interest an agent in a manuscript that's already been rejected by lots of publishers. They know that publishers are unlikely to reconsider a manuscript they've already turned down.

If you decide to try for an agent first, the advice on submitting to publishers in Section 5.3 will apply to submitting to an agent.

3 PREPARE YOUR MANUSCRIPT

3.1 Develop your writing skills

No matter what stage you're at in your writing career, there's always more to learn. Good writers weren't born that way. There's always room for improvement, and good writers will continue to develop their skills throughout their lives. How can you hone your skills?

1. **READ.** This is the absolute most important step in your journey to becoming a better writer. You can't write well if you haven't seen good writing modelled. In particular, read books in the genre you want to write. Read carefully and critically, taking note of what works and what doesn't, and try to work out why. Even reading badly written books can be valuable if you can analyse what it is that went wrong. I can't emphasise enough how essential it is for a writer to be a reader.
2. **Read about writing.** There are blogs and websites galore about writing skills. Your local library will likely have many books on the subject. It's especially valuable to read about writing in your particular genre.
3. **Join a writers' group.** In some writers' groups (whether online or in person), members critique each other's works (see Section 3.2.3). There are many other benefits in joining a writers' group, as discussed in Section 4.4.
4. **Attend writing workshops.** They are not only fun and good networking opportunities, but a great way to learn new skills, practise them, and get feedback (see Section 4.7).
5. **Be critical of your own writing.** Apply all the knowledge you've learned from reading and attending groups and workshops. Use this knowledge when you're rereading your own work; ask yourself: how is my writing lacking? How might I improve it?

3.2 Polish your manuscript

Completing a manuscript is an achievement in itself, so if you've come that far, well done. But I'm guessing it's probably not your end goal. The next thing you'll need to think about is how to polish your manuscript to get it ready for publication.

Your first step is to put the manuscript aside for a few weeks. Maybe you could use this time to read a few books or blog posts about writing. Then return to your manuscript with fresh eyes and revise it (see Section 3.2.1). Be ruthless. Rewrite, and rewrite again. *Then* you might be ready to send your manuscript to a beta reader, an editor, an agent or a publisher.

Should you have your manuscript professionally edited before you publish? That will depend, to an extent, on whether you intend to self-publish or submit your manuscript to a traditional publisher. If you're not sure what these terms mean, please revisit Section 1 for an explanation.

If you plan to submit to an agent or traditional publisher.

In an ideal world, publishers would see the potential in your raw manuscript and commit to working on it with you to develop it into the polished product. This may have happened more often in the past than it does now. Nowadays, publishers have tight budgets; they're less likely to take a gamble on a manuscript with 'potential' and won't necessarily be willing to pay for a developmental edit or a heavy copyedit. They'll want the product to come to them in a pretty polished state. For this reason, it's advisable to seek feedback of some kind before you submit your manuscript. There are many ways to do this, as discussed in the remainder of this section.

What if you're planning to self-publish?

If this is your intention, I'd *strongly* recommend that you hire a professional editor. Just because it's *possible* to format and upload your own unedited (or self-edited) manuscript to an eBook platform for free doesn't mean it's a good idea. You get what you pay for. Editors help not only with story structure, characters, language, clarity, punctuation, spelling and grammar, but they can also flag any possible legal and copyright issues (though not give specific legal advice), and advise on cultural sensitivity and more.

So what, exactly, does an editor do? There are many different levels and types of editing. People often ask for a 'proofread' when what they really want – or need – is a **copyedit**. In the following section, I'll explain the different types of editing and other types of assistance you might seek to help you polish your manuscript.

It's worth noting that most editors prefer to work in Word and most publishers will ask for your manuscript in Word format.

3.2.1 Self-editing

As previously mentioned, your first draft is not your final manuscript. Your first draft should not even be the version you send to an editor (unless you want them to make extensive changes and are prepared to pay for it). Whether you plan your story out carefully or make it up as you go along, your early drafting stage is the time to get all your ideas down on the page without worrying too much about how well structured or elegantly written it is. It's not ready yet! Go back and look at the basic structure. Ask yourself:

- Does the plot make sense and flow logically? Are there any plot holes or sections that need further explanation?
- Is it well-paced, or does it get bogged down in parts?
- Is my point of view consistent?
- Is there a good balance between showing and telling?
- Are the characters believable and well-drawn? Do they have distinct, consistent personalities and depth?
- Does my dialogue sound natural and authentic?
- Are there any parts that are redundant or repetitive?
- Is the language suited to my audience?
- If it's non-fiction – is it accurate? Have I cited my sources accurately where necessary?

The above are only a few of the many questions you need to ask yourself. If you'd like to learn more about self-editing (and I recommend you do), this book is excellent:

Self-editing for Fiction Writers: How to Edit Yourself into Print by Renni Browne & Dave King

When you've looked at your overall structure critically and made the necessary changes, leave your manuscript for a few weeks. Then go back and read it again with fresh eyes. And again – and again! While you're at it, look out for typos and punctuation, grammar and spelling mistakes. Don't rely on your computer's spellcheck.

Here's another brilliant book to help with this step:

Editing Fiction at Sentence Level by Louise Harnby.

Some writers can self-edit well, but even so, most manuscripts will benefit from constructive criticism and a second set of eyes. Once you've gone through several drafts, it might be time to seek feedback from others. There are many people you can turn to for help. Who you choose will depend largely on your budget.

Here's a brief summary of the types of constructive criticism you can seek to help you develop and polish your manuscript.

3.2.2 Feedback from your family and friends

There's nothing wrong with showing your manuscript to family and friends early in the process. They're likely to be encouraging, and might have a few suggestions. Maybe they'll pick up typos, plot holes or grammatical mistakes. And they (presumably) come with the benefit of being free. But don't expect them to be impartial judges. Take their praise with a grain of salt. You'll probably need to go further afield for really useful constructive criticism.

3.2.3 Critique from your writers' group

If you're part of a writers' group – and I recommend that you join one – then you might have access to people who are willing to read your work and give feedback. A writers' group is likely to offer more than family and friends in the way of constructive criticism. After all, they're writers too, and hopefully they'll have an eye for literary merit. But again, they know you. They'll probably (hopefully!) want to be kind. Online critique groups might be helpful for this reason; hopefully the feedback will still be kind (and if it's not, don't stick around), but that bit of distance can make it easier to be honest about flaws in each other's writing. Remember, critique groups usually involve give-and-take. You comment on others' works and they comment on yours. This will mean a commitment of time on your part, but there are valuable trade-offs. One is that it won't cost you anything, and another is that you might well learn more about writing from analysing the works of your peers.

3.2.4 Beta readers

A beta reader is a person who reads manuscripts and gives honest feedback from a general reader's point of view. Some editors employ teams of beta readers. The beta readers may have a standard set of questions to answer – for instance, about the plot, characters, setting, language, suitability for audience, and so on. The beta reader won't know who you are, and you won't know who the beta reader is, so the feedback will be more objective than a review you might get from a family member or friend. It's much cheaper than a manuscript assessment or an edit, but it's important to note that a beta reader is not necessarily a professional editor (though they might be). It is not their job to give advice on how to fix problems, as an editor might do. You can hire one beta reader or as many as you like, depending on your budget.

3.2.5 Manuscript assessment/ appraisal

A manuscript assessment (sometimes called manuscript appraisal) is a detailed report from an editor that gives you feedback on your manuscript's strengths and weaknesses. It points out general ways in which your manuscript might be improved to make it more publishable. The report might address the plot, narrative, characters and voice, commenting on your overall structure, content and style. A manuscript assessment might help you decide whether your manuscript is ready to submit and, if not, what further work is needed before it will be ready. Some publishers ask editors to do assessments of manuscripts they're considering taking on, for the assessment might help them decide how much work (and therefore money) they'll need to put into it, and whether it will be worth it.

3.2.6 Developmental/structural/substantive edit

A structural (also known as a developmental or substantive) edit is generally performed in the early stages of a manuscript's development. It's not the final refinement of a text at sentence level; it's a 'big picture' look at the overall structure, flow and language of your draft. It could include advice on how you might arrange the chapters more logically, or how you might speed up or slow down the pace; how to bring your characters to life; or how you might improve the consistency of your narrator's voice. It might comment on whether the ending works, or suggest different chapter headings, or point out issues of cultural sensitivity. It can also alert you to any potential legal, ethical or copyright issues (which you might then need to discuss with a lawyer).

3.2.7 Sensitivity reading

A sensitivity reader is someone who reads a manuscript with the purpose of picking up plots, themes, language or characterisations that might be culturally inaccurate or offensive, or perpetuate stereotypes. If a manuscript, for instance, contains references to the cultural practices of a particular Indigenous group, it would be wise to find a sensitivity reader from that group to review your text. With sensitivity readers, it's not a case of 'one size fits all'. You can get sensitivity readers for issues relating to ethnicity, disability, gender, sexuality or cultural groups. You should expect to pay for such a service, and it's best to do this early in the process.

3.2.8 Copyedit/ line editing

Copyediting focuses more closely on the finer details of your writing. Some editors define **line editing** as a separate process, but others consider a line edit to be simply a heavy copyedit. Copyediting and line editing can include:

- ensuring that spelling, punctuation and grammar are correct and consistent
- in non-fiction, checking elements like tables, charts, illustrations, footnotes and endnotes: are they correct and well placed?
- advice on the voice, pace, dialogue, characterisation: are they clear, consistent and compelling?
- advice on sentence structure, style and content, to help you 'tighten up' your writing and ensure that your text says exactly what you want it to say, elegantly and concisely, without ambiguity or repetition.

It *might* also include basic fact-checking and/or checking of references, but that will depend on what you negotiate with your editor.

3.2.9 [Proofreading]

For the sake of completeness, I have included a brief reference to proofreading here, but I've put it in brackets because proofreading is not part of the pre-submission process. Proofreading comes much later. It's the final step before a typeset manuscript is sent off to print or uploaded as an eBook. 'Would you please proofread this for me?' is a question that editors approach with caution. More often than not, when someone asks this, what they really want is a copyedit. It's worth knowing the difference. More about proofreading in Section 6.6.

3.2.10 A final word about the editing process

The way I've set out the services above makes it seem as if these procedures are clear-cut and distinct from each other. I'm afraid that's a little misleading. In theory, the process would be this: write → self-edit → get feedback from family/friends/writers' group/beta reader → structural edit +/- sensitivity read → copyedit → typeset → proofread. In practice, however, it doesn't always work this way.

Depending on the state of the manuscript (or the wishes and budget of the author), an editor might skip the structural edit stage and go straight into copyediting. Sometimes an editor will do a combined structural edit and copyedit. Sometimes the editor will do a structural edit but address a few issues that would normally be addressed in a copyedit, and vice-versa. It depends on the state of the manuscript, the author's (or publisher's) wishes and the budget.

To add to the confusion, different editors sometimes mean slightly different things when they talk about 'copyediting' or 'line editing' or 'structural editing'. The label they give to the process is not really all that important. When you're negotiating a contract with an editor, make sure you understand what *tasks* will be performed, regardless of what you or they call the process.

3.3 Where to find an editor

If you intend to hire a professional editor, make sure you engage a qualified editor with relevant experience. Many editors specialise in particular genres.

- [The Institute of Professional Editors \(iPed\)](#) is an Australian organisation that maintains a register of highly qualified editors. Not all qualified editors are on the register, but it's worth asking your potential editor if they're a member of iPed.
- The [Freelance Editors' Network](#) is another excellent register of editors in Australia and New Zealand.
- Other countries have similar professional bodies for editors. In the UK it's the [Chartered Institute of Editing and Proofreading \(CIEP\)](#).

Many editors have websites outlining their services, so you'll find plenty just by googling. When choosing one, be sure to find out: what are their qualifications? What experience do they have? What area do they specialise in? Are they members of iPed (or a related body)? What books have they previously edited? Are there testimonials on their site, and what do they say?

4 PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE INDUSTRY

If you plan to submit to a traditional publisher or agent:

Publishing is a competitive industry, and publishers won't take on a manuscript just because it's well written. They need to know there's a market for it, and they need to know you will help them to market it. They'll want to know you're willing and able to promote yourself and your book, and they'll want to know they can work with and trust you.

The same applies to agents. Agents will only take on authors they believe they can 'sell' to a publisher.

To make yourself an attractive prospect for a publisher or agent, you need to be able to demonstrate to them that you know a bit about the industry, that you have connections within the industry, and that you are marketable (and, of course, that your book is). Aside from marketability, it makes sense for you to develop knowledge of the industry so you can navigate it successfully.

If you plan to self-publish

If you want to get your book into the hands of readers, it will also pay to learn more about the industry. How can you do this? Read on.

4.1 Learn about the industry in general

If you want to be part of the book industry, you'll need to know a bit about it. We've already covered some of this, but here's a summary:

- What's the difference between self-publishing and traditional publishing? (see Section 1)
- What's the publishing process, from author's computer to bookshelf? (see Section 6)
- What's the role of the editor (and do I need one)? (see Sections 3.2 and 6.2)
- How can I earn an income as an author? (see Section 7)
- How can I improve my writing? (see Sections 3, 4.4 and 4.5)

4.2 Learn about your target market and similar titles

This is important. How can you appeal to an audience if you don't know who that audience is? Publishers (and agents) will expect you to be familiar with your target audience. If you have a clear idea of your target demographic, you'll know what they expect in a book and how to reach them. It's worth getting this very clear in your mind. Once you know who your audience is and what your genre is, try to educate yourself on the tastes of that audience and the current state of publishing for that audience and genre. This is important regardless of the publishing path you follow.

4.2.1 What you need to know about the market

- What's popular at the moment? (Beware: publication can take a long time, so what's popular now might not be trending by the time your book hits the shelves. Still, it's helpful to be aware of trends. If nothing else, you might be able to use them as selling points when you're pitching to customers or publishers).
- What other books are comparable with yours? Publishers or agents will probably ask you this. You'll need to be able to give them a list of recently published titles that are similar to yours, but you'll probably also need to tell them how yours is different. They want to know that you know the market – and there's no point trying to fake it. You need to read those comparable books so you can answer their questions knowledgeably. But don't oversell – they'll be sceptical if you claim your book is the next Harry Potter.

4.2.2 How you can find out about the market

- Visit bookshops and browse (tough gig, but someone has to do it).
- Talk to booksellers.
- Visit the library – look at the new releases, talk to librarians about what's popular.
- Read book reviews in newspapers, magazines and online.
- Join writers' groups and social media groups that focus on your genre (I'll keep coming back to this ...)

4.3 Immerse yourself in the industry

I freely acknowledge that the first time a publisher accepted one of my manuscripts, it was not due to the brilliance of my manuscript alone. Yes, the text was (I like to think) interesting, well-written and largely error-free. I also followed the publisher's submission guidelines to the letter. (I spent an entire day writing the submission.) That alone would not have been enough. Happily for me, I was submitting a series of Australian history books for children at a time that the publisher was intending to increase their production of children's books. The following points also went in my favour:

- I worked in a school library, so I knew what libraries were buying, what kids liked and what teachers wanted.
- Because of my library work, I had developed good relationships with several travelling educational booksellers who were willing to promote my books to their customers.
- I had developed good relationships with local bookstores as a customer.
- I could cite a few contacts in the local media.
- I had been submitting regular book reviews to a children's literature magazine for a year or so. (Note: writing book reviews is a great way to practise analysing texts. If you hone these skills by analysing what works and what doesn't in *other* writers' works, you might get better at applying them to your *own* when you self-edit.)
- I had worked in the local public library (including a stint as acting young people's librarian) and still had contacts there.
- I was part of a network of teacher-librarians.
- I was a member of the Queensland Writers' Centre.

For all of the above reasons, I could demonstrate that I had a fair knowledge of the industry – and, in particular, a knowledge of that part of the industry the publisher wanted to learn more about: children's books. My timing was very lucky! I could also demonstrate that I had connections who would help us promote and sell the books.

I'm aware we can't all be lucky enough to work in libraries or bookshops. But it's not all luck; you have to work at it. There are some things you can do to become part of the industry. They include:

- Join your local library's 'Friends of the Library' group. Many libraries have them.
- Write book reviews.
 - Contact literature magazines to ask if they'll publish your reviews. Try to find a relevant magazine. For instance, do you write children's books? Seek out parenting magazines or children's literature magazines like *Maggies*.
 - Put regular reviews on blogs – perhaps you can be a guest on someone else's blog if you don't want to create your own.
 - Put your reviews on social media.
 - Volunteer at writers' festivals. Many cities run them.
- Support your local bookshop. (There are many reasons for doing this!)

4.4 Join a writers' group

Writers' groups can be in person or online. Joining a writers' group provides many benefits:

- You've got something in common with the other members right from the get-go.
- You'll understand each other's frustrations and joys, whether you become friends or not. This can be surprisingly reassuring in a field that is so solitary and often unrewarding.
- You can learn from each other; discussions will always bring to light useful tips you'd never come across otherwise, like which bookshops support local authors, which editors are good value, which blogs to follow, what competitions are coming up, how to create a website, what the pros and cons of self-publishing are, how to get an ISBN, where to get computer repairs – the list is endless.
- Some writers' groups critique each other's work. This can be a great, non-threatening way to improve your writing (see Section 3.2.3).

4.5 Some valuable groups and organisations to follow or join

I have compiled this list of clubs, associations, social media groups and websites from suggestions by authors in the relevant genres who have personally found them useful. I can't vouch for all of them myself. Most groups have an online presence and many run remote workshops as well as face-to-face professional development. Through these groups you can get advice on writing, publishing, pay rates and marketing, as well as business and legal advice and notifications of competitions – and more. The following list is only a tiny fraction of what's out there, and it's biased towards QLD, but it will give you a start, wherever you are.

4.5.1 All authors

- Your state's writers centre (e.g. [Queensland Writers' Centre \[QWC\]](#))
- [ASA \(Australian Society of Authors\)](#) – for information and support on just about every aspect of writing and publishing you can imagine.
- Your local writers' group. If you don't have one, you could start one.
- [Australian Writers' Centre \(AWC\)](#) – advocacy and information on contracts, pay rates, rights management, and great online courses.
- [Copyright Agency Limited](#) – provides information, advice, and funding.
- [Australian Writers Marketplace \(AWM\)](#) – a regularly updated listing of markets, publishers, agents, etc (subscription based).
- [Ask a Book Editor](#) (Facebook group) – handy group in which you can ask editors for free advice on sentence construction, punctuation, grammar, or questions related to the editing process.

4.5.2 Children's authors

- [Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators](#) – a supportive network with a branch for Australian and New Zealand members. They also have a Facebook page.
- [CBCA \(Children's Book Council of Australia\)](#)
- [Write Links](#) (Queensland's Children's Writers and Illustrators Group)
- [Just Write for Kids](#) (support group for aspiring and emerging authors and illustrators of children's books)
- [Sunshine House Writers & Creatives](#) (Facebook group)

4.5.3 Historical authors

- Your local history society – become a member and/or follow them on Facebook. Great for helping you with your research, and a potential audience for your books.
- Your state's historical society (e.g. Royal Historical Society of QLD).
- [Historical Novel Society of Australasia](#)

4.5.4 Fantasy writers

- [Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Association \(on Facebook\)](#)

4.5.5 Sci-Fi writers

- [Australian Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers' Association \(on Facebook\)](#)

4.5.6 Romance writers

- [Romance Writers of Australia](#)
- [Romance Writers of New Zealand](#)
- [Romance Editor Q&A](#) (Facebook)

4.5.7 Christian writers

- [Christian Writers Downunder](#)
- [Omega Writers](#)

4.5.8 Crime

- [Sisters in Crime](#)

4.5.9 Poetry

- [Australian Haiku Society](#)
- [Australian Poetry](#)

4.6 Develop an online presence

Like it or not, your publisher will expect you to have a social media presence, and a website might help too. Having a good following before you even submit to a publisher will go in your favour. Social media is constantly evolving, and too big a topic to go into in any depth here.

4.6.1 Website

If you plan to self-publish, you might want a website as a platform through which you can sell your books directly. (You don't have to do this; you can just upload to Amazon and/or IngramSpark and other such platforms and have them do the selling for you. You'll get a bigger cut from each sale if you sell directly, but you'll need to do all the admin – sales, packaging and posting – yourself.)

There are plenty of platforms you can use to create websites, like Square, Wix, Wordpress, Squarespace and countless others. Again, website design is too big a topic to go into here.

4.6.2 Social media in brief

When it comes to promotion via social media, I am no expert. It's a big and ever-changing topic, so this section does not give advice on where, how or what to post. You can find plenty of advice on marketing elsewhere. This section is really just to point out a few tips that I've found valuable on how an author might find social media useful.

- Remember: social media is not only for promoting yourself. It's an incredibly valuable source of learning. I'm in several writers' groups and editors' groups. We ask questions, read each other's answers, learn about promotional opportunities and jobs and skills, celebrate each other's successes and sympathise with each other's frustrations or disappointments. There are countless Facebook groups that will help you develop as an author and help establish you in the writing community. Join some! Many are private groups that you'll need to request to join. From groups like these, you'll receive encouragement and learn valuable tips about writing, marketing, events and more.
- If you're already on Facebook, create a separate page for your business as a writer. Keep your private posts private.
- If you've already got a social media following for your business, that's great. Tell your followers about your book, even before it's published. Make them look forward to it. If you don't have a following, build one up by posting about things that might interest a person in your target audience. Don't make all your posts about your book. If you're writing a kids' book, follow other children's authors, teachers and parenting experts. Share their posts. Find interesting items pertinent to them to link to or repost.

4.7 Go to writing events and workshops

This is important! Festivals, workshops, author talks, book launches, seminars, webinars: there are so many to choose from. Take advantage of them because:

- They're fun.
- They'll help you improve your writing.
- You'll meet other writers, which is nice socially but will also help you along in the industry.
- You'll pick up presentation skills and ideas, which you can use later when you host your own book launch or deliver talks about your own works.

4.8 Network

This is important both after your book has been published AND when you're seeking publication. Yes, 'networking' is an ugly word; to me, it smacks of using other people to get ahead. But it needn't be like that. The simple fact is that you cannot succeed in the book industry without the support of others in the industry. The idea is more palatable, I think, if you approach networking as a give-and-take thing, not as a leg up to your own success. You also have something to offer, and if you're generous in sharing your expertise, you'll find the community that grows around you will be inspiring and rewarding. The exercise will be mutually beneficial. So, what can you do to develop this community? I've already mentioned some, but I'll list them and other suggestions below. You might think of many more.

- Join a writers' group.
- Join your state's writing centre.
- Join relevant Facebook groups.
- Go to writing events.
- Introduce yourself to your local bookshops and librarians.
- Volunteer at library events or writers' festivals.
- Invite other authors to speak to your book club or your school or whatever groups you're involved with.
- Attend book launches of other emerging authors. They need your support just as much as you need theirs.
- Tell people you're a writer. I know – that's hard to do! But if you don't tell them, they won't know.
- Share the successes of other authors on your social media. If someone you met at a writing event released a book, re-post the news of their launch or positive reviews about their book (but only if you can be genuinely positive about it).
- Write to groups that might be interested in what you do. This is more useful after your book is released, but worth noting here. For example, I have a historical fiction series for children that features a modern girl who goes back in time to have adventures with women who changed the world. I spent days finding contact details of primary school teachers' associations; history teachers' associations; English teachers' associations; history groups; women's groups; women's history groups; libraries; bookshops ... and so on. I emailed them all individually, tweaking each email to make sure it was tailored to that particular organisation. It's time-consuming, and you'll probably only get one response for every twenty emails you send. You might get a speaking gig out of it, or they might agree to review

the book for their newsletter. Another tip: keep track of who you've contacted and what their response is. Follow up politely if you haven't received a response in a reasonable time.

5 SUBMITTING TO A TRADITIONAL PUBLISHER OR AGENT

Let's say you've decided to submit to a traditional publisher or agent. As with every other aspect of writing, this is not as simple as it sounds. A google search will turn up so many publishing houses that you'll be forgiven for giving up and sobbing onto your keyboard in despair. This section will help you break down the process.

5.1 Find a suitable publisher or agent

How do you go about finding the right publisher? If you have an agent, they'll do this for you. As explained previously, some publishers do not accept submissions unless they come through an agent. If you want to try for those, you'll need to get an agent first.

The following advice on finding a publisher is for authors who don't have an agent, but it also applies to seeking an agent. Note that some agents (especially in the US) might want you to send a brief 'query' first. If they like your query, they'll ask for a full submission. Check the agent's requirements and supply what they ask you for. Anything else is a waste of time.

1. The first step is to research what publishers are out there and write a longlist. How do you do this?

For Australians, [The Australian Writer's Marketplace](#) is one place to start. If you buy a subscription, you have access to their online database of publishers. You can narrow your search down so that you only show those that publish books in your genre. (AWM also provides a lot of other helpful information for writers.)

The [Australian Publishers Association](#) also has an industry directory.

2. Narrow the list down to a shortlist of possible candidates. How? Look at the website of every publisher on your longlist. You can find this either by googling or through one of the directories above. With each one, ask yourself:
 - a. Do they accept unsolicited manuscripts? If not, cross them off your list straight away. Some publishers only accept unsolicited manuscript at brief intervals through the year. Make a note of these.
 - b. Do they publish books in your genre? If not, strike them off.
 - c. What else have they published? Does their list include books like yours, and do you like the look of their list? What about their covers – do they look well designed, or are they amateurish? Have they won any awards?
 - d. Do you like the tone of their website? Do they sound like people you could work with?
 - e. Check that the publisher is reputable. There are scammers out there. There are countless predatory publishers who pass themselves off as traditional publishers but want to take your money. Here's more info: [Writer Beware](#).
3. Write a shortlist. Create a table with the following columns: Publisher name; contact details (with name of person to contact if known) and website; method of submission (email or

hard copy?); date submitted; publisher's advice on response (i.e. do they say they'll reply within six weeks? Do they advise that you follow up? Do they tell you that if you don't get a response within a certain timeframe you can assume it's not been accepted? Do they mind if you submit to multiple publishers simultaneously?); response received.

4. Arrange your shortlist in order of priority.
5. Submit! See the next section for advice on how.

5.2 Write your submission

In general, most publishers will want – at the very least – a query letter, a synopsis and an author bio that includes your publishing/writing history. They'll want to know the genre, the word length, and your target audience as well. They might also want a chapter outline, and maybe some details about what recently published books yours is similar to.

Annoyingly, all publishers have different submission guidelines. Having submitted to many more publishers than I can count, I know what a drag this is. Writing a good submission takes hours. If you submit to multiple publishers, you'll have to write multiple submissions, and each one will take many, many hours. There's no way around it. Yes, you can take parts of your submission to one publisher and adapt them to fit the submission guidelines of another – but I'll guarantee you'll have to do lots of tweaking.

The best advice I can give is this: follow the publisher's guidelines EXACTLY.

If they ask for a 100-word bio, don't give them your 250-word bio from the other submission without cutting it down. If they want it double-spaced, make sure it's double-spaced. If they want a 500-word synopsis, give it to them. Don't ignore any questions, and don't give them anything they don't ask for.

It should go without saying, but I'll say it anyway: edit your submission over and over again. It needs to be as close to error-free as humanly possible. If you've got great ideas but you're lousy at spelling, it might be worthwhile to pay a professional to edit or proofread your submission.

5.3 Submit

5.3.1 Method of submission

Most, but not all, publishers accept only digital submissions. Almost all will want your manuscript in Word format. Some want emails with attachments, some want the entire text of your submission in the body of the email, and some only accept submissions via online forms. It should be obvious, but, again, it's worth emphasising: if the publisher asks for hard copy only, send them hard copy. If they ask for emailed Word documents, send them emailed Word documents. Anything else is a waste of your time.

5.3.2 Multiple submissions

If a publisher says they don't want you to do multiple simultaneous submissions, don't. If they say they want you to tell them if you've submitted to multiple publishers, tell them. It's not a big industry, and publishers communicate with each other.

5.3.3 Direct pitch

One way to get the attention of an agent and/or publisher (and stand out from the hundreds of others who at any given time are competing with you) is to pitch your manuscript to them directly.

Often writers' festivals run sessions in which you can do this. You might have five minutes to meet with an agent or publisher face-to-face and sell your idea to them. The Australian Society of Authors also periodically runs ['Literary Speed Dating'](#) sessions in which you can pitch your book via Zoom to an agent or publisher of your choice. Note that these sessions are very popular, so you'll need to book ahead. They can also be costly, but could be worth it.

5.4 Wait

Check the publisher's guidelines. Some will tell you they'll respond within six weeks; others will tell you that if you've heard nothing in three months, you can assume they don't want it. Others might encourage you to send a follow-up email. Keep a record of all these details on your shortlist table, and follow their instructions carefully.

If nothing else, submitting to agents and publishers will teach you patience.

6 THE PUBLISHING PROCESS

Getting your book accepted by a publisher is so much hard work and such an exciting thing, that you might not have given much thought to what happens next. I'll confess, when my first book was accepted for publication, I was astonished at how much more work I had to do leading up to publication and then following the release. It's helpful to be prepared, so this section answers the question: what does the publishing process involve?

This section is relevant whether you self-publish or traditionally publish. The steps in the process are more or less the same. The difference is that with self-publishing, you pay for each service. If you're self-publishing and plan to co-ordinate the publishing process yourself rather than going through a self-publishing company, you'll need to understand the process. Even if you choose not to follow all the steps, it's best to know what they are, so you can make informed decisions about what you can afford to leave out.

6.1 Contracts

If your book is accepted by a traditional publisher, you will be offered a contract. It should outline how much you'll be paid in royalties, whether you'll receive an advance, what your rights are, what the timeline of publication will be, what the publisher's rights are – and MUCH more. Read the contract carefully and make sure you understand it. You may need legal advice. If you do seek legal advice, make sure you get it from a lawyer who is familiar with the publishing industry. The Australian Society of Authors is one organisation that can help you with [legal advice regarding contracts and other publishing issues](#).

6.2 Edits

If you're self-publishing, you'll need to decide what level of editing you need, and organise and pay for the service(s) yourself (see Section 3.2).

If you've signed a contract with a traditional publisher, your publisher would normally get your manuscript edited. Even if you've already had it edited, the publisher might want changes made to suit their requirements. At this stage it might be a copyedit (see Section 3.2.8). Larger publishers

might have in-house editors, but many publishers send their manuscripts to contractors. The publisher will coordinate this. You might have direct contact with the editor, or your edits might go through the publisher. Generally, the editor will mark up your Word document with 'Track Changes' so you can see and respond to the suggestions. Don't be shocked at what you see when the first pass of your edit is returned to you; it's likely to be heavily marked up with changes. Some (many) of them might be simply formatting changes to ensure the final text conforms to the publisher's house style.

How much say you have in what you accept and what you reject will depend on the publisher, and this might be outlined in your contract. Don't be defensive; while constructive criticism can be painful, you need to accept that the publishers have more experience in what works in the industry than you do. Listen to their advice respectfully, and if you still don't agree, be diplomatic in your objections.

If you don't know how to use Word's 'Track Changes' feature, it's a good idea to find out before you start the editing process. If you google it, you'll find countless useful tutorials. It's really not hard once you know how.

6.3 Illustrations and design

You (or your publisher, if you're traditionally publishing) will need to organise a cover design, the internal layout, and maybe illustrations. Sometimes the same person does all of these tasks, but sometimes they're performed by different people. If you've written a picture book, a traditional publisher will probably have an illustrator in mind.

This is how the process has gone for me: The publisher asks me for suggestions – what illustrations do I think would work, and where should they go in the text? She then sends my suggestions and the edited text to the illustrator, who does the layout, typesets the text, does rough sketches of illustrations and sends them back to the publisher. The illustrator doesn't always take up my suggestions; he usually has much better ideas of his own. The publisher then sends them on to me for my approval. If I have any issues (e.g. Dora has pigtails not plaits; Carly is taller than Dora) then I list them, and she sends them back to the illustrator. He amends until we're all happy with the sketches, and then he finalises the illustrations. We all check them again at the proofreading stage.

Not all publishers operate the same way and, once again, some give the author more say than others.

Book designers often use InDesign to lay the text out. They'll decide on font type and size, where page and line breaks occur, how to display chapter headings and so on. Once they've done the layout, your manuscript is now at the 'proof' stage, and further changes need to be kept to a minimum.

6.4 Indexing

If your book is non-fiction, it may need an index. Indexing is a highly specialised skill. This needs to be done *after* the internal layout so that the indexer has access to final page numbers.

6.5 Cover designs

The cover design is the most exciting part (in my opinion). With a traditional publisher, this will probably be done early on, for marketing purposes, but could be going on concurrently with the edit and internal design. It might be done by the same person who does the internal design, but not necessarily. The process that I've experienced has been similar to the process for interior illustrations, but all publishers operate differently, and some give the author more say than others.

6.6 Proofreading

When the text has been typeset, the illustrations finalised and the indexing done (if applicable), it's time for a proofread. At this stage, it's more difficult and therefore more expensive to make changes, so any changes here must only be minor ones. The proofreader should pick up typos, inconsistent line breaks, punctuation errors, incorrect page numbers in an index, missing tables, captions that don't match the image, and so on. If you're traditionally published, the publisher might send the proofread copy to you for a final check. You will have read your book a thousand times by now and you'll be sick to death of it. Hang in there and read it closely just the same. No one is perfect, and even brilliant proofreaders miss the occasional typo. That's to be expected, and it's a good reason to have as many eyes scour the text as possible before it's sent to print.

6.7 Printing

If you're traditionally publishing, the printing is not your problem! Your publisher will arrange it. The decisions they'll make include how many copies to publish; whether to publish in hardback or paperback or both; what size to choose; what type of paper stock; whether to have a gloss or matte cover; how many copies to print; whether to print in Australia or offshore. Many publishers print overseas as it's cheaper, but this means they'll need to allow a few months for the books to arrive.

If you're self-publishing, these are decisions you'll need to make yourself. You'll need to consider carefully how you want to balance cost and quality. Two large and commonly used companies for self-publishers are Amazon KDP and IngramSpark (Lightning Source). Both of these provide a print-on-demand service. Individuals can order books online, and the company will send the book to the customer directly, which saves you a lot of hassle. The company will pay you at intervals (usually monthly) with printing costs deducted. To do this, you will need to set up an account with the company or companies you choose to use. The set-up is a bit of an ordeal, but once you've got it set up, it's easy. Note that only a small portion of the sale will come to you as a profit when they take the printing cost and their commission out. IngramSpark acts as a wholesaler from which book retailers can purchase heavily discounted copies to sell to their customers; you won't make much per book. But with Amazon, for example, you can also print copies for yourself with a significant author discount and sell them directly yourself – it's more effort but you'll make a bigger profit per unit.

You might also want to patronise a local printer for a good quality product. If you want to print a large number of copies, this might be economical. When it's not a print-on-demand service, the price per unit usually decreases significantly if you increase the number of copies printed. Of course, you'll need somewhere to store them safely and a means of selling them!

If you're self-publishing, you don't have to use the same printer every time. It's your choice.

6.8 EBooks and audiobooks

You or your publisher will probably also want to produce your book as an eBook, and maybe even an audiobook.

If you're traditionally published, the publisher will sort out the eBook formatting. If you're self-publishing, you'll need to convert the text to eBook format yourself or hire someone to do it. Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) is the biggest eBook platform, but there are others. Many eBook platforms provide their own software for converting your Word document into .EPUB.

Audiobooks are another growing area. Again, if you're traditionally published, the publisher will organise this. Some freelance editors and/or self-publishing companies are now also offering audiobook services. If you're self-publishing and you'd like to have your book made into an audiobook, ask your editor or a writers' centre to recommend a company.

6.9 ISBNs

An ISBN (International Standard Book Number) is a 13-digit unique identifier for a particular edition of a particular book. Each book has its own ISBN, and different editions of the same title need different ISBNs.

Again, if you're traditionally publishing, the publisher will buy the ISBNs and barcodes.

If you're self-publishing, you'll need to do this yourself. In Australia, you need to buy your ISBNs from [Thorpe-Bowker](#).

6.10 Legal deposit

It's a legal requirement that publishers (including self-publishers) send a copy of every book published in Australia to the [National Library of Australia](#). This is called 'legal deposit'. Nowadays the NLA prefers authors to send the book in eBook format – it's called [National Edeposit](#) (or NED).

Authors must also send a copy to the library in their state. If you're self-publishing, you'll need to do this yourself (just google 'legal deposit' and the name of your state for the procedure for your state library).

If you're traditionally publishing, your publisher will do this. They'll also send information about your book to the National Library to assist them with cataloguing your title. This is known as the [Prepublication Data Service](#). If you're self-publishing, you'll need to do this yourself.

6.11 Author copies

Most traditional publishers will give their authors some free copies of their book; the number should be specified in the contract. On top of the free copies, authors can expect to buy further copies at a significant discount; again, this should be specified in the contract.

6.12 Distribution

Most publishers use a distributor to get their books out to bookshops. Some larger publishers have their own distribution department. Other publishers outsource the distribution, sometimes to larger

publishers. The distributors take a very large percentage of the income made from sales. If you're self-publishing, this part of the process is up to you.

6.13 Marketing strategy/ promotions: radio, mags, blogs, signings, etc

Traditional publishers will do some marketing, but if your purpose in seeking traditional publication is to avoid having to promote your book, you'll be disappointed. Traditional publishers expect their authors to promote their books as much as possible – and increasingly so. The difference is that they'll be able to give you professional guidance. They'll also be likely to have contacts they can use to help you – for instance, they'll already have a rapport with radio hosts or other media contacts so they can tee up interviews. They might also create posters for you or help you with graphic design for bookmarks, advise you on social media strategies, re-post your social media posts, and so on.

Many of the platforms you can use to promote your book have already been mentioned in the section on developing an online presence. You've already used those platforms to build up your audience's sense of anticipation; now you can use them to celebrate the book's arrival, share news of your launch, provide links to your interviews, and so on. Now you can write to your contacts in the media to tell them your book is finally here. Email your local newspaper and radio stations. Maybe there are some magazines that might be interested in running a story. Make sure your type of book is relevant for the media you contact – otherwise you'll be wasting your time.

Another way of promoting your book is to directly contact groups or individuals who might be interested in it. Have you written a children's book? Contact local teacher-librarian groups or English teachers' networks. Have you written a book about maritime history? Email maritime museums and historical societies. Is your book about feminism? Write to women's groups. Any of these organisations might publicise your book in their newsletters or invite you to speak at their meetings.

You can't just put a book up on Amazon and expect it to sell. One way of increasing visibility is through reviews – for example, through an Advance Reader Copy (ARC) review service. This means that prior to release, you send a PDF of your book to a service that forwards it to impartial reviewers, who put a review up on agreed-upon platforms. You'll pay for it, and be aware: the reader will give an honest review! You can promote your book in a number of ways, such as using Amazon ads, paid Facebook ads, and ads on other platforms like BookBub, BookCave and more. They all cost money, so it's a good idea to keep track of what campaigns you've run, how much they cost, and how successful they were. This will help you decide which work best and therefore which ones to repeat.

6.14 Launches

Some big publishers will organise launches for their authors, but most smaller presses will leave that to the authors, though they might provide advice if you ask for it. Launches are exciting celebrations – acknowledgements that your work has finally come to fruition. They're not necessarily lucrative, but they can be.

6.14.1 Launch ideas

I've had quite a few launches. Here's a summary of mine to give you some ideas:

- I've launched children's books in the library of the school where I was working. The advantages were that it cost me nothing, and that I had a large audience of friends on the staff and some students and their parents. The school benefitted from the publicity.

- I launched a (traditionally published) adults' book at a local bookshop. This was easy because all I had to do was help spread the word and show up. The bookshop owner did the rest: she promoted it, provided nibbles and wine, a microphone and a venue – and cleaned up. She ordered the stock, so I didn't have the problem of buying a heap of books and having too much stock left over. The downside: I only earned royalties on the sales, whereas when I sell books directly myself, I earn 50%. I didn't earn much from the exercise, but I strengthened ties with my local bookshop, it was easy, and it was lots of fun.
- I launched another adults' book at a café, and another in a brewery/bar. These were probably my favourites. Anyone could go; people didn't need tickets. I was hoping we'd get a few drop-ins as the café was in the middle of town and it was a Friday night – and we did get some. The venue was free; the owner was just delighted to have a full house for the evening. After much consideration, I decided not to provide refreshments (at the brewery, I just bought plates of corn chips/nut snacks for each table). Catering more fully would have seriously cut into my profits. I figured people were getting free entertainment; they could buy their own drinks or even dinner if they wanted to. Both events went really well. We all had a great night and I sold heaps of books.
- The book I launched at the café was a QLD maritime history story. So I also launched it at the maritime museum as part of their educational series and their exhibition on immigration. This was great too – they organised everything regarding the catering, venue and advertising, but I had to write a lecture and create a slideshow.
- When a live launch was cancelled due to Covid-19, I had a small gathering in a cosy second-hand bookshop and we live-streamed a discussion about the themes in the book. Online launches are not the best way to sell books, but it was a fun occasion.
- I was expecting to launch a book as part of a writers' festival, but again at the last minute it was cancelled due to Covid-19. The festival organisers kindly re-scheduled it back-to-back with a panel discussion about editing, which drew in a few more members of the public than might have otherwise come. Not the numbers I'd hoped for when it was going to be part of a larger festival – and numbers were capped due to social distancing regulations, but it was still worthwhile.

6.14.2 Launches: points to consider

How, when and where you run your launch will depend on many factors. Here are some things to consider:

- Are you hoping to make a profit, or is the purpose merely to celebrate?
- How many people do you want? (This will determine your venue and marketing approach)
- Who is your likely audience? (If it's a kids' book – maybe make it during the day so kids can attend. And have it in a child-friendly venue.)
- Do you want to provide refreshments? Maybe this will be viable if you charge for entry.
- Do you *want* to charge for attendance?
- Will people need to register to attend? (Consider whether your venue limits numbers.)
- How will you promote it? Can you get local media to attend?
- Who will launch your book? My books are mostly historical. I've had books launched by friends who are local historians, librarians and – for a children's book – a teacher.
- Will you provide some other attractions? Music? Free book giveaways? Lucky door prizes? Games?
- Will you need a sound system?
- You'll need to give a speech and a reading. Keep them brief and pithy!

7 MAKING MONEY

I'll be upfront about this: your chances of making a living from writing books are very slim. A 2022 survey of Australian book authors found that the average income derived from practising as an author was \$18,200. That's the *average*, and the figure varies according to genre. Some authors earn a lot more, but most earn a lot less. [Here's the full report.](#)

I'm not saying this to put you off. It's just important, I believe, to go into this with your eyes open. You might be the next Liane Moriarty, but chances are you'll just make a bit of pocket money at best. But whether you make a living or not, your writing income doesn't have to come from book sales alone. This section outlines some of the sources of income your writing can provide.

7.1 Advances

An advance is a sum of money a traditional publisher gives you upfront. The size of it will depend on how many books they expect to sell. Some publishers – generally larger businesses – offer advances, but many don't. A first-time author published by a small publishing house would be lucky to get one.

7.2 Royalties

If you're traditionally published, your publisher will pay royalties, usually every six months, and usually 5% to 10% of the recommended retail price, or as according to your contract. Typically, your royalties will be highest in the first six months after release; that's when sales are at their peak.

7.3 Author sales at events

Whether you're traditionally published or self-published, events in which you have an opportunity to sell your books are a good source of revenue. Public speaking opportunities are great for sales. If you're traditionally published, you will probably be able to buy your own stock at a good price (maybe 50% discount) and you can then sell it at the RRP, thereby making a lot more than you would get in royalties if the publisher sold them directly. If you're self-published, you can have copies printed and make an even larger percentage of the RRP per sale.

Initially at least, you might need to offer to speak for free. It can be worth the effort if you get good sales from the event. Try organisations like Probus and Rotary Clubs, public libraries, local history societies, special interest groups. If you're writing about stamps, contact every stamp collecting club within a range you're willing to travel; if you're writing kids' books, maybe there's a local teacher-librarian group that would like to hear from you. Once you've had some experience in public speaking, you can apply to register with any number of speaking agencies who will co-ordinate paid speaking gigs for you. They can be quite lucrative, but it might take some time to get regular work.

7.4 Bookshops

If bookshops want to buy your books, they'll want to buy them at a wholesale price (they need to make profits too). If you're traditionally published, they'll probably buy from the publisher's distributor. If you're self-published, you'll need to offer them around 40% off the RRP – possibly more. They might prefer to sell your books on consignment only. In any case, it's a good idea to foster good relationships with your local bookstore. They can be an amazing support, and they'll appreciate the business you can bring in if you work well with them.

7.5 Educational Lending Rights (ELR) and Public Lending Rights (PLR)

This is a government scheme that compensates authors for the loss in sales they bear due to having their books in public or school libraries. Libraries are surveyed regularly to determine what books are in their collections. If your books are in enough libraries (there's a threshold), you will be paid an amount per book. Payments are made annually in June.

For me, ELR/PLR pays better than the publisher's royalties. It's harder to get self-published books into libraries, so the ELR/PLR income stream for self-publishers might not be as good. How do you get ELR/PLR payments? You'll need to register each edition of each title on the government website. It's not hard to do, and you only have to do it once. [Register your books or find out more information here.](#)

7.6 Copyright Agency Limited

Schools and other organisations in Australia pay annual licence fees to the Copyright Agency Limited to allow them to copy published material legally. The money collected in fees goes to creators to compensate them for this copying. The Copyright Agency collects data randomly from schools and other organisations regularly for information about what works are being copied so that they can pay the creators. If you are registered as a member of the Copyright Agency and if an organisation happens to copy your item during the 6 to 10-week period that they're being randomly surveyed, you'll receive a payment. So it's like winning lotto, but now and then you might be lucky enough to get a surprise payment. If you're traditionally published, your publisher might register for you, but it's worth checking that they've done so. If you're self-published, you'll need to register yourself. It's not hard and it's free. [Find out more about it here.](#)

7.7 Write articles

Another source of income and a good way to get known in the industry is to write articles for literary journals. [WQ](#), the journal of the [Queensland Writers' Centre](#), regularly takes submissions of articles about writing – and pays for them.

Some journals also pay for book reviews. Even if they don't pay, writing book reviews is an excellent way to improve your own writing because it forces you to think critically about what literary techniques work.

7.8 Literary awards, grants and fellowships

Don't dismiss the idea of submitting your writing for literary awards. There are loads of competitions for short stories, in Australia and overseas. There are also awards for published and unpublished book-length manuscripts (though not as many). If you're traditionally published, your publisher might submit your book to some of these. Ask them. If they don't, or if you're self-published, you could submit it yourself. If you're long- or short-listed, the kudos could be worth it, and if you win, the cash probably will be!

Look out for grants and fellowships to support your works in progress. If you're a member of your state's writers' centre, you'll probably receive regular updates on what opportunities are available.

8 REJECTIONS

8.1 Why is it so hard to get published?

Rejections are hurtful and disappointing. Many publishers don't even send rejection notices; on receipt of your submission they might simply send an automated email explaining that if you haven't heard from them in a specified time, you can assume it's a 'no'. When you've spent so much time – maybe even years – honing your work, having it dismissed so lightly can feel like a slap in the face. Especially if the publishers don't even 'bother' letting you know they don't want your book.

Those feelings are natural and unavoidable. But, hard as it is to do, try not to take rejections personally. I'm sure you've heard it before: only a tiny percentage of manuscripts submitted to traditional publishers are accepted. So why is it so hard to get published?

Try to see it from the publishers' point of view. Publishing a title is a huge investment, both in time and money. The publisher must pay for an editor, a designer, a typesetter, a proofreader, an artist for the cover, a printer. Maybe they'll also pay an illustrator and an indexer, and maybe they'll need to seek legal or copyright advice. They'll pay you, the author, your royalties. They must also purchase ISBNs and might send free advance copies to reviewers. They might also send free copies off as competition entries. They'll pay for warehouse storage and shipping, and invest a lot of time, effort and money in marketing. Then the distributors will take a large percentage of their profits. They'll need to spend money on all of these things, as well as time co-ordinating them and – if you're a new author – coaching you on the process. It's a big commitment up front, and the only way they can recoup those costs is by making sales. They need to be pretty confident of making big sales.

Taking on a new author is a big risk. They need to be sure they can work with you, that you'll help them promote your book, and that you'll enhance their reputation.

Your book could be rejected for any number of reasons. Small publishers might only release a handful of titles each year, but they'll receive thousands of submissions. Many of them will be poorly written or fail to follow the submission guidelines. Many will be in a genre the publisher simply doesn't publish. These will be promptly rejected – but, even so, sifting through them takes time. Publishers generally operate on tight budgets, so any submission that clearly doesn't suit them will get short shrift.

On top of that, your book might be a beautifully written, fascinating story in your publisher's genre, and your submission might be perfect. But maybe they've already decided on their list for this year. Or maybe they've just published a title with a similar theme. Or maybe they're thinking of changing their focus this year. Or maybe their research tells them there's just not a big enough market for your type of book. Or maybe they're just not in a financial position to take on a brand-new author at the moment. Or maybe it's a great story, but the level of editing it needs is more than they're prepared to invest.

8.2 What to do if your submission is rejected

If you've followed the advice in Section 5.1, you'll have a table or spreadsheet listing the publishers you're submitting to. Make sure you update it with the rejection notice. This will save you from making the mistake of accidentally submitting to the same publisher twice. Do whatever you do to get over a disappointment: rant to a friend, go for a run, have a glass of wine – whatever it takes.

Then what?

If the publisher gave feedback, celebrate. This is rare, and it probably means they liked your book and seriously considered it. Take heart! It might be just what another publisher is looking for. Be sure to consider the feedback carefully and, if they've provided advice on how to improve your chances of success, take it! If you *haven't* received feedback, you're not alone. With hundreds of submissions coming in every week, most publishers just don't have the time to give feedback.

Either way, keep trying. Move on to the next publisher on your shortlist. Keep writing. Maybe it's time to start on your next novel? Or, after a few rejections, maybe it's time to send your work to a beta reader or an editor (if you haven't already) for advice? Keep reading, keep learning how to improve your writing, and keep digging yourself further into the publishing industry. Go to workshops, writers' group meetings and participate in online forums. Graciously celebrate the successes of others in your position, for one day they might be there to celebrate yours.

9 A FEW FINAL WORDS

1. I hope that by now you've understood a crucial point: there's no quick and easy way to becoming a successful author. It takes time and effort to develop good writing skills. It takes time and effort to write and edit a book. It takes time and effort to build a network in the publishing industry, to write a winning submission, and to secure a contract with an agent or a publisher. After that, there's more time and effort in taking your book through the publishing process, and a huge amount of time and effort in promoting it – for an indefinite period. If you're self-publishing, obviously you'll have to put in even more time and effort throughout the publishing process and after. Some of it is tedious, but a lot of it is fascinating and fun. But it's good to be warned, I think: if you want to succeed, you have to be involved with all of it – even the bits you don't love.
2. I hope you've also understood that it's hard to make a living out of writing. But you're not in it for the money, right? You write because you enjoy it and because you want to create something of value. Ideally, you'd like to cover your costs – which will be considerably higher if you're self-published. Personally, I spend a lot of money on research, which eats significantly into my costs ... but then, my research takes me to fascinating places and introduces me to wonderful people. You can't put a dollar value on that.
3. Being part of a writing community is immensely rewarding, whether you've been published or not. At the risk of being repetitive, I urge you to attend events, join critique groups, engage in social media. You can learn so much from others at various stages in their writing careers. Being involved will help you hone your skills and knowledge (not only in story-telling but in everything to do with the business of writing), help you on the road to publication and help you promote your book once it's out there.
4. There are many skills you need to develop as a writer: writing skills, self-editing, submission writing, social media, marketing. It can also help to know about cover design, blurbs, web design and public speaking. Just being good at constructing a sentence isn't enough.
5. READ!

10 USEFUL RESOURCES

Here are some great books that will help you improve your writing skills. There are hundreds of others!

Self-editing for Fiction Writers: How to Edit Yourself into Print by Renni Browne & Dave King

Editing Fiction at Sentence Level by Louise Harnby

Point of View by Sandra Gerth

Show Don't Tell by Sandra Gerth.