

## “You’ve Written a Book – What Next?”

The calls, emails, and questions I get most often, as an author, are from new writers who say: *“I’ve just finished a book. What do I do now to get it published?”* Most hope to be traditionally published—versus self-publishing their book—so I’m addressing this article to these writers.

Dear new author ...

I am so excited you’ve finished your first book and I know you are eager to find a publishing home for it. As requested, here are my tips to help you in your journey to find a publisher:

(1) First, be sure your book is the best it can be; it’s “your product” and it is your responsibility to prepare and package it in the best way possible. New writers often don’t have enough experience to recognize inherent problems that could keep their work from getting a contract. Like parents with a new baby, they see their creation as beautiful, perfect, and without flaw. But, unfortunately, like any “first effort,” it needs a lot of work. ... So a writer’s first job is to self-edit their book extensively using a thorough guidebook like *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers* by Renni Browne and Dave King, and then to pay a qualified editor to read and provide further help before submission.

(2) Once the product is “professionally polished and edited,” the next step is to find an agent or a publisher. An agent helps an author find a publisher and negotiate publishing contracts. Books such as *The Writer’s Market* provide listings of reputable agents as well as

reputable publishers. Many large publishing giants will not accept direct queries from authors without an agent, but many publishers will. There are no “credentialing associations” for agents or publishers, as for attorneys or CPAs, so a new writer must carefully research either for credibility, checking authors they represent and associations they belong to. Authors must also be legally watchful about contracts they sign with either. A website called “Predators and Editors” can help, as there are many predators willing to take advantage of eager, excited, and inexperienced authors. Be wary and “run” from any agent or publisher who wants money from you to handle your work.

(3) Once a reputable offer comes in from a publisher—directly or via an agent—have a publishing attorney review any contract before signing it. I have heard enough heart-breaking stories of contracts signed in haste to wisely council any new author to be extremely careful of any and all contracts. They are easy to sign but *not* easy to get out of.

(4) When you are “pitching” your book to an agent or publisher, be aware that you’re creating a marketing pitch for your product. Study the guidelines for creating good query letters, and read the guidelines each agent or publisher provides regarding submissions—and adhere to them rigidly. Be aware that not only is an author pitching their book “for sale” ... they are pitching themselves as an author. The question is not simply: *Why should an agent or publisher be interested in your book?...* but *Why should they be interested in you as an author?* What qualifies you to write your book? What educational and work background could be an asset as an author? How long did it take you to write your book and how quickly can an agent or publisher expect to see another in follow-up? Agents and

publishers want to put their time and money behind “producers.” Finally, what plans can you present to an agent or publisher as to how you will help market and promote your product? A whole new career begins for an author after a contract is signed and you need to be ready to discuss your proposed part in it. An excellent help book in this area is Chuck Sambuchino’s *Create Your Writer Platform*.

As you can see from these four tips, it takes a lot of work to find a publisher for a book. It is naïve to assume the job is done when the book is finished. The reality is that getting a book ready to present to an agent or a publisher requires extensive study, research, and effort. If an author is unwilling to study, research, and work in the stages prior to publication, they are unlikely to gain a publisher or to be successful if they do. A popular quote suggests: “There is no elevator to success, you have to take the stairs.” However, if you’re up for the climb, the view is great from the top.