

# WRITING, EDITING AND PUBLISHING: ADVICE FOR NEW AUTHORS

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The following information 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. While much of this advice applies to those pursuing traditional publication, then, plenty of it will be helpful for those planning self-publication. I have provided extra advice for self-publishing authors where relevant.

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 1) but also yourself (Section 2).

## CONTENTS

1	PREPARE YOUR MANUSCRIPT.....	2
2	PREPARE <i>YOURSELF</i> FOR SUBMISSION.....	6
3	AGENTS.....	13
4	PREPARE YOUR SUBMISSION.....	14
5	SUBMIT.....	17
6	THE PUBLISHING PROCESS.....	17
7	MAKING MONEY.....	23
8	SELF-PUBLISHING.....	25
9	REJECTIONS.....	26
10	A FEW FINAL WORDS.....	28

# 1 PREPARE YOUR MANUSCRIPT

## 1.1 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. I provide weekly writing tips on [my own blog](#), for instance. 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 writing group.** In some writing groups (whether online or in person), members critique each other's works (See Section 1.2.3). There are many other benefits in joining a writing group, as discussed in Section 2.4.
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 2.7).
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 re-reading your own work; ask yourself: *how is my writing lacking? how might I improve it?*

## 1.2 Polish your manuscript to prepare

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 submission to an agent or traditional publisher, or to self-publish your book.

Should you have your manuscript professionally edited before you take this step?

First, let's assume you're planning to submit to an agent or traditional publisher. In an ideal world, publishers would see the potential in your 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 have the resources 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 below.

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 manuscript to an eBook platform for free doesn't mean it's a good idea. You get what you pay for. Editors not only help with story structure, characters, language, punctuation, spelling and grammar, but they can also advise on issues like legal and copyright matters, plagiarism, 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.

### 1.2.1 Self-editing

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 do extensive rewriting for you 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?
- Are the characters believable and well-drawn? Do they have distinct, consistent personalities and depth?
- Does my dialogue sound natural and authentic?
- Is the language suited to my audience?
- If it's non-fiction – is it accurate?

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 might help:

*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 at least a few days. 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.

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 develop and polish your manuscript.

### 1.2.2 Feedback from your family and friends

There's nothing wrong with showing your manuscript to family and friends early on 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.

### 1.2.3 Critique from your writing group

If you're part of a writing group – and I recommend that you join one (see Section 2.4) – then you might have access to people who are willing to read your work and give feedback. A writing 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.

### 1.2.4 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 the 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 probably *not* a professional editor. A beta reader will tell you their impressions but not 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.

### 1.2.5 Manuscript assessment

A manuscript assessment is a professional 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.

### 1.2.6 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.

### 1.2.7 Copyedit

Copyediting (sometimes called 'line editing') focuses more closely on the finer details of your writing. It can include:

- ensuring that spelling, punctuation and grammar are correct and consistent
- 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.

### 1.2.8 [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.

### 1.2.9 A final word about the editing process

The way I've set out the services above make 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/writing group/beta reader → structural edit → copyedit → typeset → proofread. In practice, however, it doesn't always work this way.

Depending on the state of the manuscript (or the wishes 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.

## 1.3 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.

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? What books have they previously edited? Are there testimonials on their site, and what do they say?

# 2 PREPARE *YOURSELF* FOR SUBMISSION

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. How can you do this? Read on.

## 2.1 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. Here's a list of some of the things it will help to know about, with links to more information:

- What's the difference between self-publishing and traditional publishing? (See Section 4.1)
- What is 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 1.2 and 6.2)
- How can you earn an income as an author? (See Section 7)
- How can you improve your writing? (See Sections 2.4, 2.5 and 1)

## 2.2 Learn about your target market and similar titles

This is important. 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.

### 2.2.1 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 publishers).
- What other books are comparable with yours? Publishers or agents will very likely ask you this. You'll need to be able to give them a list of 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 about claims that your book is the next *Harry Potter*.

### 2.2.2 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 writing groups and social media groups that focus on your genre (I'll keep coming back to this ...)

## 2.3 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 think 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 agreed 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.
- 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 sound 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. Most libraries have them.
- Write book reviews.
  - You can 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 *Magpies*.
  - You can 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.
  - You could put your reviews on social media – e.g. Facebook or LinkedIn.
- Volunteer at writers' festivals. Many cities run them.

## 2.4 Join a writing group

There are many benefits from joining a writing group:

- 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 writing groups critique each other's work. This can be a great, non-threatening way to improve your writing (See Section 1.2.3).

## 2.5 Some valuable groups 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. 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.

### 2.5.1 All authors

- Your state's writers centre (e.g. [Queensland Writers' Centre \[QWC\]](#) and [Writing New South Wales](#)). I can't recommend these highly enough.
- [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.
- [Australian Writers' Centre \(AWC\)](#) – advocacy and information on contracts, pay rates, rights management, etc.
- [Copyright Agency Limited](#) – provides information, advice, and funding.
- [Brisbane Writers Festival](#) – runs a year-long program of events (as well as the annual festival).
- [Australian Writers Marketplace \(AWM\)](#) – a regularly updated listing of markets, publishers, agents, etc (Subscription based).
- [Submission Grinder](#) is a free online listing of markets for submissions of fiction and poetry.

### 2.5.2 Children's authors

- [Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators](#) – a very supportive network with a branch for Australian and New Zealand members. They also have a Facebook page.
- [Creative Kids Tales](#) – great website for emerging authors and illustrators to network, show their work to the public and learn from each other.
- The Duck Pond (Facebook group)
- [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)
- 'Pass it On' ezine by Jackie Hosking

### 2.5.3 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](#)).

### 2.5.4 Fantasy writers

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

### 2.5.5 Sci-Fi writers

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

### 2.5.6 Romance writers

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

### 2.5.7 Christian writers

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

### 2.5.8 Crime

- [Sisters in Crime](#)

### 2.5.9 Speculative fiction

- [Aussie Speculative Fiction](#)

### 2.5.10 Poetry

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

### 2.5.11 Self-publishing

- [selfpublishinglab.com](#)
- [20Books to 50k](#) (Facebook group)

## 2.6 Develop an online presence

Like it or not, your publisher will expect you to have a social media presence, and a website will help too. Social media strategy is a big topic that I won't go into in much depth here. It's not something I do brilliantly, so you'd be advised to do more research of your own on this. I just want to mention that you *will* need to have an online presence if you want to get your book out there. Below I've just jotted some notes about a few platforms. One piece of advice I've heard is that it's better to do two or three platforms and do them well and consistently than spread yourself thinly across them all. I like that advice! It's my vindication for avoiding Instagram.

Whatever platform you use, make sure you include pictures as much as possible. Videos are even better, as long as they're *short* and interesting.

And remember: social media is *not* only for promoting yourself. I find it 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.

### 2.6.1 Facebook

If you're already on Facebook, you'll need to create a separate page for your business as a writer. Through your business page, make sure you 'like' pages that are relevant to your work and your audience. This way you can *learn*. You can also share posts and tag relevant people or sites to help build up your following. Having a good following before you even submit to a publisher will go in your favour.

There are countless Facebook groups that will help you develop as an author, and also help establish you in the writing community. Join some! Many are private groups that you'll need to request to join. If you're writing for children, you can't go past 'The Duck Pond', for example – a fantastically supportive community of authors at all different stages of their careers. From groups like this, you'll receive encouragement and learn all sorts of valuable tips about writing, marketing, events and more.

### 2.6.2 Twitter

If you've already got a Twitter following, 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 tweeting about things that might interest a person in your target audience. Don't make all your tweets about your book. If you're writing a kids' book, follow other children's authors, teachers and parenting experts. Retweet them so they'll notice you. Find interesting items pertinent to them to link to or retweet. Then once they've noticed you, maybe they'll take an interest in your book.

### 2.6.3 Instagram

As I mentioned, I haven't used Instagram so I'm not in a position to advise on this one. I chose to ignore this one because I thought it was the platform that my target demographic would be least likely to use. However, I suspect things are changing and it's probably a rewarding option, as long as you keep your content very visual.

### 2.6.4 LinkedIn

I'm told that not so many people post articles on LinkedIn, so any articles you contribute might have a better chance of visibility than they'd have on some other social media. Worth thinking about.

### 2.6.5 Website

If you can afford to hire a web designer, go for it!

If you can't (or would rather not), there are plenty of platforms you can use to create websites, and most of them are quite user-friendly. I use Weebly, but there's also Wix, Wordpress and countless others.

Again, website design is too big a topic to go into here. Two pieces of advice I have are:

- Whatever you use, update it regularly.
- Platforms like Weebly have a completely free option. They also have an option to pay for a domain name. I'd strongly advise you to pay for a domain name; it's not expensive, and it makes your site much more likely to appear in web searches.

## 2.7 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 a talk about your own works.

## 2.8 Network

This is important after your book has been published AND when you're seeking publication. Yes, 'networking' is an ugly word. To me, it smacks of *using* 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 mere stepping-stone 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 writing 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.
- Chat with new people at the events you attend – and exchange business cards.
- 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 that 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.
- 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, my latest series is historical fiction for children. It features a modern girl who goes back in time to have adventures with women who have 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 20 emails you send. It's a hard slog, but it's necessary if you want to spread the word. 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.

## 3 AGENTS

Should you get an agent?

There's no right answer to this question. If you want to be published by one of the bigger publishers, you'll need an agent; they usually won't take unsolicited submissions. However, many smaller publishers will look at unsolicited submissions, and you might have yours accepted without the need for an agent.

### 3.1 Pros of having an agent

- An agent might help you negotiate a better deal.
- An agent can help you develop your career, possibly taking you further than you might have done alone.

### 3.2 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.

Whether you decide to submit to a publisher or try for an agent first, the following advice on submissions will apply.

## 4 PREPARE YOUR SUBMISSION

As with every other aspect of writing and seeking publication, submitting to a publisher or agent 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. Where do you start?

Should you even pitch to a traditional publisher, or should you self-publish?

Before you consider pitching to a publisher or agent, or before you choose to self-publish, it's important to understand the difference between traditional publishing, self-publishing and vanity presses.

### 4.1 Types of publishers

#### 4.1.1 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.

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 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 may 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 much. 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.
- 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're likely to support you with advice and maybe set up some interviews and/or help with design of posters, etc. 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 9.1).

#### 4.1.2 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. More about the various models of self-publishing in Section 8.

### 4.1.3 Vanity presses

Publishing models are always changing, and the lines between models are becoming blurred. 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 charge authors to publish their books, but often retain some creative control, so the author has the worst of both worlds. They might present the fee as a co-payment, requiring the author to buy a certain number of copies to cover their costs. 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.

## 4.2 Find a suitable publisher or agent

Let's assume for now that you've decided to submit for traditional publication. How do you go about finding the right publisher?

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

The [Australian Writer's Marketplace](#) is a good 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 for you. 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 every 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 in the genre of your book? 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? What sort of quality do their books have? 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 a good blog post about it: <https://justpublishingadvice.com/new-authors-beware-of-scam-agents-and-publishing-sharks/>.

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 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 to submit. Make sure that when you submit, you record the date you submitted in the table mentioned above.

### 4.3 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 books yours is similar to.

Annoyingly, all publishers have different submission guidelines. Having submitted to many more publishers than I have fingers and toes, I know what a drag this is. Writing a good submission takes *hours*. You'd think that writing one submission would be enough but, sadly, it's not. 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 make them 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 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 SUBMIT

### 5.1 Method of submission

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.

### 5.2 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 talk to each other.

### 5.3 Follow ups

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.

## 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 aims to inform you of what happens *after* your book has been accepted by a traditional publisher. However, if you're planning to self-publish, much of this information is even more important. If you're going to co-ordinate the publishing process yourself, you'll need to know the usual procedure. 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 publishers' 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. There's some [general advice and a contract template on the Australian Society of Authors' website](#).

## 6.2 Edits

Once you've signed the contract, your publisher will probably (hopefully) get it edited. Even if you've already have it edited, the publisher might want changes made to suit their requirements. At this stage it will probably be a copyedit (See Section 1.2.7). Larger publishers might have in-house editors, but many publishers send their manuscript 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 document with 'Track Changes' on 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. Here's one of many sites with instructions: <https://oxen.tech/blog/using-track-changes-microsoft-word/>

## 6.3 Illustrations and design

Your publisher will need to organise a cover design, the interior 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, your publisher will likely 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 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.

## 6.4 Indexing

If your book is non-fiction, it may need an index. Indexing is a highly specialised skill. Your publisher would normally organise this after the layout has been done, so that the indexer has access to final page numbers.

## 6.5 Cover designs

The cover design is the most fun part (in my opinion). This will likely be done early on, for marketing purposes, but could be going on concurrently with the edit and interior 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 relevant), 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. It's very likely that the publisher will send the proofread copy to you – the author – 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 much 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 and Ingram Spark (Lightning Source). Both of these you provide a print-on-demand service. Individuals can order books online, and the company will send the book to the customer directly. 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.

## 6.8 eBooks

Your publisher may also want to produce your book as an eBook. This will mean they'll have to convert the text to eBook format – probably a couple of different formats. The designer who did the layout for your print version will likely do the eBook as well. This step isn't likely to require much (if any) input from you.

If you're self-publishing, you'll need to do this yourself or hire someone to do it. Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) is the biggest eBook platform. It uses the .MOBI format, while most other publishers use .EPUB, so it's a good idea to get your eBooks formatted in both types so you can have a broader market. You can convert your Word version of the manuscript to .MOBI using free conversion software like Calibre. Many other eBook platforms provide their own software for converting your Word document into .EPUB.

## 6.9 Behind the scenes: ISBNs

Again, if you're traditionally publishing, you won't need to deal with this task, but it's helpful to know what's going on.

Publishers purchase ISBNs (International Standard Book Number) for each title – and different editions of the same title need different ISBNs. This is a unique identifier for a particular edition of a particular book.

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 Behind the scenes: 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. They must also send a copy to the library in their state. This is called 'Legal Deposit'. If you're self-publishing, you'll need to do this yourself, both to the [National Library](#) and your state's library (just google 'legal deposit' and the name of your state).

If you're traditionally publishing, your publisher will 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 of free copies should be specified in the contract. On top of the free copies, authors can expect to buy further copies at a significant discount (I pay 50% of the RRP); 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 – usually smaller – publishers outsource the distribution. Sometimes they use larger publishers for distribution. The distributors take a very large percentage of the income made from the book.

## 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. 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-tweet your tweets, 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.

## 6.14 Launches

Some big publishers will organise launches for their authors, but most smaller presses will leave that to the authors, though they'll probably 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.

### 6.14.1 Launch ideas

I've had quite a few launches. Here's a summary 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 an adults' book at a local bookshop. This was great because all I had to do was create a poster and email my friends about it. I also asked someone to speak and asked my son to play background music. The bookshop owner did the rest: she promoted it, provided nibbles and wine, a microphone and a venue – and she 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 downsides: (1) I felt bad about charging attendees \$5 for entry (to cover refreshments), but this was out of my control; and (2) 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. This was probably my favourite. 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. We might have had one or two. The venue was free; the owner was just delighted to have a full house for the evening. I didn't charge entry but, after much consideration, I also didn't provide refreshments. Doing so 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. It went really well. We all had a great night and I sold heaps of books.
- The book in my previous point 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.

### 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?
- Do you want to charge for attendance?
- Will people need to register to attend? (They might need to if your venue has strict limits on numbers and you're expecting a lot)
- 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 microphone?
- 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 2015 survey of more than 1000 Australian book authors found that the average income was \$62,000, but only \$12,900 of that came from their writing practice. The median income was only \$2,800. This suggests there's a handful of authors earning a high income from writing, but many more earning very little. Fewer than 5% of the authors surveyed were earning an average annual income from their writing alone, despite the fact that 20% of those surveyed were working full time as authors. [Here's a summary of the results](#), and [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 you're 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 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 the book is released; that's when sales are at their peak. After that, the publishers will tend to promote the newer books on their list more, and your sales will start to decrease.

### 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.

Initially at least, you'll probably 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, women's groups. If you're writing about stamps, contact every stamp collecting club in a 100 km radius; 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 try 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 want to buy from the publisher's distributor. If you're self-published, you'll need to offer them at least 30% off the RRP – probably 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 suffer 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, 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 6–10 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 may 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.

# 8 SELF-PUBLISHING

As explained in Section 4.1, self-publishing means that you bear the cost of editing, design, proofreading, typesetting and printing yourself. The advantages are that you’ll have complete creative control and you won’t need to share the profits. But you should know that you’ll have to work harder to get sales so you can make those profits.

There are many ways of self-publishing, but I’ll outline three main approaches here.

1. **You employ a self-publishing** business 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.
2. **You co-ordinate the whole thing yourself, but hire professionals to work on it.** You hire an editor, you hire a designer for the cover, you hire a designer for the interior – to determine layout, illustrations, and typeset it, you hire a proofreader, you

hire someone to format as an eBook and upload it, you select and pay a printer. This is more work than (1) but it will likely 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 you get what you pay for. If your aim is, for example, just 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 strongly 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.

## 9 REJECTIONS

### 9.1 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 generate 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.

All 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, send copies to the National Library of Australia and relevant state library, and 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.

Of course, 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 in it.

## 9.2 What to do if your submission is rejected

If you've followed the advice in Section 4.2, 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 makes you feel good.

Then what?

If the publisher gave feedback, crack open the bubbly. 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, writing 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.

## 10 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. My favourite part is the cover design. My least favourite is the marketing – but some people love that part. 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. 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!