



Fiction Feedback

How to Get A Book Published

Ways of Getting Published

1. Get a traditional publishing contract where you get paid royalties for every book your publisher sells on your behalf.
2. Self-publish, doing everything yourself.
3. Use a half-way house, an author services company such as Matador (large) or Open Circle (small). You pay them to do what you'd otherwise need to and they're upfront about costs and make no false promises.
4. Vanity publishing, where a so-called publisher takes your money and might or might not deliver any books. Avoid. NB No vanity publisher calls themselves this. They affect to be traditional publishers, but then tell you they need a contribution to the costs. Please don't be caught out by such publishers. If you're going to pay, pay a company who'll do the work and do it well such as Matador.

Why do you want to be published? Who do you want to be published to?

Eg

If for friends and family, then bear in mind your total number of books, who is going to be distributing them (you) where they're going to be for sale (possibly only through you) and what you want your friends and family to think. Set this against the money you're willing to spend.

Book printer rather than publisher? Cover design so very important? Even professional editing, while always desirable, so very important? Given you're going to be shelling out and probably getting nothing or very little back in sales, be sensible.

If you want to sell to a wider audience, and self-publishing is your choice, then you'll want to be on Amazon. You can sell both printed books and ebooks that way. There are other platforms such as Kobo, Nook and Apple for ebooks, but Amazon will be your main platform.

So what do you need to do?

First of all, make sure your book is as good as it can be.

- Get professional advice on narrative arc, structure, plot, characterisation, style and prose.

Ask for a critique if you're new to this and later, if you can, structural editing. Producing a book without this advice is a bit like trying to decorate a room without measuring the space, checking the amount of paint or paper you need or deciding on your scheme.

- Get the book professionally copy-edited

Producing a book without copy-editing is like decorating a room without help or guidance when you've never wielded a paintbrush or pasted wallpaper before. It is, honestly. You wouldn't do it. However good a writer you are, everyone needs copy-editing. When people first started self-publishing they thought they could bypass this. It sometimes works with non-fiction when people are really interested in the content so inconsistencies, grammatical mistakes, spelling and punctuation errors can be overlooked. With fiction, that's what your book will be if it's not been edited. Everybody notices, leading to poor reviews if any, no recommendations and few sales. Don't scupper your reputation from the off. You only get the one chance.

Still not convinced you need all this if you're self-publishing? Bear in mind the process in a traditional publishing deal. First, an agent is likely to suggest the author makes changes before they submit it to publishers. Once a publisher agrees to buy the novel, they'll almost always suggest more changes. You'll probably go through several more drafts before it's classed as finished. Then they'll put it through several copy-edits – you have to work through each one, making changes such as replacing a word or reworking sentence, hand it back to the publisher and go through the process again. When it's finally OK they'll send you proofs to go through again and put a proof-reader on that. It takes a long time.

It's tough as a self-published person to compete with that, but if your book is to stand up against traditionally published novels in the market then you need to try, and to put aside the money to do so. Remember that later you get all the profits rather than a small percentage (royalties) as with a traditional publishing contract. (Provided you sell the book of course.)

Book cover – absolutely crucial. Don't use your friend who's quite good at graphic design, don't get a nice photo and drop some text on top; use a professional book cover designer. And don't think that your book will stand out if your cover is completely different from other novels of a similar kind; it will but no one will buy it.

Again I'm taking about fiction here. I do think that some would-be authors, carried away with the wonderfulness of the creative process, forget that writing is a business like any other. Remembering this will stand you in good stead when it comes to selling your book.

Or indeed getting it published by a traditional publisher. There are two avenues. To reach the large publishers with marketing clout and big distribution, you need an agent. How do you get an agent?

Identify an agent who handles the kind of novel you've written. One way to do this to find a book which has similarities to yours on the bookshelves and check the acknowledgements. An author almost always thanks their agent. Then check out their entry in *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook*, and especially their website for up-to-date info on what they're looking for right now.

Tip: once you've identified an agent who you think might be interested in representing you, follow their *individual* instructions for submissions to the letter.

Once you have your agent, it's still not plain-sailing. I've heard horror stories of writers still editing their work to suit the agent two years on. And we all know how getting an agent to represent you is not the same as getting a publisher to take on your book. But it is a major step. I would suggest, though, that you only approach agents who can point to authors for whom they've won publishing deals with publishers you've heard of. Otherwise...

There are other ways to get a traditional publishing deal.

First, you can self-publish and sell so well that the publishers take notice and offer you a deal. This happened to EL James with *Fifty Shades of Grey*. This is now, many major publishers admit, the favoured way of finding new authors. The industry is so risk-averse that they're much happier to take on someone who has already proved they can sell rather than an unknown newbie. Thing is, if you're doing so well as a self-published author and earning all the profits yourself, why would you surrender control and possible earnings when you've proved you're one of the few who can do it?

Second, you can directly approach a small independent publisher, such as Blue Moose or Hic Dragones. More are springing up all the time.

Pros

1. You are published, not self-published
2. You don't pay a penny for book production
3. You get editorial help, professional book cover design and production
4. Your book can be entered for industry prizes not open to the self-published author that get you noticed by the wider publishing industry. You might have to alert the publisher to the possibility, though.

Cons

1. Missing out on an agent might mean that you don't have to pay them their 10% or 15%. But it also means you have limited hope of selling into lucrative overseas markets or selling options to TV and film companies, unless you have a very proactive and knowledgeable publisher.
2. You'll probably be asked to contribute hugely to marketing your book in terms of your time, participating in social media and so on. If you're happy with that, fine. If you're not, be aware that being able to say you're published might be the best thing about this deal.
3. And there's no guarantee that your book will appear on the shelves at Waterstones. The likelihood is it won't be. If you're published by HarperCollins or Penguin Random House, there pretty much is. So distribution is likely to be an area where you need to be prepared for less than you'd hope from being traditionally published.

Do remember though that *any* book with an ISBN number can be ordered by Waterstones and individual managers might even be persuaded to stock it – that's whoever it's published by, including you.

More on Self Publishing

Ways of Book Production

For ebooks to sell via Amazon's Kindle, use KDP – this is Amazon's free kit for creating ebooks from your manuscript. It's a steep learning curve and you might want to pay someone to do this, saving you time and hassle. If you have illustrations, don't consider doing it yourself.

For non-Amazon ebooks, that is ebooks for the Kobo, Nook or Apple platforms, you need to use different technology and create a different kind of file. If you're technically inclined, then you can research how to do this on the web. If you haven't got the inclination or the time, again I'd suggest paying an expert. You should have a bit of change from £100 for a standard novel in most formats without illustrations other than the cover – the cover you've had professionally designed, remember, and produced to the specification required for ebook and...

Printed books

The big drawback once you get to printed books is balancing the unit price with the number of books you're going to be able to shift. If you use a traditional printer, you're going to have to work hard at your figures.

Unit cost needs to balance with retail price so a) they're at a price people will buy and b) you make a profit.

Unless it's a special book, almost always non-fiction, the public are not going to pay £12 for a paperback from an unknown when they can buy the latest Lee Child or Marian Keyes for £8. Fact. If you're aiming to sell through retailers, remember most charge a commission of 35-65% of cover price. You've got to price the book so you can stand that if you're going to sell through bookstores. (See why Amazon is so popular for self-published authors?)

This equation is largely impossible unless you can commission a 10,000 run of books or have the clout of a major publisher to negotiate huge discounts. No? Then unless you're selling direct to a small group of family and friends who will virtually pay whatever price you ask, you need to consider:

Print On Demand

Companies such as FastPrint, part of a company called Print on Demand Worldwide.

Pros

1. You only pay per individual book and considering that, the cost is usually manageable
2. They distribute for you: orders arriving via Amazon are automatically sent to your POD printers and they fulfil. The cost of postage will be for the buyer to shoulder
3. They're very good at giving you specifications for book production

Cons

1. I have yet to be reliably informed whether print on demand books are acceptable to mainstream bookstores to *stock*. The answer used to be that the wholesalers such as Bertrams who sell books in volume to retailers, from the giant Waterstones to small independent bookshops, would not touch POD books and while people have told me that's no longer true I'm not sure enough to tell you that yes, it is so. So be aware.
2. They can be slower than you might like. My own pocket poetry book, on sale on Amazon and distributed through PODW, took weeks to reach people in the busy Christmas period. People didn't get them as Christmas presents or even New Year presents. Certainly for people you know, it's best to have a supply of books – cheaper for you to buy so you can sell at a discount if you like, and faster.

You can see why I recommend new authors use an author services company such as Matador, who are very experienced and know the publishing industry inside out and what's required to make it work for their authors.

They will look after ebooks, print and distribution. For a price, they will pay agents to sell them into bookstores and I believe to the UK's two retail wholesalers and maybe even to the major wholesalers for library services. They offer book cover design and take away the hassle – although you might not think so the first time you use them, but that's simply because the process can seem overwhelming when you've not had a book published before.

I used Open Circle Publishing of Chorley for my own poetry book. Partly because owner Dave Harrison is a known and trusted friend and colleague, partly because I knew exactly what I wanted in terms of service and could get this at a cheaper price from there than anywhere else. If I'd wanted marketing, retail representation and so on I would have chosen Matador.

Sobering facts

What I will say is, don't self-publish *by any means* if you can't afford to spend the money. A lot of authors I speak to through Fiction Feedback say they're happy to spend a few thousand quid on editing, book cover design and the rest as long as they get it back. I have to say, there's a very high chance that they'll be disappointed. As a self-publisher, if you sell over 200 books you're doing extremely well. If your profit per book is 50p then you've made £100. It's likely to be a small fraction of what you've spent. If you can't afford to spend the money, please don't. Self-publishing can be, as I've heard it described, a rich man's hobby.

But it's also true that if you don't spend the money, finding the success of EL James is never going to be a possibility.

And there's nothing quite like the delight of holding your own book in your hands...