

## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO: HOW TO GET PUBLISHED

### WHAT'S THIS CHAPTER ABOUT?

The main purpose of this chapter is to point you in the direction of useful resources. Details of specific names or organisations are in the resources chapter. There are three ways to publish a novel. 1. Through one of the big publishers (the mainstream presses, or trade press), which I refer to here as 'the traditional route'. 2. Through a small press, often in your 'niche' or your local area. 3. By becoming an independent author. Things are changing fast. Indy authorship is now a viable way to run your own business, with all the caveats that usually involves! Although my novels were 'traditional route', I've published via all three, and the advice I give here is based on my own experiences.

### A FEW DEFINITIONS

**Agent:** represents the interests of writers, sells their work to editors, may also secure film and TV rights and foreign publication rights.

**ALLI:** the Alliance of Independent Authors

**The Approach:** how you pitch your work to an agent or editor

**Commissioning Editor:** Works for a publishing house. Buys novels from agents. An editor at a small press usually deals directly with writers.

**Contract:** you sign one when an agent takes you on and when you sell a novel to an editor.

**Commission:** your agent takes a cut of your earnings, typically 10 - 15%.

**EACWP:** European Association of Creative Writing Programmes.

**Gatekeepers:** anyone 'in the way' of you getting published. Mainly editors and agents.

**Hard copy manuscript:** when you print to edit, or print and post instead of emailing.

**Independent author:** someone who self-publishes and runs their writing as a business. Sometimes blended with the other two routes, or 'hybrid'.

**KDP:** Kindle Direct Publishing. A service provided by Amazon.

**Manuscript (ms):** the printed copy of your unpublished novel.

**Marketing:** promoting a product to the general public, or a part of it, making sure a product reaches its target audience. Involves building a platform.

**NAWE:** National Association of Writers in Education.

**Platform:** a stage (virtual or actual) on which you share valuable content and let your ideal reader know about your work.

**P.O.D.** Print on demand. Technology that allows you to print just one copy of your book.

Proof-read: check your manuscript for mechanical errors.

S.a.e.: authors are often required to include a stamped addressed envelope or s.a.e. with a hard copy of a manuscript. This must bear your home address and enough return postage.

Selling: Selling means, essentially, that you have something someone else wants and they give you money for it. It also means that an agent or publisher isn't doing you a favour. They are part of a business.

Slush pile: the pile of unsolicited manuscripts that reach the desks of both agents and editors. Called 'slush' because they mostly contain romantic fiction, or at least they used to, and were therefore called 'slushy.'

Unsolicited manuscripts or unsolicited submissions: manuscripts that arrive out of the blue without being requested. These go onto the slush pile.

## SELLING YOUR WORK

I'm going to go through each of the three ways to publish a novel, but first some general advice on selling your work. As a novelist you must clearly communicate the value of the novel you are selling. You are selling something, not asking someone for / doing someone a favour. Time equals money, and money equals time. This sounds clichéd but apply it to the writing life and it makes a lot of sense. You spent time writing this novel, and that time is worth something!

The money you get for a product relates to how much people are willing to pay for it, the quality of the item, how much time has gone into it, how much profit can be made from selling it on, and how much time you put into building your platform. You are also selling yourself as a writing professional. If it helps, imagine you are selling an antique vase or an expensive car, or imagine you are applying for a job (then get slightly less formal).

## THREE SMALL STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TODAY

1. Read the blog post about how not to submit to a literary agent - listed in the resources section - by agent Carole Blake, sadly no longer with us. Yes, someone really did try to submit by sliding a manuscript under a toilet door. (If you like it, have a look at the 'How Not to Sell a Novel' section in the book *How Not to Write a Novel* by Howard Mittelmark and Sandra Newman for more.)
2. Try writing a blurb for your novel. Who will read it? What is it that draws the reader in? Why is the story important? What themes do you investigate?
3. Follow writing organisations on social media, plus bloggers or organisations that regularly share summaries of writing opportunities. Rather than going onto social media ad hoc, plan time to spend looking at resources. You can gain valuable information about submission windows, small presses, and calls for submissions from literary journals if you check in with your 'key influencers' or 'key information sharers' regularly. Have a look at Robin Houghton's books for more on blogging and social media for writers. I've listed some suggestions for follows in the resources chapter.

## PUBLISH FEATURE ARTICLES FIRST

One way to get to understand the mechanics of publishing and getting paid for your writing is to pitch and write feature articles. Of course, publishing nonfiction is very different but the great thing about

it is that it almost forces you to see writing as a business. It's beyond the scope of this book to speak about how to pitch feature articles, but luckily there are some good resources out there, such as Caroline Quinn's *No Contacts? No Problem!* Having some previous publications also makes you look good, and it is easier to sell feature articles than short stories, just because the market is bigger.

#### FOUR TOP TIPS FOR PUBLISHING SUCCESS

1. Quality writing is always the most important thing to get right. Do this first.
2. Is it your first novel? It is better to finish it before selling it.
3. Attempt to place something smaller first. Work for a student magazine, pitch an article, poem or a short story, for instance. Although you don't have to do this, it gives you tacit knowledge about how publishing works.
4. Go to writers' events and make the most of networking opportunities.

### ROUTE ONE

#### GOING 'TRADITIONAL'

Over the next couple of pages I give you some advice on using the 'traditional route'. This is used to feel like the only route! It's the most prestigious (for most people anyway) and involves the most gatekeepers. Many of the procedures involved in traditional publicising hold true for the other kinds of publishing too: professionalism, for instance, and the importance of the quality of the writing.

#### AGENTS AND EDITORS

If you're going the traditional route, you will most likely be submitting to an agent. With the big publishers, you need to go through an agent with the following exception. Some imprints within the large publishers have started having 'unagented' reading windows. The approach is very similar. Look out for information on social media and in writing magazines. (Borough Press have a reading window, for example. See the resources chapter.) However, the traditional route usually means you send your work to an agent first. Just to complicate things, some agents have reading windows for unsolicited work too. Follow them on twitter and look at their website to find out more. Your agent, if you agree to work with one another, will attempt to sell your work for you to a publisher, by dealing directly with commissioning editors. The agent takes a cut of royalties, but you're likely to get more than if you negotiated alone.

#### 6 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH

1. Research is very important when it comes to getting published. If you're going down route one or two, you must send your work to the right place. This is probably the biggest mistake people make when submitting their work. Take time to get it right.
2. Yes, you should ideally read a sample from your target agent or publisher, but the other way round is better. In other words, start with the books you love to read. Find out who publishes them and which agent (if relevant) represents them.

3. In the U.K., look in the current edition of the Writers' and Artists' Yearbook (WAAY) in your local library. It contains lists of agents, publishers, magazines, newspapers, and journals. Have a look at the Writers and Artists Yearbook website, too. They often have 'ask the agent' events.

If you are in the U.S. have a look at Arielle Eckstut and David Sterry's *The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*. You probably already know about the Writer's Market. Put that into [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and you'll see there are several versions, such as 'The Novel & Short Story Writer's Market'. Also check out the Writers' Digest website.

If you're in mainland Europe, take a look at the European Authors Societies (GESAC) website. You might also like to check out the resources on the EACWP website, not because you have to be on a Creative Writing programme to get a novel published but because you're likely to find other writers on there with tacit knowledge about the publishing set up in your home country.

4. Use specific key word searches in google to find out who represents or publishes your favourite authors. For example if I put the key words - "Arundhati Roy" agent - into google, I discover that her agent in the UK is David Godwin. You can also use key word searches in Amazon and use the 'look inside' feature to check the acknowledgements. (Obviously the low tech version of this technique is available at your local library!)

5. Any publication or organisation that's looking for writers usually has writers' or submission guidelines on its website. Have a look at these before you submit. Do not deviate from them.

6. Find a name. (Organisations that want your submissions won't try to hide the names!) Don't not multiple-cc or blind-cc lots of agents and editors, under any circumstances.

#### GET YOUR MANUSCRIPT OFF THE SLUSH PILE

It is better for your work not to be unsolicited. This means getting them to ask you to send it, instead of just mailing it off willy-nilly. Therefore, email the agent or editor briefly in advance asking if you can send your work. If you've heard them talk or been to a workshop they attended, even better – mention it. Don't ask for information that's already in the submission guidelines, though.

It is fairly easy to go to a 'meet the agent' event if you are prepared to travel. Check out your local writers' centre, or writing festival. In the UK, try the TLC Writers' Day, or the York Festival of Writing, all of which are listed in the resources chapter. You could also use your local area plus a specific key word search on google, or look up your area on the literary festivals website. The literary festivals website does include worldwide festivals as well as UK ones.

If you can, when you go to a 'meet the agent' event, pluck up the courage to ask a question from the audience and / or speak one-to-one to the agent. However, many writers are too shy to do this – and it is enough to say that you were there in a quick email, asking if they will look at your manuscript. You don't have to be an extrovert to be a good writer and most agents know this. In other words, you can take advantage of the more challenging parts of 'meet the agent' events, but it's no problem, and no reason to beat yourself up, if you'd rather not.

Another way to get in front of agents is to submit your manuscript to a good online workshop like 'You Write On', or a reading service, such as TLC in the UK. Local writing centres may also have agent pitching events. You can see a list of writing centres in the UK by scrolling down to [the bottom of this](#)

[page](#): Again, in the US, the Writer's Digest is a good place to start. In Europe, try GESAC. (I've also listed Australian and Canadian writers' organisations in the resources chapter, in case that is relevant to you.)

## BE PROFESSIONAL

Be professional when you submit your work: as I said, it's a bit like applying for a job, but less formal. Don't beg or ask for favours. Set out your letter or email properly. Be polite to everyone from the receptionist to the CEO. Be gracious if you are rejected, even if it's through gritted teeth.

## HOW DO I KNOW WHERE TO SEND MY WORK?

Research writing organisations and writing events **EVEN IF YOU CAN'T GO**. The agents who are volunteering to speak at events are usually the ones looking for new authors.

Look in writers' magazines, such as Mslexia and the Writers' News in the UK, or the Writer's Digest magazine in the US. Look through back issues, too, as writers' magazines tend to have a directory section full of information.

Get to know writers organisations and key influencers by checking in regularly. They will often retweet opportunities. It depends where you are in the world, so start by looking for your nearest writers centre or festival and go from there. In the UK, check out Arvon, the Freeword Centre, English PEN, NAWA, or Spread the Word, for instance.

Fit your submission to the right agent. Who represents your favourite author? Or: who else does the agent you are interested in represent? Is there space on his / her list? Is this person actively going out giving talks and meeting people? If so that's a clue that he / she is looking for writers! Use the Agent Hunter online search tool if you don't have any luck.

## ROUTE TWO

### PUBLISHING WITH A SMALL PRESS

There are several small presses in existence, some smaller than others. Sometimes you'll hear them called independent presses. These are publishers operating outside the mainstream. Mslexia publishes a directory of small presses in the U.K., which feels like a real game changer to me - it makes it so much easier to access the right information. You can also find small presses online. Looking at Aerogramme Writers Studio or Thresholds will give you an idea of what's out there. Another way to find small presses is to look for a list of literary journals, which are often attached to a press. You obviously need to narrow down your list according to which presses publish novels, and novels in your 'niche' or genre. The website should tell you whether the press accepts submissions.

Often small presses are open to submissions, but you should always follow the guidelines on their website and read a sample of whatever they publish first. Many have reading windows or competitions. An afternoon spent with the Mslexia directory and / or a search engine will allow you to plan where to submit to in an objective way, and to list the submission windows that will open during the year.

### HOW ARE SMALL PRESSES DIFFERENT