

Getting Your Book Published

If you want to get a book published at someone else's expense and with some hope of monetary return to yourself, you need to have a commercial publisher underwrite the costs of production and marketing.

There are three points that you must realize:

- *Publishing is not a friendly author-centric environment:* publishing companies most often have no interest in you, your topic, or your writing abilities. You must search to find a receptive place for your work.
- *Success in publishing is a very rare commodity:* 80% of all projects fail to meet their first-year sales expectations—yes, only 1 book in 5 meets expectations. You have to make sure your book will be in that smaller category.
- *Publishing is a small and shrinking industry:* there are a limited and shrinking number of publishers, these companies employ a relatively few number of editors, and these people are inundated with competitive proposals. You have to identify your targets and make your approach to them flawlessly.

Understanding the publishing environment

Go to a book superstore and look for titles that would appeal to the same reader as your work. Once you find your niche in the bookstore, identify the publishers that are

most active in your area of interest—and therefore most receptive to your project.

List authors, titles, publication dates, and publishers that would appeal to your potential reader (a successful track record in a particular area will predispose the publisher toward other, similar ventures).

Identify the most active publishers as the ones most likely to publish your work. You will have likely listed at least one large publisher and several medium or small companies. Even small companies may have several people responsible for acquiring new publications, so it is essential to identify the *individual person by name* who will be responsible for publishing your work.

Literary Marketplace is a directory of corporate personnel in publishing. Use *LMP* at the local library to find the division within the corporation, the group within the division, and the person within the group who would be responsible for the publication of your book.

You might go to www.literarymarketplace.com/ to see if personnel has changed since the directory was published; and reconfirm by visiting the personnel lists included on the publishers' websites.

Finally, call the editor's personal assistant (a very important person as a source of information) to confirm the name and spelling, and inquire into the procedures used in the office. Also, ask whether the editor deals with authors directly or works only through literary agents.*

* **Literary agents** can guide you in publishing negotiations although they will obviously charge for this service. They are common in markets of adult fiction or children's literature, and are less common in academic, educational, reference, self-help or how-to.

Contracting with an agent can be as much of a challenge as contracting with a publisher. If you determine that the use of an agent is required for your particular work, you would be well advised to adapt the steps outlined above to the search for an agent, using the latest edition of *Guide to Literary Agents*, which lists their areas of interest. Follow the instructions explicitly—agents will routinely dismiss any communication that does not follow their exact guidelines.

Typically an agent will first want a query letter (there is a good section in *Guide to Literary Agents* on writing a query letter), followed by a book proposal if the agent expresses interest. Some want to see a proposal with your query letter, so plan to customize the material you prepare according to the preferences of each agent.

Finding an agent is time-consuming and difficult, but you may not want to write your book before you have found an agent, secured a publishing contract, and gotten an advance against future royalties. The reason for waiting is that the publisher may request revisions of the outline or approach, which would mean spending a lot of time and effort writing something that may have to be revamped in a major way.

Do not introduce yourself or try to sell your work at this point. Instead, confirm your information and assumptions for each publisher.

At the end of this research phase, your task becomes one of approaching and selling the individual. Start to think of each person on your list as the actual publisher of the work. This mind-set is important—believe that you *will be published* by each of these acquisitions editors.

Documenting the successful future of your book

Remember that 80% of all books are first-year *failures*—*how will you be able to prove to your publisher that your project will be in the successful minority?*

Use reviewers who are familiar with the marketplace. Publishers regularly ask teachers to review educational proposals and recommend publication or rejection; children's literature books are often reviewed by elementary reading specialists; and trade books are reviewed by bookstore owners or managers. Other qualified reviewers might be ministers, politicians, school administrators, business executives—depending on your topic.

Use your own resources to review your project. Identify people who are intimate with your area of expertise, and ask them to review the material a chapter at a time (you don't want to impose too much on these people until you are really sure of the quality of your material and their commitment to your project).

These reviews may show you the folly of your effort, and you should believe this feedback. Alternatively, reviews can identify ways to improve your book, and one or more of these people may be willing to continue to help.

Once your reviewers are committed to your project, you might ask them to suggest others in the field (perhaps with a national or regional reputation) who might be willing to review and recommend the book for publication.

The goal of this collaboration is both to make the best book you can and to provide summary reviews that you can enclose in your proposal to the publisher.

Making your approach to your publishers

Earlier, you identified editors who you feel will want to publish your book. You know how these people work from your interviews with their personal assistants, and you are confident about approaching these editors.

You have developed your manuscript, had the material reviewed by potential users, and revised accordingly. You have gathered endorsements from people who have read your work and are recommending it for publication.

Nevertheless, these editors will lean toward rejection of unsolicited proposals—it is easier to reject a project than to gamble on your book against the publishing odds, especially when there is not enough time to review all the unsolicited materials that are received.

Therefore, you must make your letter personal, brief, convincing, documented.

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am attaching a one-page prospectus for my book, *Through the Looking Glass: An Introduction to Behavior Modification*.

This book is aimed at self-help courses on personal development (such as that defined by Jones's *Becoming Whole*), has been reviewed and revised by several teachers of this material (names and affiliations are attached), and has been endorsed by Abraham Maslow (his letter is also attached).

I look forward to hearing of your interest, and look forward to working with you toward publication of this book.

Cordially,

U. R. Author

Attachments:

Brief prospectus

List of reviewers and comments

Endorsement from Abraham Maslow

An editor responsible for this area of publishing *cannot reject the project out-of-hand*—the proposal does not provide enough data to justify rejection and it includes enough indication that the book will be a better-than-average entry into the marketplace. When the editor asks for more information, you can then tailor your pitch specifically to the editor's demands.

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