



Info Sheet: How to Get Published

So you've finished a manuscript and want to get published. Writing a novel is a difficult task, but the hardest part is ahead. Remember that publishing is a business, and is a highly competitive industry. Publishers can receive hundreds of manuscripts each week through the slush pile, submissions requested through writers' centres or festivals, agented queries, or competitions.

So what can you do to stand out and get that elusive publishing contract?

Is your manuscript ready?

There are some crucial things to be aware of before you submit.

Publishers don't accept re-submissions of manuscripts they've already rejected so it's crucial to get it right the first time.

DO NOT SUBMIT TOO SOON. Make your manuscript as good as you can get it. Redraft and redraft and redraft. Ensure a potential publisher is not the first person to read it. Connect with your local writers' centre and get feedback on your writing before you submit.

There are many things you can do to prepare your manuscript: edit it, get feedback from beta readers, hire a freelance editor. Always make sure your manuscript is proofread for spelling and grammar mistakes. We highly recommend you read our **Info Sheet: Editing** before you submit to publishers.

What is a publisher?

A traditional publisher is a business which publishes books for profit. If they accept your manuscript, they will control all aspects of the publishing process. They will offer you a publishing contract, and will arrange for it to be edited, proofread, designed (including the cover), typeset, printed, bound, promoted and distributed to bookstores. The publisher will also cover all costs and pay you a percentage of sales, sometimes through an advance. If you are asked to pay a fee, you are probably dealing with a fee-for-service publisher (see our **Info Sheet: Vanity Publishing**).

You can also choose to self-publish your book - if you do, we often run workshops on self-publishing so feel free to enquire when our next one is scheduled.



Who will publish you?

Before contacting a publisher it's a good idea to do some research. Publishers' websites are a good place to start. Check to see if they have a history of publishing titles similar to your own. You can also research important information on the length, style and genre of their current publications.

To find publishers that might be a good fit: view our page of [Australian publishers here](#), search the internet, visit bookstores and libraries, and ask your writing community. You can find lists of publishers from various resources and organisations. Another good place to start is to find out who published books you like, or that are similar to your manuscript.

Here are some questions you should address before submitting to a publisher:

- What genres do they publish? Have they published anything similar to your manuscript?
- Are they a large or small publisher?
- Do you like the quality of their books, branding, and design?
- Do they accept unsolicited manuscripts – that is, submissions made directly by an author, rather than agent?
- What is their reputation with authors, readers and the industry?

How do I submit to a publisher?

Publishers usually list their submission guidelines on their website. These include guidance such as what genres they accept, how long the novel should be, what to submit and how to format your manuscript. You should follow the submission guidelines exactly.

The usual requirements include:

- Query letter
- Author bio
- Synopsis (see **Info Sheet: Synopsis** for more detail)
- Sample chapters / full manuscript

Once you submit, your manuscript will go into the 'slush pile.' Be patient: responses to a submission can take anywhere between three months to a year. A positive rejection is one that includes feedback or, even better, an invitation to submit your next manuscript. Many publishers do not respond at all to unsuccessful submissions – they simply have too many.

You can also pitch directly to publishers at events at writers centres, conferences (such as GenreCon or Romance Writers of Australia) and festivals. Writers SA often runs events at which you can pitch your manuscript face-to-face with a publisher. Keep visiting our website for details of this year's events.



How do I write a query letter?

Your query letter (sometimes referred to as a cover letter) is your first impression. It introduces you and your manuscript to the publisher. It tells the publisher who you are, what your manuscript is about and where your manuscript fits in the market. A good query letter is a sales pitch which shows that you understand the publishing industry and the current market. It should be concise, professional and well written. Query letters are usually one A4 page in length.

Your query letter should include:

- A brief overview of the book (plot, characters and themes)
- The target audience and the genre of book
- How it will fit the publisher
- Your writing credentials and any extra expertise that qualifies you to write about the subject
- The length of the manuscript
- An invitation to contact you at their convenience (as a concluding sentence).

If you need more help, Writers SA runs workshops on pitching and synopsis writing. Keep visiting our [website](#) to find out when.

How do I write a fiction synopsis?

A synopsis is a concise summary of your novel: the main characters, the main plot, the central themes and the resolution. This is different from a blurb, which might be only one or two sentences. Synopses are usually 1-2 pages in length and always give away the ending. Exact requirements will be in the publisher's submission guidelines.

Here are some tips to writing your synopsis:

- DO use third person, present tense ("Betty discovers that her long lost brother is really her...").
- DO focus on the essential aspects of the story. Remember that this is not only what happens, but also the characters' motivations and emotions.
- DO express what happens, not how it happens.
- DO present the events of the plot in the same order they appear in the novel.
- DO ensure you have a beginning, middle and end.
- DO include how the novel concludes. The publisher must see that your book has an adequate ending and is complete.
- DO cut out unnecessary adverbs and adjectives to keep it concise.
- DON'T include dialogue.
- DON'T separate the synopsis into chapters; it should be a whole account, although paragraphs can be used to indicate a chapter or section break.



How do I write a nonfiction synopsis?

The same advice applies for narrative nonfiction, creative nonfiction and memoir.

What happens when I receive a contract?

Firstly, you celebrate!

If a publisher accepts your manuscript, you will be offered a contract. It is important that you understand the terms in the contract which can bind you and your work for many years to that publisher. Arts Law Centre of Australia provides contract advice for writers and the Australian Society of Authors offers contract assessments that will explain the terms and alert you to any unfair clauses.

Do I need an agent?

Literary agents negotiate the sale of an author's work to book publishers, television and film producers, or agents in other countries or territories. Agents use their industry expertise and contacts to get you the best deal possible and to protect your financial and legal interests. We recommend reading the **Info Sheet: Literary Agents** for more information.

What if you still have no success?

If you have followed all the submission guidelines and have not received a contract, your manuscript may be the issue.

Writers SA provides a [Manuscript Assessment Service](#) that will give you feedback on the structural elements of your manuscript. We also offer a number of workshops throughout the year on how to improve your writing and tips for getting published. Visit our website for details of this year's events. We also recommend you read the **Info Sheet: Editing** for more detailed information.

The key to becoming a better writer is to listen to feedback. Published writers consistently get feedback from their agents, publishers, editors and readers. It may be that your writing needs improvement. You might need to focus for a while on developing your writing craft. It may be that your manuscript is very niche and not 'commercial' and you're approaching commercial fiction publishers.

Keep writing. Keep learning and keep trying.