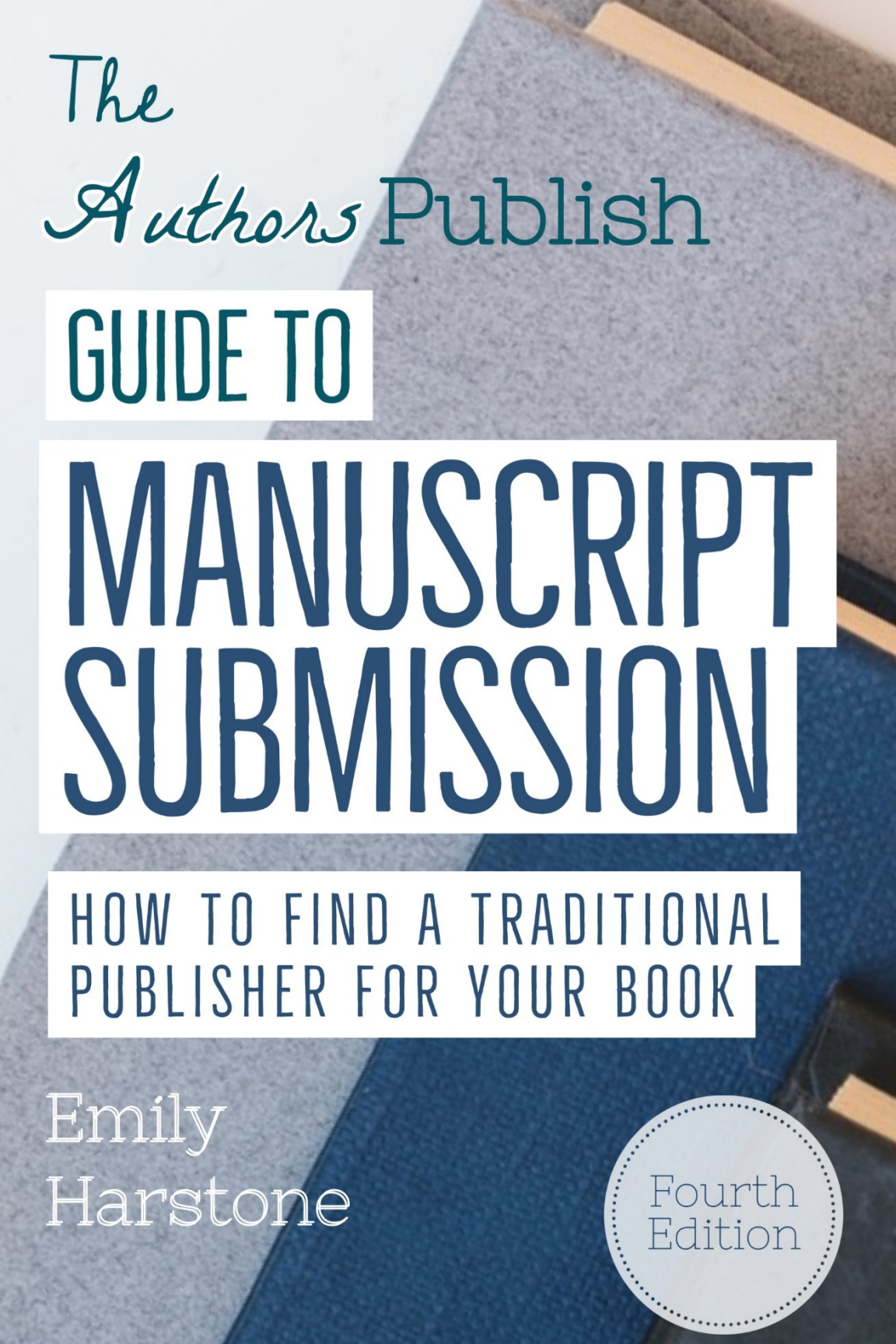
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Introduction

Often, writers will finish their first manuscript, and only after it is complete, they will wonder: *Where do I go from here?* This book answers that question. It walks readers through the process of turning a manuscript into a book.

The ideal reader of *The Authors Publish Guide to Manuscript Submission* will have already completed writing their manuscript or be close to finishing the first draft.

It would also be helpful to someone who has finished multiple revisions and is struggling to find an agent or a publisher.

The majority of this book focuses on the submission process, from query letters to agents and publishers who accept direct submissions. This book should answer all of the questions you have about manuscript submission, as well as some of the questions you didn't know you had.

The focus of this book is primarily on fiction manuscripts, but we have added more information focusing on nonfiction submissions, which are very different.

We cover issues that trip up a lot of new authors, including self-publishing, vanity publishers, copyright, and the importance of patience, as well as some of the different issues facing nonfiction authors.

For a long time, submitting seemed strange and mysterious to me. It seemed too overwhelming to actually do. In fact, for the most part, submitting is relatively easy. This book will help demystify the process for you.

This is the fourth edition of *The Authors Publish Guide to Manuscript Submissions.* Some of the sections of the book have been updated to reflect changes in the publishing world and others have been altered to explore certain aspects of the process in more depth.

The bulk of the new information this book contains is about the querying process, as well as adding additional resources in terms of agents, publishers, and beta readers.

Over 5,000 words of content have been added to this book to make it better and more thorough. Some of the additions came based on the generous feedback we received about the first and second edition of the book.

We cover a few of those publishers in this book, but to get the bulk of the reviews, you would have to read The 2020 Guide to

Manuscript Publishers. You can also search our manuscript publisher reviews online here.

I also teach a course that focuses exclusively on manuscript publishing for novelists. If you are interested, you can add your email address to the waitlist here.

The course covers much of what the book covers, but provides additional information in terms of revisions, querying, agents, and publishers. I also offer detailed feedback on the first twenty pages, query letters, synopsis, and potential agents and publishers.

Still, you should be able to learn everything that you need to know in order to submit well from this book. A number of our readers have successfully placed manuscripts by following the advice outlined here.

I wish all of my readers the best of luck.

Chapter 1:
Manuscript Preparation

This chapter is an overview. Deep revisions take time, effort, and persistence. Different manuscripts require different amounts of revision. But if you follow the steps below, you will end up facing the right direction.

When you write a book, it is officially called a manuscript until it is published. One of the tricky things about writing is that it can be very hard to discern when a manuscript is actually finished and ready to be submitted to an agent. This, too, is the case if your book is self-published.

Some authors constantly tweak their work. Others finish one draft and declare it finished, which is usually not the best course of action, unless you want to self-publish.

I follow three steps to know that my manuscript is done. Sometimes I repeat these steps, even after I start submitting.

Once I finish my first draft, and before I let anyone else see it, I edit it twice. The first draft of editing is just for spelling and

grammatical errors. I often mess up my tense shifts, so I try to keep an eye on that. Everyone has different areas where they are more likely to make errors, so it is good to know your trouble spots and focus on them when editing.

During the second round of editing, I am more focused on the content. I think of this as the revisions stage. During this stage I want to make sure that the characters come across as authentic. I want to make sure the plot is interesting and doesn't have any gaping holes. I do not change anything significant at this point in terms of plot or character development, because I want feedback first. This is supposed to be the editing stage, and not the revising stage.

Only once I've done at least one round of editing and revisions am I ready to pursue the second step.

The second step is to find and organize a small group of readers.

Try and choose at least five people whose opinions you trust and give them a copy of your manuscript. Do not expect feedback from all five, but handing out your manuscript to so many people will guarantee that you get at least some feedback.

These five people can be friends, but it's better if they are not. It's great to find either experienced beta readers or other writers to exchange your work with.

Beta readers can be found online. There are a number of Beta Reading communities on Facebook including the large and active group, Beta Readers & Critiques. There are other active beta reader groups on FB, many structured around genre, so take a look around before deciding what groups the best fit for you.

On Goodreads there's also an active beta reader community called Beta Reader Group.

Beta readers aren't editors, they're first readers and they tend to focus on story and character. A good beta reader gives you honest feedback and helps improve your overarching story. They aren't there to fix all your typos.

If you want any feedback on specific elements of the manuscript, type up a list of questions for the reader to keep in mind. This will help them focus on giving you the feedback that you need.

Make sure that when they give you feedback you appreciate the compliments as well as take in the criticism. Read over all the feedback carefully and then let it set for a little bit. Don't do anything drastic to your book for at least two weeks.

The third step is editing and perhaps even revising the book; this is based on the feedback which you received. You don't have to take every nitpicky suggestion your readers made, but make sure to address any of the legitimate concerns they may have had. At this

point in the process, I hire a professional editor to review all of my work for errors and to provide feedback on general plot points. If you cannot afford to hire an editor, it is fine to proceed without one.

After this draft and one final review for any minor errors, your manuscript should be ready to submit. However, if you have an idea for a change in your plot or other revisions, and you have received a number of rejections, feel encouraged to revise your book again.

Don't let the fact that your manuscript is probably not 100 percent error free prevent you from submitting it. I often spot errors in *New York Times* best-sellers. It is nearly impossible to be error-free, even with a professional editor. The hope with editing and revisions is to get your work to the point where errors don't distract from the plot and the plot is clear and easy to follow.

If you are struggling to get a book published and have submitted it to twenty or so publishers without any response, except for canned rejections (personal rejections are often a compliment and should be seen as such), you should consider another major round of revisions.

If you are mostly querying with the first two to three chapters, I suggest that you focus the revisions there. Most authors use those chapters as the "on ramp"; when they are first writing the book,

they are orientating themselves to the world and the characters they are creating. It is their entry way into the world of the book, but it is not always helpful for, or even geared toward, readers.

I have re-written the first three chapters of the last two novels I have written, always with positive results. Both times I changed something major that meant I had to make minor edits throughout the rest of the book for consistency. In one of them, the event that became the first chapter had initially occurred before the book itself started, but it made so much more sense for readers to see that event as the first chapter, because it had lasting results, and it made that character a lot more relatable from the start, which made the book as a whole more appealing.

Don't be scared to make major revisions. You can always save old versions of your manuscript so you can switch back if you change your mind, or make an edit that doesn't work. Just be sure to title the document something that makes it clear what version of the story it is.

Chapter 2:
An Overview of the Submission Process

Most publishers and agents want the same two things—a query letter and a synopsis. They also expect an excerpt of your book, generally the first two chapters, although there is a lot of variation in terms of length. If it is a picture book, they generally want the whole manuscript. Also, some publishers want the whole manuscript regardless of length. If it is nonfiction you are submitting, your manuscript does not even need to be complete and your proposal could just involve one sample chapter and an outline.

There are specific requirements that differ from publisher to publisher and from agency to agency, and also from genre to genre; however, it is good to have a basic query letter and synopsis that you modify to meet the needs of the given agent or publisher. Just make sure you send the correct version to the right person. It

really annoys a publisher to receive submissions with another publisher's name on it. The same goes for agents.

Make sure your sample chapters are perfectly polished and formatted. Some publishers want the full manuscript submitted from the start, but all of them expect to receive the full manuscript if they request to see it, so it is particularly important to do the formatting correctly. This article covers correct formatting (and the ways it is changing) in detail.

You should spend a lot of time and consideration crafting the cover or query letter. This is the first impression you will make on agents and publishers. The next chapter focuses on how to compose a good query letter and the chapter following it will focus on how to craft a good synopsis.

It is important to note that many publishers expect information about your author platform or marketing plan either as a separate entry, or as part of your query letter. Don't know where to start in terms of an author platform? Chapter 6 will cover that information in depth.

If you meet a publisher or an agent directly at a conference, most want a pitch. A pitch can also be handy to include in your cover letter. Don't know what a pitch is? Chapter 4 talks about what a pitch is, and more importantly, how to make a good one. I always include my pitch in my cover letter.

Not all publishers and agents require a synopsis, but many do. Most want a complete synopsis of the plot that fits on one page. By complete synopsis, I mean they want spoilers. They also generally want information about character development. Chapter 8 will focus on how to craft a good synopsis.

It should go without saying, but it is very important to edit and polish the query letter and synopsis. If you can afford an editor, get them to review the query letter, the synopsis, and also the first twenty pages. Twice. Or more. The first twenty pages of the novel are all that most agents and many publishers will initially see, so make sure they are compelling and error-free.

If you are focusing on finding an agent, then you should read this article: The Safest Way to Search For an Agent. One of the best, reputable search engines for agents is Query Tracker. You can start looking for an agent there, but not all agents on that site are good agents. This is why additional research is often needed, but the details of what that research involves are covered in Chapter 10; Chapter 9 focuses on a basic overview of submitting to agents.

Chapter 11 takes into account information from authors, agents, and publishers about common submission mistakes that lead to rejection. It is a must-read before you begin the submission process.

Once you have completed a query letter and a synopsis that you are happy with, start to research where you are going to submit your book. You can start your research earlier, if you wish.

You should decide early on if you want to submit directly to publishers or if you want to submit to an agent. Chapter 12 covers the various pros and cons of both options.

If you are looking at submitting a manuscript directly to a publisher, our index of manuscript publishers is a good place to start. We always check watchdog sites before reviewing a publisher, but it is also good to verify the information yourself.

Remember, there is no such thing as a legitimate traditional publisher that charges its writers. You should be paid by your publisher, not the other way around. The term hybrid publishing is often used as an excuse to charge writers. It is not the same as traditional publishing.

The only time a traditional publisher can potentially ask for money, and remain a traditional publisher, is in terms of reading fees. Most poetry presses charge these, and more independent presses, including ones I admire, like Two Dollar Radio are now charging to read submissions.

When examining a publisher's website, this article will help you know what to keep an eye out for.

Some publishers can respond to submissions within weeks, while others will respond within years, so, keep that in mind. If you have not heard from a publisher in six months, you should email them to ask about the status of the manuscript, unless they explicitly say they will take longer on their website.

Many publishers explicitly state on their site that they won't respond to manuscripts they aren't interested in, and if you haven't heard from them within a stated period of time, one should assume rejection. There is nothing wrong with this policy, in my opinion. It can seem frustrating, but it allows more publishers to remain open to direct submissions.

Once you find agents or publishers that you feel would be a good fit, you should check and double-check their submission guidelines.

Most publishers accept electronic submissions through email or a submission manager, but a few still require submissions through the post. Either way, the publisher's submission guidelines should walk you through the steps. The same goes for agents.

It is important not to submit to an agent or publisher if they say they are closed to unsolicited submissions. Your manuscript will not be read and in all likelihood, you will annoy the person or persons who receive it. This could hurt your chances in the future.

It’s even more important to submit to publishers and agents that are open to publishing or representing the genre you are writing in. A lot of authors mass submit to agents and publishers ignoring their individual guidelines, and the authors work ends up wasting a lot of individuals time. Other times authors submit to publishers that don’t accept the genre the author is writing in, in the hopes that the publisher will make an exception.

This does not end in publication and often causes publishers to no longer be open to direct submissions.

During the submission process always make sure to track who you have submitted your manuscript to, so that you don’t submit to the same place twice.

Chapter 3:
How to Write a Query Letter

A query letter (sometimes referred to as a cover letter) is a single-page letter introducing your book to an editor or a publisher that accepts unsolicited submissions.

When you write a query letter, always remember that it is similar to a cover letter in a job application. Be professional. Write in a formal style, even if that style is at odds with your novel. Make sure you repeatedly edit it for errors. Make sure it is typed and the font is easy to read. A standard font like Times New Roman works best.

Even though it is formal, try to engage with the reader. Try to focus on what makes your book interesting and what sets it apart from other books.

I receive a lot of query letters for fiction manuscripts at Authors Publish (even though we don't publish fiction) and a lot of them are riddled with errors and focus on a personal story involving financial obstacles. Publishers and agents don't want to struggle

through reading an error-filled manuscript, and hearing about personal obstacles you face is not going to change their opinion about publishing your manuscript, unless it's a memoir or an #ownvoices work (manuscripts that depict marginalized or under-represented group written by a person from that group).

Keep it short and sweet; don't use language that is too flowery.

The query letter should consist of at least three main paragraphs: the hook, the summary, and the author's bio. These should be presented in letter format.

You should lead with a sentence introducing the title, genre, and length of your manuscript. This can segue into the hook but it doesn't have to.

If you particularly like an author the agent you're querying represents, or a book the publisher published, then it is appropriate to mention that in your letter.

I try to do a lot of research and personalize each letter at least a little. Most agents and publishers are used to receiving mass emails that might not even reflect the genres they publish, so making it clear that you have done your research puts your query letter ahead of the others.

Creating a Hook/Pitch

The hook or a pitch is a one-sentence description of the book. It should be intelligent, intriguing, and concise.

Your hook should not be a rhetorical question.

An agent I knew handed me a small pile of query letters from authors that she rejected. Most of the letters she had not even bothered finishing to read. She asked me what they all had in common. By the third letter, it was clear they all started with rhetorical questions.

In one query letter, every paragraph was composed entirely of rhetorical questions.

It is best to focus on your hook, be it your main character, the location, or something else entirely. That is the best way to keep the sentence concise and maintain the agent's interest.

Also, make sure that the premise of your book sounds unique. Agents and publishers are unlikely to follow up with an author whose book appears to be generic. Including specifics helps make your manuscript stand out.

I go into more details about how to write a pitch in the next chapter. Wendy S. Delmater also offers great insight on how to write a hook, which you can read here.

Writing a Summary that Appeals to Agents and Publishers

The summary is the second paragraph, and should not be confused with the synopsis, which is separate from the cover letter.

It is difficult to describe a novel in a paragraph or two. The key is to just focus on giving the agent an impression of what your novel is like, without getting bogged down by all the details.

You don't need to disclose the whole plot here, and it's perfectly fine to set up mysteries or actions within a summary, and not disclose the resolution.

Comparative Titles

Generally, between the summary and the biography an author should include two to three comparative titles. Comparative titles are the names of published books that have a lot in common with yours. Ideally these books would have been published in the last two years. When mentioning the titles, talk about what your work has in common with these titles, and also about what makes it different.

If there's one title that your work has a lot in common with that wasn't published in the last five years, consider integrating it into the hook, rather than including it as a comparative title. The same goes for non-book comparisons. If you are going to drag movies or TV into it, think about how you can make that part of the hook.

Writing an Appealing Author's Biography

The author's bio is not a necessary part of the query letter. If you have not been published before, or do not hold a degree in creative writing, it is probably best not to include an author's bio at all—unless your profession influences the subject of your books. For example, Kathy Reich is a forensic scientist who writes novels about a forensic scientist who writes novels.

Conclusion

In the conclusion to your letter, you should do two things:

The first is to thank the agent or the editor for their time and consideration. The second is to inform the agent that the full novel is available upon request.

Do not include the entire manuscript with the letter. Most agents request the first two or three chapters of your manuscript. When submitting nonfiction, you should include an outline, table of contents, and a few chapters for their consideration.

Once you have written your query letter, edit it repeatedly. Keep refining it, even after you have started to submit it to agents. Even more tips, in terms of query letters, are included in Chapter 9, so I

encourage you to read that chapter as well before completing your query letter.

It's helpful to see sample query letters as well, although I caution against following their format too closely, which leads to a formulaic sounding query letter.

This is a great sample query letter and feedback from the helpful query shark.

Also, you can see Ann Leckie's query letter for her NYT bestselling novel *Ancillary Justice* here.

In addition Jane Friedman's complete guide to query letters is very helpful and her blog is a great resource with a lot of additional information.

Chapter 4:
How to Write a Good Pitch

A *pitch* (also known as a hook*)* was such a foreign term for me as a young author, that when the first agent asked for my novel's pitch at a conference, I blinked and shrugged. I was seventeen at the time, so I suppose my reaction was understandable.

The agent then had to explain to me what a pitch was. How it is an attempt to make the main concept of your novel understandable and appealing in the space of one or two sentences.

I learned later that they could be longer than that, but the best pitches are simple. They are not just two long sentences with lots of complicated ideas. Ideally, they are simple, concise, and intriguing.

For example, the pitch for the movie *The Matrix* could be any of the following sentences:

If Neo swallows the Red Pill the fate of his captured world will be in his hands.

The whole world is captured, but intrepid rebels are trying to free it.

What you see is not real.

Just kiss Trinity.

Now some of those pitches are clearly better than others, some would only work if you had seen the movie, some might intrigue you enough to see the movie.

My first attempt at a pitch was a complete failure, but I have since successfully pitched an agent a novel, through the following methods.

Write a Lot of Pitches

This seems obvious, but it isn't necessarily. You should start writing pitches as often as possible if you are interested in following the path of publishing that involves agents. Even traditional publishers often require pitches, so if you are submitting to publishers directly, it's not a bad thing to practice.

When you watch a movie, write a couple of pitches for it afterward. Also sit down with your own novel and just write pitches for fifteen minutes. Don't look at these pitches right away. Give it a few days, then review them. Once you have done this a few times, you should have three or four pitches that you like.

Play with Length

Try writing longer pitches occasionally and then think of ways that you can trim them down to size.

Play with Focus

A novel has a lot of different things going on at the same time. There can be many themes and plots. Don't try to cover all of it in the pitch. Instead, try focusing on just one theme, plot, or character.

Compare

This sounds like a cheap trick but almost every agent I have ever met wants to compare your book to already successful books. For example, *50 Shades of Grey* is the erotic version of *Twilight*, but without vampires. Agents want to know what your book is like, so saying something like *"The Matrix* with aliens, not robots" might intrigue someone.

Get Feedback

Take the pitches you really like and then show them to people—friends and family members that you trust. Some should have read the novel already, others should not have. Their feedback will be valuable as you develop your ability to write a good pitch.

Chapter 5: An Overview for Fiction Writers

Most adult fiction follows certain unstated and stated rules. These rules cover everything from the length of a manuscript based on its genre, to what tense it's written in.

As a reader, I long assumed most of these rules are obvious. But from reading so many unpublished manuscripts over the last few years, I have discovered that this is not the case.

This chapter won't be able to cover everything, but I am going to try to at least mention all of the most important points.

The first thing I am going to cover is word counts. Most general fiction is between 75,00 and 100,000 words in length. General fiction refers to popular fiction, the kind of books you often find at airport stores, on display near the entrance to Barnes & Noble. Books like *The Rosie Project* by Graeme Simsion and *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens. Historical fiction, like *The Paris Wife* by Paula McLain, lean toward being longer and are usually between 80,000 and 120,000 words. Literary fiction is generally

between 40,000 and 120,000 words in length and includes work like *The Dept. of Speculation* by Jenny Offill and *Transit* by Rachel Cusk.

The list goes on. Mystery books tend to be between 75,000 and 90,000 words. Thrillers start at the 80,000-word mark and can go up to 100,000 words. Fantasy and Science Fiction books tend to be between 90,000 and 125,000 words. Romance novels start at around 50,000 words and go to 90,000 words, but they tend to be on the lower end of that range.

Chapter books (pre-middle grade fiction), are between 5,000 and 20,000 words in length. Middle grade fiction is between 30,000-60,000 words. Books in the young adult genre are usually between 60,000 and 80,000 words in length.

There is sometimes a little leeway on either ends of these guidelines, but it is best for first-time authors to be within these guidelines. Once an author has a proven track record, it is easier to become an exception to these rules.

Most published novels are written in past tense, not present tense. Past tense is much easier to read as a general rule because it's less noticeable and more flexible. For the most part, present tense is only used in experimental literary fiction or a novel that contains a duel timeframe.

Point of view is also a very big deal. First-person perspective and third-person perspective are both very common in novels. As a reader, over time I've generally come to prefer third person, but there are disadvantages and advantages to both. I think this article is a great jumping off point for that.

But the most important thing that I have to stress is that you don't use direct address in your novel. Direct address is when you talk to the audience directly using the word *you*.

I have read a lot of manuscripts where the prologue or the first chapter is this way. I have never read a published novel that starts out this way, unless it's part of the plot/structure. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky is an epistolary novel, where all the chapters are letters to an unnamed person.

There's other conventions to know as well, although they are often genre-specific. For example, in a novel aimed at young adults or children, a parent will never be a main character.

In a work of literary fiction, it is very normal for an end to be unhappy or ambiguous, but outside of literary fiction it is very unusual to encounter an unhappy ending.

This is one of the many reasons you have to read within your chosen genre.

Chapter 6: An Overview for Nonfiction Writers

I have touched on how nonfiction is different in other parts of the book, but this is the section where I really focus on what sets it apart.

Most writers of educational nonfiction, outside of memoirs, don't have agents, particularly when they are starting out. This is why many established publishers that focus on nonfiction like Chronicle Books and Workman Publishing and all of their imprints, accept direct submissions.

I know nonfiction authors that have published dozens of books and never worked with an agent. Particularly in the "How To" field, they are kind of unheard of.

So if you are a nonfiction author, you should focus on finding the right publisher rather than the right agent. You should also be focusing on what publishers are actually looking for in nonfiction authors.

To publish many nonfiction books, like cookbooks or books on specific fields like acupuncture or gardening, you have to prove yourself as an expert in that field.

Depending on what that field is, there are different expectations. For example, a chef that runs a popular restaurant in a major city would have a much better chance at publishing a cookbook than a home cook. But even home cooks have a chance if they prove they have a specialized area of knowledge based on study, and the book they have is a right fit for the market the publisher caters to.

Home cooks particularly have a chance if they run a popular blog. One of my favorite cookbooks, *Oh She Glows*, is written by Angela Liddon, who got her start as a blogger and continues to grow her business through that and other ways.

To write a book on acupuncture, you would be expected to have a degree or certificate in that, as well as lived experience.

Most books about gardening are written not just by people who garden, but by master gardeners or experienced landscapers.

Books on yoga are not written by just anyone who practices it, but teachers, and usually experienced ones at that.

It's easy to look at something like quilting and think there is no way to get a degree in that, any quilter could write a book about it, but that's not entirely the case. Publishers are looking for quilters

whose work has placed in shows and maybe even been placed in museums. I'm not saying you would have to participate in such things in order to place a book on the subject with a publisher, but it would help.

Think of ways to gain experience and recommendations. Be creative; if you want to establish your reputation you might have to start off teaching your own classes.

Part of this comes into play because most nonfiction publishers want a marketing plan from their authors as part of the query. The marketing plan can be pretty broad, but if you are already teaching the subject, your students could be one of the potential markets. If your work is being shown at quilt shows, that might be a place to sell them as well. If you teach gardening classes at a local nursery, they could sell your book, too. All of these are good, concrete examples of ways being an expert in your field and help create a platform for your book.

When it comes to nonfiction, it's also very important to know that you don't have to have a complete manuscript in order to find a publisher.

Most publishers accept nonfiction books based on proposals. They also are more likely to offer advances with nonfiction books, in the hope that those advances will cover any research trips or other costs you might encounter while finishing the book.

Proposal guidelines vary from publisher to publisher but often contain the following components. It is important to read all publisher submission guidelines carefully.

When you submit a work of fiction, it's normal to focus on the content of the work; with nonfiction book proposals, it's important to focus why people will care and who will benefit from the content. You have to make it very clear the purpose your book will serve.

Usually the first component of your proposal is a two- to three-page overview of what your book will cover. People often write these last, once they've spent a lot of time with the rest of the proposal material, because the overview is informed by the proposal material as a whole.

One of the important components of your proposal is competitive title analysis, and it involves listing books in the same market as yours (including the title, subtitle, author, publisher, year of publication, page count, price, format, and ISBN number, as well as edition number), along with a brief summary of the book (no more than 200 words). You should be able to differentiate your book from the book you are summarizing. Treat that book kindly; there is no reason to criticize it. It does not reflect well on you.

You have to do a lot of research in order to produce this information, but it's unavoidable. Not doing this will put you at a

disadvantage, not only when submitting but when writing the actual book.

Also include the target market, also known as the ideal reader. Don't say that everyone should read it, because that's overgeneralizing and unhelpful in every way. Try and narrow it down as much as possible. For example, if your work is about living with chronic illness, the target audience would probably be people living with chronic illnesses and their close family and friends.

Marketing plans are very important and focus on how you will connect with your target audience. The more specifics you include, the better. This is a good time to mention any connections you have in the industry or community that surrounds your topic.

You also need an author bio that emphasizes your authority in the area, as well as an overview.

You should also submit chapter outlines or a table of contents, depending on the publisher, and the work as a whole. Sometimes, depending on the work, chapter outlines can be redundant.

If you do the chapter summary route, the chapter summaries should be between one hundred and two hundred words. Sometimes authors include both chapter outlines and a table of contents, and there is nothing wrong with that.

Sample chapters are needed to give the editor a feel for your writing style. It doesn't have to be the first chapter of your book, particularly if your book is a how-to book. In that, case submit the chapter you think of as the best.

Writing nonfiction is a whole different beast though, so don't be limited to this book. A great resource is *How to Write a Book Proposal* by agent Michael Larson.

Chapter 7:
Building an Author Platform

This is an ongoing process, so feel encouraged to get started on this step long before your manuscript is finished.

This chapter, unfortunately, cannot cover all the ins and outs of an author platform, because parts of it are personal and intuitive, but it will give you an overview of what it takes to get started.

An author platform is something more and more agents and publishers would like authors to already have. An author platform is essentially your "brand"—what makes you distinct and different. This is increasingly based primarily online, on social media, but it should include the real world as well.

If you have an established audience for your author platform and you already get lots of likes and shares online, maybe even some press outside of that, this is the type of information you include in your query letter. Otherwise, work on building your presence toward that.

Some publishers require that you include a link to at least one of your social platforms in your query letter, so if you have a meager number of likes or fans on that platform, it could really count against you.

Increasingly, even large traditional publishers and agents want authors that already have, to some degree, an audience and have previous experience promoting themselves. That is part of the reason the blog-to-book trend has continued to be so successful.

If you already have a significant social media presence, then this is a good thing, even if it is just with personal Facebook and Instagram accounts. This isn't just about number of followers but the engagement of those followers. Posts should have a fair number of likes and comments.

At least experiment by trying accounts on different platforms. I have had a Twitter account for well over a decade at this point, even though for me personally it was largely a failed experiment.

It's also important to explore hashtags. If you are good at photography, having an active Instagram or Bookstagram (an Instagram account that focuses on books, and uses that hashtag) can really help.

Try and find ways to use what you already are doing to build a following, even if it isn't directly related to writing. For example,

if you like to develop recipes and are a good cook, perhaps you could experiment with a meal and a book blog, or other social media account post.

Just because something doesn't work once don't give up. Play around with hashtags and tagging, as well as personal fit.

It is also important to have a Goodreads account, to be part of a large community of readers and writers. It can also help to have accounts on other websites, such as Pinterest and Twitter.

Start broad with multiple platforms but focus on what works for you. Does a Facebook Author Page work better for you, or is it all about Instagram and hashtags? Figure these things out. It is important for me to keep my professional pages separate from my personal pages, but other authors feel differently. They add any readers or fans they have to their personal page.

It is important to know your limits and what you are comfortable with. I have written under a pen name for Authors Publish for four years—for a reason. I have made friendships through the pen name with readers, but I have also encountered some people who have made me feel less than safe. Use your judgment when sharing personal information, particularly pertaining to children and your location.

I know that I could get a lot of attention with photos of my children, who love to read, but I don't really feel comfortable using them for promotion, but this is a personal choice.

Although I have started to share some of their more interesting "quotes" and that's managed to attract some attention.

In-person and online, focus on getting across your personality and information about the book you are writing or have written.

Readers who have not actually read your book will want to connect with something and personality can do that, as can sharing what you are interested in.

A blog, long seen as essential, is still a good idea, though I think you can have more success by publishing articles on the blogs of other writers and established reading- or writing-focused websites. It might be more work to place pieces about writing on these sites, but since these places already have an audience, it can really pay off in terms of fans for your social media page and visitors for your website. Moreover, it does not require regular posting.

When we publish a feature article by a guest writer at Authors Publish, it often increases the number of likes and follows they receive, and books that they sell, because it introduces the author to a brand-new audience of strangers. There are many other publications online that work similarly.

If you enjoy writing a blog, go for it. Make sure you link it to social media accounts so that anything you write there gets cross-posted elsewhere. If you set up a Google Analytics account, then you can monitor how much use it is getting.

If having and maintaining a blog feels like a chore, I would suggest crafting longer, more detail-oriented pieces, for other publications. That way, you can build a relationship with other writers and editors, and if the publication is established, it can lend your piece and your reputation more legitimacy.

Target places that have bios listed after articles because that can help you greatly increase your readership. The process of submitting articles has much lower consequences than the process of submitting books and is a lot less involved. It can help you improve your ability to craft a cover letter and converse with editors in an appropriate manner (generally via email).

In both online and offline platform building, it is very important to be professional to a certain degree—even when your personality is on display. Online, this usually comes down to not making too many mistakes in spelling and grammar. Even if you are just writing a 140-character post, edit it as carefully as possible before posting it.

In-person, behaving professionally hopefully means treating everyone you know with the consideration and dignity they deserve anyway.

In-person, some of the ways you can build your platform (that have worked for me) are giving readings (even if it is just one spot in an open mic), handing out business cards, being generous with the copies of the books I do have, buying other author's books, and getting my creative work published in various literary journals and anthologies.

There are other methods, too. Attending writing conferences and workshops can be helpful, so can joining or starting a writing group. Submit your work to local contests and contact local radio stations and newspapers who might be interested in your work for any number of reasons.

Although this edition of the Guide is being published during the COVID-19 pandemic, so many readings and conferences have moved online. They are still often worth attending.

Ultimately, in my experience, increasing one's author platform comes down to getting more involved in the literary community, one way or another. So, if you are not currently involved at all, I encourage you to connect with other readers and writers. It's a good way is to start attending open mics and reading series' in your area. Also check if your library or local bookstore has book

clubs or writing groups; either of these places are great ways to connect with other readers and writers.

Building an author's platform takes time, but start out trying a lot of different things and then focus on what works.

Chapter 8:
How to Write a Synopsis

The synopsis is generally 500-600 words in length. It should convey the story's entire narrative arc, ending and all.

The synopsis is the part of the submitting process I struggle with the most. A synopsis seems like the best way to take a story and rid it of all its creative energy. However, the synopsis is an important part of the submission for some publishers and agents. If they don't ask for it explicitly, don't send it; if they do, of course you have to include it.

In any case, you should have one written before you start submitting, because just avoiding publishers and agents who require one is not a particularly sustainable strategy.

Some publishers will require more than 500-600 words in the synopsis, but if they don't specify, this is a good default length for a synopsis.

Because different publishers and agents require different lengths, what I do is write out and perfect a two-page version of the

synopsis and then I copy and paste the same text into a different file and shorten it, sometimes into several different versions.

One of the ways that I prepare myself for writing a synopsis is to go to Wikipedia and look up a book or a movie I like that I have not read or seen for a while. Then I read the synopsis. Most of the time, I feel bored reading those synopses; sometimes, though, I feel intrigued and want to re-read the book or re-watch the movie. If I feel that way, I study that synopsis and see what they did right. What information did they include? What information did they leave out or simplify? What lessons can you take away from reading this synopsis?

I also practice by writing synopses of books I didn't write, but really enjoy (I do not post these on Wikipedia, in case you are curious). It is easier to pick out what is important in another person's book than your own sometimes, and this exercise can really help with that.

The focus, when writing a synopsis, is not on being creative or impressing anyone with your literary abilities, but on clearly and succinctly conveying what your story is about, in terms of plot and character development.

Make sure to focus on your main character (or characters) while writing the synopsis because they can be easier to convey in fewer words than the plot itself (no matter how compelling the plot is).

If you can make the reader connect with a character even in a synopsis, then it will help your chances of landing an agent or a publisher. Only mention secondary characters when absolutely needed. Too many names flying around will just serve to confuse everyone.

Focus on making sure the ending makes sense in terms of the plot and the characters. The ending should have an impact on the characters because that is how a good plot, and a good story, works. You should make that connection clear in your synopsis.

Don't include dialogue and don't raise questions that you don't answer in the synopsis. If you have to simplify the plot for the sake of brevity and your synopsis slightly disconnects from your novel there, that is probably for the best. If the end results are the same, it is ok if some steps are skipped over.

Get friends who have not read your book to read the synopsis; make sure it makes sense to them. Can they follow the plot clearly? Are the characters intriguing? These are good questions to ask, and only people who have not read the novel will know the answers based on the synopsis. Nonfiction synopses serve a different function. Mostly, nonfiction publishers and agents are interested in a chapter by chapter breakdown (some more detailed than others), outlining what will be included in the nonfiction book.

Of course, it really varies between publishers and agents and also between subgenres; what a publisher needs to see in terms of a cookbook proposal is very different than what they need to see in terms of a history book proposal. Read guidelines carefully and do follow-up research involving any terms you are not comfortable with.

In addition you can find helpful information about synopsis on Jane Friedman's blog, and this very helpful information on synopsis from How to Write a Book Now. Also Marissa Mayer shares some very helpful information on her blog, and includes details from her synopsis for *Cinder*.

Chapter 9:

How to Get an Agent

As long as you submit to agents and manuscript publishers who accept simultaneous submissions, I don't think there is anything wrong with trying both at the same time as long as you would be equally happy if either said yes. If you are submitting to top notch agents and sub-par publishers there is a disconnect there.

Many authors start with their ideal agents and then if they pass, they start submitting directly to their favorite publishers that accept direct submissions. There is nothing wrong with that method of submitting either.

In many ways submitting to agents and publishers is remarkably similar; however, this chapter focuses on submitting to agents.

Most of the steps in any submission process, to an agent or a publisher, are the same. You have to start out with a complete manuscript. Along with a query letter, most agents want the first twenty pages of the manuscript. I highly suggest you find an excellent editor to focus on editing just the query letter and the first

twenty pages. If you don't want to spend the money, please run it by a writer's group or a group of friends for their feedback.

Some agents also want a full synopsis of the book, although this is rather rare. If they ask for one, provide one. If they don't, do not include one.

Now that everything is ready to go—your query letter, your first twenty pages (or so, as it does differ from agent to agent), and a synopsis—your next big task is to find the right agents. There are many ways to go about this. A great place to start is with this rather long blog post by Neil Gaiman called "Everything You Wanted to Know about Literary Agents."

How I look for potential agents is a two-step process. The first step involves using Query Tracker and then reviewing the agents I find there on watchdog sites. This process usually includes a quick Google search, and always includes searching the forums at Absolute Write. Sometimes I also start with browsing the forum there. It is very active and contains lots of information about agents that is not available elsewhere. (The entire following chapter is devoted to researching agents because I just could not cover all of the essentials here.)

After spending time on these websites, I start to put together a list of agents. At first the list is long and extensive and includes most

of the agents I would consider representing me. Over time I pick my five favorite agents from this list to submit to first.

The agents I submit to first are all reach agents. Agents who I would be proud to be represented by. I then submit to each of them, carefully including names and reviewing submission guidelines to make sure I meet their individual needs, which sometimes vary. If I have liked any of the books they have represented, I mention that, usually including a specific detail so they know I actually read and enjoyed the book.

I keep a Word document where I track each of the agents I have submitted to. I update it when I hear back from an agent. I always note personal rejections (which are rare and generally a compliment) and I always keep track of which agencies have rejected me before. All of this is one centralized and well-organized file.

There is no step after this one, you just keep repeating this step. Although you might get rewrite requests, which will require editing again, or you might decide to revise your book on your own.

The other option you have available to you is attending and pitching at writers conferences or at other events where you directly interact with agents. I think generally the success rate when meeting an agent is much higher. Learn more about writers

conferences here and here. You should never have to pay a specific agent to pitch to them—it should be covered as part of the cost of the conference.

There are some courses online that also give you access to agents and allow for pitching. Make sure to vet the agents before signing up.

I wish you the best of luck in this process. Always remember: research and persistence are the key.

Chapter 10:

How to Research an Agent

Researching agents can be a time-consuming process, but I would never submit to an agent without first doing significant research.

To me, research is the most important step of the submission process. It is vital, because there is no point going through all the work of writing your manuscript and submitting, just to end up with an agent that does not properly represent you or your manuscript.

An agent that could be a good fit for another author or even another one of your manuscripts might not be the right agent for this particular project. And just like any other industry, there are bad agents out there that could misrepresent you in any number of ways. Writer Beware (a volunteer organization that works on behalf of writers) has a terrific section on dishonest agents.

It is important to note that many agents do not work alone, and most of the more successful agents (although not all), are part of, or head, a larger agency. When submitting to an agency, you often

submit to individual agents that work there. Sometimes the agency is very established, but the agents within that agency that are open to unsolicited submissions are the newer ones. All these are important factors to consider when the time comes to submit.

I would say that over half of the agents I research in the genre I write in, I dismiss after researching. Or I put them in a document on my computer with notes about what I liked and didn't like about them, to review for potential submission at a later date. In other words, I would consider submitting to them, but only after a significant number of rejections from more established agents.

How to Find Potential Agents

The first step of researching agents is always the same. It involves finding agents that are worth looking into further. There are several ways to go about this. One is to use Query Tracker. This is the way many authors find the agents that end up representing them. Both search engines have lots of filters so it is easy to look for agents that focus on your genre of writing, although you should always verify by other means that they actually do focus on that genre before submitting.

Another method (and the one with which I personally have found the best leads) is to read books in the same genre that you write in, and when you find a book or an author you like, figure out who

their agent is. Often, the agent is specifically thanked in the acknowledgements section of the book, but if they are not, Googling the name of the author and the word “agent” will often find the results.

I also use the Absolute Write Water Cooler Forum to find agents. Usually I look just by browsing the Agents and Publishers forum. I always keep my eye out for the longer threads spanning multiple pages; that could be a good or a bad sign.

I also frequently use ManuscriptWishList, which features detailed “interviews” with agents sharing what they are looking for at this time. The information shared there is generally much more helpful than on their website, and the site is searchable by genre.

In addition to those methods I also pay for a yearly subscription to Publishers Marketplace which helps me have a feel for which agents are active and successful, and gives me a better feel for current publishing trends.

Another way is through attending literary conferences. Agents often attend literary conferences, and there are various ways to communicate with them, or pitch to them during the conference. If you are attending a conference specifically to seek agents, research the agents beforehand to see if you would actually want to work with them (and they with you—most agents focus on a specific

genre). Also approach with caution any sessions where they are charging you an additional fee to pitch.

How to Research an Agent Outside of Their Website

You can also learn a lot about the agent or agency just by browsing their website, but I always research the agent outside their website first. Visiting the website first can color your perspective too much.

I already mentioned the Absolute Write Water Cooler Forum above as a potential way to find agents, but the way I primarily use it is to vet agents (and publishers). The forums are active and get a lot of use. If an author has a good or bad experience with an agent, they often will share it. Other people in the industry also chime in. Victoria Strauss, the co-founder of Writer Beware, is active there. Because it is a forum and everyone can post, you sometimes have to take entries with a grain of salt. But there is a lot of good information to be had there. If an agent or agency isn't discussed there, it is usually because they are new, small, or not very active, and that itself can be a clear sign, although there are exceptions.

Doing a Google search of the agency or agent is also good. A write-up in Publishers Weekly can be a good thing, but they also write a lot of "puff pieces" about agents and publishing houses so I try not to take them too seriously. Wikipedia, as most people already know, is not generally a trustworthy source in this area

either. One of the things that is valuable is that sometimes the agent is mentioned on author websites (helpful), or the agency is maligned on Glassdoor (not a good sign).

It is very important to make sure the agency isn't on the Writer Beware Thumbs Down Agencies List. At this point, I almost have the list memorized.

How to Evaluate an Agent's Website

A lot can be learned from the agent's website itself. An established and reputable agent will have the names of at least some of the authors and books they have represented right on their website. It is important that these books and names are currently relevant. For example, if they only mention representing one or two authors that were successful twenty years ago but have not published in a decade, they are to be avoided, generally.

But the clearest, best indicator of a legitimate agency that could place your book with a good publisher, in my experience, is their track record—the authors that they work with and the books they represent.

It is very important that an agent be active in the genre that you hope to publish in. If they are not, they do not understand how that genre works, and often don't have the relevant connections that will help your book be considered by the right publishers. If they

say they accept your genre but have not represented any books in that genre, I would approach with caution.

It is a good sign if an agent has membership in a professional literary agents' organization. That in and of itself is not a stamp of approval though, it is just an indicator that they are probably competent. Make sure the organization they list is relevant, though; an association with the local writing group is not relevant, neither is a general local business association.

New agents can be good, although they are more of a risk because they don't have a track record. However, you should only consider submitting to a new agent if they have industry experience (more on that here) and/or if they are part of a large established agency. They should make it very clear what experience they have on their website.

An agent should never charge an upfront fee. That is a clear indicator that they are not a legitimate agent. The same goes for agents who offer editing services for a fee. A combination editor/agent website is usually a clear warning sign, although those lines are starting to blur. A number of successful agents now run publishing companies and/or have editing services. If that is the case, ideally, these different businesses will remain separate. For example, an author taken on by the agent will not be offered a contract by that agent's publishing company or be encouraged to

use that agent's paid editorial services. Sometimes this multi-business approach is clear on the agent's site itself, other times, the Absolute Write Water Cooler Forum is where it is mentioned. If it is talked about on the forum, it is usually clear if the agency manages to run multiple businesses in a legitimate way or not. Always look for fees and signs of multiple businesses or redirection on the website.

In Conclusion

Researching agents might seem overwhelming at first, but the good news is the more you do it, the easier it becomes. Spending a lot of time researching agents helps, but so does spending time increasing your base of knowledge by reading Writers Beware. One picks up warning signs much quicker as one's base of knowledge expands.

Because it is important to keep track of the research one does—not to mention the submissions one makes—I have two files on my computer devoted to agents and publishers. One includes notes about the agents and publishers I am considering submitting to, as well as a list of agencies and publishers I do not want to consider in the future. The other file tracks my submissions to agents and publishers. It indicates the responses I have received and how long it took to receive them. If I received a request for a full manuscript

before receiving a rejection, I make sure to indicate that. These two files help the submission process immensely.

Chapter 11:
The Seven Most Common Manuscript Submission Mistakes

When I talk to agents, writers, and editors, I always hear them complain of the same mistakes over and over again. The other day I was reading a back issue of *Poets & Writers*. It was based on the question: "What kind of submissions do you not take seriously?" (I am paraphrasing here.) I was able to guess exactly what the agents would say in response to this question.

Even writers who write imaginative and creative pieces are capable of falling into the same traps, particularly if you don't know what other writers are doing in terms of submissions or what an agent's or editor's expectations are. Speaking from personal experience, I made a lot of mistakes when I started submitting.

Agents and editors are so used to seeing query letters and sample chapters day in and day out, but most writers only interact with their own submission packet. It is always good to start by seeking out other authors' submission packets.

Another good place to start? Learning what not to do. Below I cover the top seven most common complaints agents and editors have about submission packets. All of the reasons are based on information I have learned from talking directly with agents, writers, and editors. This is concrete information you can use to craft the best submission packet you can.

1. The Submission Did NOT Obey Their Submission Guidelines

Agents and publishers receive submissions all the time where the submitter does not follow directions at all. They include the whole manuscript when only the first thirty pages are asked for. They don't include a cover letter at all. They submit a marketing packet instead of a manuscript or cover letter. The variety of mistakes are wide-ranging, but the fact remains the same—the author did not follow the agent's or publisher's submission guidelines at all.

Submission guidelines exist for a reason. Ignore them at your peril. Most of the editors I have talked to either automatically reject submissions that do not follow guidelines, or they refuse to respond to them entirely.

2. They Didn't Submit to the Right Agent or Publisher

There is no way to predict which agent or publisher will be the right fit for you or your novel. But it is pretty easy to eliminate ones that won't fit at all based on genre.

If you have written a young adult (YA) book, don't submit it to a publisher that does not publish YA. They will not accept your book. If you submit your work of fantasy to an agent that only focuses on literary fiction, then they will not accept it.

Most authors think of this in terms of what the agent or publisher explicitly states on their site that they don't publish. When submitting to agents, however, it is important to see what books they represent. For example, an agent might not say: "No Fantasy." At the same time, the only books he has represented are works of literary fiction. Even if he was to be won over by your wonderful dragon-filled novel (which is unlikely), he probably would not be the right person to represent it because his connections are in a different genre.

Also, (and this is a bit of a tangent), but most small publishers who accept unsolicited submissions and are open to multiple genres do not sell as many books as those publishers who focus on one or two niche markets. If you have a fantasy novel, it is generally best to place it with a science fiction and fantasy-focused publisher.

3. Do Not Include Rhetorical Questions

What would you do if your parents were killed by pirates? What would you do if you could breathe underwater? What would you do if your boyfriend became a werewolf?

These and many other rhetorical questions are something that agents are so used to seeing in cover letters that some agencies just toss them into a pile together and leave it at that.

Sometimes, an entire paragraph of a cover letter is devoted to rhetorical questions, while other times it is just a sentence or two. But after reading a few hundred or so of them, most agents grow to dislike them.

It is really easy not to use them in a cover letter and really much more effective. So, remove them if you have any in yours. They might seem like a fun way to intrigue the agent, but that isn't what the agent is thinking.

4. Don't Talk About Copyright

Never say you have copyrighted your book with the Library of Congress. Your book is copyrighted the moment you put the words on paper. To have it done officially dates your material—forever. Let the publisher do that.

A book with a copyright date of 2013, and submitted in 2016, speaks volumes to an editor or agent. It means it's been shopped around—a lot! If you are really worried someone will steal your material, then register it with the Writers' Guild, East or West. For a small fee, they will record the work, proving when you wrote it. And then, unless you are submitting to an entertainment agent or producer, keep your mouth shut. Copyright marks and WGA numbers suggest you don't trust the people you are submitting your work to.

Joyce Holland, a literary agent, writes: "Tempted to use this symbol © instead of talking about copyright directly? Don't! It sends the message that not only do you not trust the agent, you are new to submitting." I talk here more about the issues that arise from copywriting any creative work that has not found a publisher.

5. Don't Query (Yet)

Most publishers and agents mention a timeframe within which they respond to most submissions. For some publishers, it is two to four months; for others, it is a week or six months. After that time has passed and you have not heard from them, it is fine to query. Querying involves sending a polite email inquiring about your submission. I actually like waiting an extra month on top of the time they mention before querying, just to be polite.

If they don't mention a timeframe at all, don't query for at least six months. If they ask you not to query, don't! These are rules they set in place for a reason, even if they are frustrating, but more importantly, querying too quickly, or bothering them too frequently about your work, can really tick them off. It can also send them the wrong message—that if they were representing you, you would be very needy. Don't do that.

6. Politeness and Formality Is a Must

I have already talked a little about how important politeness is if you are following up on your manuscript, but it is vitally important throughout the entire process.

I've seen cover letters that are rude. Usually along the lines of this: "You are so very lucky to receive my wonderful manuscript." Often, the rudeness is right at the end of the cover letter, such as signing off with this line: "I can't wait to receive the acceptance letter that you will send me."

It is also particularly important to respond politely, or not at all, if they decline your submission. Sending them an email imploring them to give your work a second look or calling them out for rejecting your work, will only do you harm. Remember: agents, agencies, and publishers talk to each other. If you behave badly, it could hurt your reputation at a much larger scale than you might be thinking.

Remember that it isn't just when engaging with the agent directly that you have to be polite. If you are polite via email, but then blog or tweet to complain about the whole experience, the agent will likely find out. They will then be even less pleased.

It is also important to be formal with your cover letter. Just like you would be formal for a job (although, honestly, I have read a lot of rude and informal cover letters in my day).

Think of this as a time to make an impression that is professional. Even if your book is the new version of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, you want your cover letter to convey reliability. Unless you already have a Hunter S. Thompson-like publication backlog, in which case you would probably not be reading this book.

But don't go over the top. I have read a cover letter where every other word was archaic and appeared to be pulled from the thesaurus. It did not make a positive impression.

7. Know the Agent's Name

> *Number one on my list of things never to do is to address a query to thirty or forty agents or editors at the same time. I'm talking about listing them in the header of your query. We usually toss those without even reading the subject line. Someone sent me one yesterday addressed to at least fifty other agents. I took a moment and tried to*

figure out what their reasoning might be. Did the writer think I would immediately jump on the material, worried someone would beat me out of a bestseller? Really?

I'm not foolish enough to think authors aren't submitting to more than one agent or editor at a time. I certainly do, but I never list them so everyone *knows. By the same reasoning, don't ever, ever send material to all the agents at one agency. We do talk to one another.*

I recently received a query stating the author had done his homework and investigated dozens of agents and agencies. It boiled down to me being the perfect person to represent his masterpiece. (Yes, that's what he called it.) Unfortunately, for him, he addressed the query to Ms. Gallagher. Lesson: Be very careful before you press the send button.

—Joyce Holland, Literary Agent

When you submit directly to a publisher, unless they specifically state which editor you are submitting to, you don't know the editor's name. If you know the editor's name, use it. If it isn't obviously provided for you—don't use a name. Just say *Dear Editors.* Assume that more than one will see your submission.

Chapter 12:

Agent versus Publisher

I wish there were more ongoing discussions about looking for an agent versus submitting directly to a publisher, but honestly, they are fairly rare. Many books and websites about publishing act as if there is only one way forward: agents.

That is not how it works at all. There are many publishers—including imprints of the Big Five—that will accept unsolicited submissions. That said, there are lots of arguments for agents which I will go into here, but it should not be considered your only option.

When I submit, it is generally to both publishers and agents. You do not have to decide on one or the other at first. The majority of both accept simultaneous submissions. Even if your book is accepted by a publisher, that does not mean it is too late to find an agent. I know authors whose book was accepted by a publisher and then they had no issues finding an agent when they actively struggled to secure one before.

Whether an agent is needed after an acceptance is also up for debate, but I do think they can help you negotiate a better contract and help you find homes for future books.

Arguments for Agents

A literary agent is someone who will act on your behalf, dealing with publishers and promoting the author's work. This is their job and a good agent really understands how publishing works and has connections to benefit you. You don't need to do the same kind of legwork researching companies (although, some authors do end up doing that).

Agents understand and know book contracts and publishers in a way authors don't. They can also help you negotiate a better contract with some publishers. Some publishers simply don't negotiate. For them, contracts are a one size fits all deal.

An agent can help you secure a much larger advance and can be the difference between getting an advance or not. For debut books, the percentage of the royalties you receive is usually not up for discussion, and that is part of why agents are reluctant to take on unproven authors.

Agents can submit work to almost any publisher and your work won't get caught in the same sort of slush pile (generally). This should encourage faster response times and that your manuscript

might be viewed in a more favorable light, particularly if that publisher has a good relationship with your agent.

An agent can protect you from going with the wrong publisher. An agent can also help you communicate with your publisher if your work gets delayed.

When an agent submits your manuscript to a publisher, it is generally the whole manuscript. Most manuscript publishers request that you just submit the first three chapters initially (although there are exceptions).

An agent can help you turn your novel into something that is more desirable for publishers because an agent has a more tuned perspective to what publishers like.

Arguments Against Agents

Just like there are bad publishers, there are also bad agents. So you have to do your research in much the same way, and that can take time and effort as well. Lots of authors assume you don't need to research agents, and that is not the case.

There is one less time-delayed step to go through when you submit directly to an agent. A good agent will generally get back to you within a month and a half, but that response is usually not an acceptance. Rather, it is a request for the full manuscript after reading your query or proposal.

Sometimes an agent, even after taking you on as a client, will take a long time to place your work. Direct submissions to publishers can really speed up turnaround times.

Agents receive a percentage of the money you receive for your book. Since authors do not make that much—unless they are bestsellers—this can really affect your income and financial stability.

An agent is no guarantee that your book will be published. Many manuscripts that find an agent never get placed with a publisher.

Arguments for Direct Submissions

It can be a lot faster to submit to publishers directly. When you submit a query to various agents, you have to wait for a request for the full manuscript. Then, if they like that full manuscript, there is the finalizing of the contract with them, then waiting for them to give you edits or feedback (which does not always happen but often does) on your manuscript, editing your piece to comply with that feedback, and then they start submitting to manuscript publishers. If you take the direct submission route, you can start submitting queries to manuscript publishers right away.

In some markets like science fiction, romance, and nonfiction, it can be just as easy to place a book without an agent as with one. The publishers are much more set up for direct submissions and

many process them quickly and allow simultaneous submissions. Some publishers even prefer direct submissions.

If you already know who you want to publish your book and they accept direct submissions, why not make sure your work is submitted there by just doing it.

Arguments Against Direct Submissions

The dreaded slush pile is a major argument against direct submissions. Your work is generally taken more seriously and responded to more quickly if an agent represents you.

You can't submit directly to all publishers, so if you have your heart set on a publisher that only accepts represented submissions, then find an agent. Do keep in mind that many of the Big Five publishers have at least one imprint open to un-represented submissions.

Chapter 13:
How to Evaluate a Publisher for Your Book

How can you check the legitimacy of a publisher if you don't know much about the industry? Even if a publisher is legitimate, how do you know that they will do right by your work?

These are complicated questions, but knowing how to evaluate a publisher, and knowing your own personal standards, should make it relativity easy to find publishers that work for your needs.

This chapter should give you concrete steps to answering these complicated questions.

How to Make Sure a Company Is Legitimate

I have spent quite a lot of time evaluating publishers for Authors Publish. Sometimes I have already read several books that have been printed by a publisher I am reviewing. Sometimes they publish in a genre I have never read, such as romance, and I don't know a thing about the publisher before going into the research.

This lack of initial knowledge has proven very helpful and taught me a lot about publishing, and a fair amount about the romance genre.

The first time I encountered the phrase "Heat Levels," I was deeply confused. Now it just part of my knowledge base.

Now, within two minutes of being on a publisher's website, I usually know if they fit our standards for a review or not.

One or more of the following things usually eliminates a publisher in the first three minutes of visiting their website.

There is a mention of fees of any kind.
Some legitimate publishers are charging reading fees now, but that doesn't make it okay. If they mention a fee for editing or anything like that, then they are eliminated. They are not a traditional publisher; they are just a vanity press posing as a traditional publisher. Some companies talk about a cooperative payment approach. If they do that, then run in the opposite direction.

They are trying to sell you something else (and it isn't a book).
I have no problem with publishers encouraging interested authors to buy a book that the publisher has already published. That is a good idea. But what I do have a problem with is this: a publisher whose website that is really pushing or promoting additional

services of any kind. This website is a good example of what to avoid.

They have been around for under a year.
Most presses fail in the first three years, so over three years old is ideal. If you are a new author, you sometimes have to take a risk on a new publisher. Sometimes these risks pay off, but there is no reason not to monitor that press, and not submit to them, during the first year.

They have been around for two years and have not published a book.
This is usually an indicator that they are 1) disorganized, and 2) struggling financially.

They have not published anything in the last year.
If an older publisher has not published anything for a full year, that is not generally a good sign.

If they have only published a few books, I make sure these books are not just written by the publisher themselves.
Lots of writers these days set up companies just to make it seem like they are not self-publishing. Some of these grow into legitimate publishers, and some do not.

Their website is not functioning properly.
I don't think I need to elaborate on this point.

The Next Steps

If a publisher makes it past those first easy-to-check hurdles, I check the Writer Beware Thumbs Down list to make sure they are not listed.

I also Google them. This often is not helpful, but sometimes equals good information. If there is ever a listing from Glassdoor on the Google list, make sure to read it. These reports are usually made by employees of the company, such as editors. They may (or may not) be authors themselves, but if employees are unhappy, then this is generally not a good sign.

If I was actually submitting to this company, I would make sure that they publish in the same genre in which I write.

How to Make Sure It Meets Your Personal Standards

Would you be happy if the publisher you submitted to had chosen to publish your book?

This might seem obvious, but often times, writers get so nervous or start to think it is a numbers game in terms of submissions out, that they submit to publishers that are legitimate but do not meet their personal standards.

For example, I know someone who submitted to an eBook-only publisher and their work was accepted; they signed the contract.

The only problem with that was that they didn't want eBook only. They wanted an actual physical book. So, they were not happy.

I cannot set your personal standards for you because I do not know you, but I think it might help you to see mine. It will help to get a good, concrete idea about what I am talking about:

I am only interested in a print publisher with good distribution.

If they have good distribution, I usually know because they mention the distribution company, or I see their books in bookstores all the time.

That clearly eliminates a lot of publishers—even a lot of the ones I have reviewed—but at least I know that. That helps me eliminate even more potential publishers, even quicker.

But for every author, the standards are different, the preferences are different. Just make sure you are submitting to companies that actually want to publish your manuscript.

Chapter 14: Alternative Ways to Connect with Agents and Publishers

This book primarily focuses on submitting to agents and publishers through email, post, and submission managers. There are other ways to connect with agents and publishers, and they often increase your odds of success, some are straight forward, others are not.

A lot of people think of these alternative methods as specific things, like following the right hashtag on Twitter or going to a pitching conference. All those things are important and I will cover them, but in my experience the number one best way to connect with agents and publishers is through being part of a writing community.

If you are part of a strong writing community, it will benefit you in so many ways. It can help you connect with fellow writers who can help keep you up to date about writing opportunities. They can

encourage you and support you by attending readings and promoting your work to their connections, which could include other writers, agents, and publishers.

The two agents that have been serious about my work were both connections I made through the writing community. The first three times my writing was published was through offers from literary journal editors, not through general submissions.

With many of the most prestigious publishers I've worked with, the offer happened through connections. Often not even close connections—often the friends of friends of friends—in the writing community.

Which is not to say I haven't placed lots of work through submitting like everyone else does—that is how I have done the bulk of my publishing—but connections do really make a difference.

When I was published in a Knopf anthology, I didn't know the editors, but I only got their submission email address through a friend of the editors.

I think a lot of writers start out trying to make connections directly with agents and publishers, whereas often it can be just as good to know someone who knows someone.

It's part of why it is important to always be polite and friendly. I had a friend behave very rudely to an editor who worked for a journal she wasn't interested in publishing with. That editor told the story of the rude encounter to many of her industry friends.

It is also hard to know how everyone is connected. I was talking to a non-writer about my work, just because it came up in conversation. It turns out her partner was an editor at a prestigious journal and he ended up soliciting my work.

In-person it can be easier to remember to be polite. When online, people sometimes forget about manners and are more outspoken and rude. This is not without consequences.

Writers that are part of a writing community are much more likely to be successful than authors operating in isolation.

Now in order to be part of a healthy community, you can't just take from the community—you have to contribute to it as well. Every writer has different things to offer their community. Sometimes it's editing feedback, or it could be sharing the opportunities you know of. Maybe you write fiction, but you know a nonfiction editor that might be a good fit for someone.

If you go into a community just to take advantage of connections, people will pick up on that rather quickly and you will not be

welcomed or encouraged. It is much better to start out offering to help than asking for it.

Offline connections are good because they tend to be more concrete. You know where they stand with that person. Online it can be easy to over- or underestimate your closeness.

I've talked a lot about the importance of a writing community, but haven't yet talked about how to actually become a part of that writing community.

Offline it can easy to connect with writers and the writing community by joining a writer's group. Some bookstores, libraries, and schools host these, but most are hosted in people's homes.

Writing groups usually focus on writing and editing each other's work. But there are others that focus more on publishing and helping each member promote their work.

Readings and open mics are a good place to go to meet other writers (and maybe find a writing group to join). You don't have to read at these events but you should try and be social. Going to these events alone can really help, because it forces you to be more outgoing.

Going to conferences, writers retreats, and weeklong workshops are a great way to meet fellow writers. I talk in depth about this here.

I have a network of writer friends all across North America because of conferences and workshops.

Attending local writing classes hosted at colleges and bookstores can really help as well. I've made great connections through these and several of the writing groups I've been involved with have formed out of these.

Online forums and Facebook Groups can be great ways to find online connections and build relationships with them. Twitter also works for lots of people. I could spend a lot more time on this, but this should be enough to get you started.

Other ways to connect more directly to publishers is by attending conferences. There are whole conferences around pitching. At many conferences, you can meet publishers directly, as well as agents.

If you want to try and find a good conference to attend this list of writing conferences (including weeklong workshops) and residencies is compiled by *Poets & Writers*. There is also this list of thirty American writing conferences. And if you're based in Canada, this list is for you and includes a number of free and low cost options.

Twitter has a lot of options to connect with agents and publishers. #Pitmad is probably the most famous opportunity but it might not

be the best. Lots of the publishers that participate in #pitmad are not the best.

Sometimes publishers who are not open to direct submissions generally offer up specific editors email addresses as open for direct submissions on twitter. So if you are really interested in a publisher that isn't open to direct submissions, follow their editors on twitter, just in case.

Facebook groups, particularly private or secret ones can be great places to find out about other publishing opportunities. Even though these are online, I usually am asked to join these groups by offline writer friends, so keep that in mind.

I know of a number of friends and some famous authors who found agents through publishing their work in respected literary journals. The agents reached out to them after reading the literary journal.

The important thing to do is put yourself and your writing out there. Submitting to traditional manuscript publishers is important and it does often equal publication in the long term, but trying multiple methods, certainly helps.

The great thing about being part of the writing community is that not only is it a great way to make friends that you have something in common with but it will help you in the long run when your

work is published. The writing community should help you promote your work, just as you help other writers promote theirs.

Chapter 15: The Self-Publishing Conundrum and the Importance of Patience

The first thing I want to make very clear is that I don't have any problems with self-publishing. I have read some very good self-published books. I know some very successful self-published authors. That said, I know a far larger amount of people who regret self-publishing at least one of their books.

The *Authors Publish Guide to Manuscript Submission* is clearly not about self-publishing, and so I hesitated to bring it up at all; however, I felt that I had to because self-publishing is so prevalent today and most people who self-publish for the first time don't do enough research before starting out.

If you want to be a self-published author, I encourage you to self-publish. On the contrary, I would say that the slight majority of

people who self-publish do so because they see it as a step toward getting a traditional publisher or agent. This is not true!

How do I know that many self-published authors think this way? Because they have told me in conversations over the phone and at writers retreats and book talks. This idea of self-publishing one's work in order to get it traditionally published comes up again and again.

A couple times a month I receive an email from an author. The email always looks something like this:

> Dear Emily,
>
> I recently finished and self-published my novel, *If Looks Could*. I am now ready to find a traditional publisher. Can you help me?
>
> Sincerely,
>
> John Smith

The problem with this idea is that if you really want a traditional publisher, it is much easier to approach a publisher or an agent with a manuscript, not a self-published book (there is one exception to this rule that I will elaborate on later).

Most traditional publishers—particularly the ones who accept un-agented submissions—will not even allow authors to submit self-

published work at all. It is against their rules. They will consider an unpublished novel, or sometimes one that had been previously published by another publishing house, but not one that has been previously self-published.

I know a writer who thought this was a ridiculous rule and he submitted his manuscript to publishers without telling them that it had been previously self-published. One of them did accept his manuscript. At that point, he had to tell them the truth before signing the contract. They dropped his book and told him not to submit to them again. He had violated their trust.

Agents are also not interested in self-published books with the same exception that publishers have. That exception is that you have managed to ***sell*** a huge number of copies on your own. I placed emphasis on the word sell, because even if you are regularly giving away thousands of copies, most publishers and agents will not take you seriously.

There are lots of stories about authors self-publishing and then having their book published by a traditional publisher. The problem is that most people don't focus on the fact that these authors whose books are being chosen by traditional publishers are successful self-published authors who have already sold thousands of copies of their book without the help of a traditional publisher.

I am not telling anyone to not self-publish. I think there are a lot of great opportunities that come out of self-publishing. But I am encouraging individuals not to self-publish if their main goal is traditional publishing.

Part of the reason many authors who want to go the traditional route end up self-publishing is the amount of work and time involved in traditional publishing. You often have to be incredibly patient in order to jump through all the hoops traditional publishing involves: First you have to query with a partial manuscript, then a full manuscript, then if your manuscript is accepted, there are rounds of edits and publishers fitting you into their schedules.

It can take a decade of work to get your first book published. This is not uncommon. I don't say this to upset readers of this book—many of whom might find a home for their book well before that—yet, I want you to know the time involved. It's not just the time, but the active effort involved in submitting during this time. Just waiting a decade with a finished manuscript and not submitting it anywhere will not get it published (I should know, having tried that strategy more than once).

If anything, I want this fact that it takes a lot of time to find a worthwhile publisher to encourage you! The minute I finished my last novel (about two years ago), friends started asking me who was going to publish it. When was it coming out? I had not even

written a query letter for it yet. I found this attitude incredibly discouraging. Now, not all these friends were writers, but many of them were, though none of them had published a novel. The people I know that had published novels did not ask me these questions. They knew it would take time and effort.

Don't let other's expectations on this matter affect you. That is why I am warning you about the time it takes. The good news is that if you find a good agent and a good publisher the first time out, you hopefully will not have to go through this long process again; it just becomes easier and easier.

If you self-publish, the time between your manuscript being complete and it being a published thing available in the world is much shorter. It could even be a matter of days. However, generally authors of self-published work spend a lot of time and effort putting their book out there after it is self-published without any experienced support. They might have to do just as much work or more in the long run to make their book successful, but it is just on the other side of publication.

Chapter 16:
The Top 40 Publishers for New Authors

The writing market can be overwhelming, particularly for new authors who do not have a history of past publication. It is important to note that no legitimate, established presses specifically look for unpublished authors. The presses on this list were chosen because they have published a number of debut books before.

Also, the publishers on this list do not require literary agents. You can submit to these publishers directly.

All thirty-eight of these manuscript publishers have good distribution and clear marketing strategies. They are not vanity presses, self-publishers, or brand-new presses. They are established publishing houses with good reputations.

Some of the publishers listed below are imprints of the Big 5 Five publishers. None of the Big Five accept submissions directly, but

some of their imprints do. Others are independent companies; some are based in the US and others are based in the UK or elsewhere.

All the publishers listed below are open to authors regardless of nationality. Most of the publishers focus on publishing a particular genre or genres of books. The publishers are listed in no particular order.

Our full reviews of the publishers include more detailed submission information and links to the publishing companies' websites and submission guidelines. Not all of them are open to submissions at this time, but many are. It is good to bookmark the websites of publishers you are interested in that are not currently open to submissions, and to check back regularly, if they do not overtly state when they will re-open to submissions.

1. Chronicle Books

Chronicle is a large independent San Francisco-based publisher that publishes highly acclaimed children's books, bestselling cookbooks, gift books, and a variety of nonfiction. Most have a strong visual element. Their books are beautifully made. To learn more, read our full review here.

2. Baen

Baen is a publisher of science fiction and fantasy novels. They

have published a large number of bestsellers, and many of the most respected science fiction and fantasy novelists regularly publish with them. To learn more, read our review of Baen.

3. Shadow Mountain

Shadow Mountain is an imprint of Deseret Books. Shadow Mountain publishes primarily fiction and they have published a number of New York Times bestselling books. Many of the authors and books they publish have nothing to do with Mormonism. To learn more, read our full review here.

4. Hard Case Crime

Hard Case Crime is a well-respected and established niche publisher of hard-boiled crime novels. The publisher has been featured in a number of respected publications, including Time Magazine and The Stranger. To learn more, read our full review here.

5. DAW

DAW is an imprint of Penguin books. They publish science fiction and fantasy books, and have published authors such as Marion Zimmer Bradley and Roger Zelazny. DAW has published many

bestselling books and has published Hugo Award winning books. Read the full review here.

6. Turner Books

Turner publishes books in a wide range of categories and formats—fiction and nonfiction. They publish mainly in print but have electronic options as well. They are a major independent publishing house and have a number of imprints. Read the full review here.

7. Persea Books

This is a respected publisher of literary novels and short story collections, creative nonfiction, memoir, essays, biography, literary criticism, books on contemporary issues (multicultural, feminist, LGBTQI+), young adult novels, and literary and multicultural anthologies that are assigned in secondary and university classrooms, as well as poetry. The work they publish receives good distribution, particularly in academic circles. To learn more, read our full review here.

8. SourceBooks

A large independent publisher based out of Illinois, they also have offices in Connecticut and New York. They are open to unsolicited

submissions for a wide range of genres, from nonfiction to romance. Read our full review here.

9. Arsenal Pulp Press

They are a Canadian small press based out of Vancouver. They have won the Jim Douglas Publisher of the Year Award (from the Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia), and they have been a finalist for Small Press Publisher of the Year (awarded by the Canadian Booksellers Association) five times. They publish fiction and nonfiction. Read our full review here.

12. Coffee House Prsss

Coffee House Press (CHP) is a respected literary press with a great reputation. They are only open for short submission periods every year in March and September. These periods are capped at 300 submissions, so submit early. During the last open period, they had reached 300 submissions on the third day. Coffee House Press publishes emerging and midcareer authors. They do not focus on bestsellers, but their books are often taught in academic settings and available in libraries and independent bookstores. Read our full review here.

13. Flashlight Press

Flashlight is an award winning publisher of illustrated children's books. They publish books aimed at 4-8-year-olds. They only publish 2-4 books every year, so they are very selective. Their books are beautifully illustrated, and also receive good distribution internationally and nationally. Read the full review here.

14. Oneworld Publishing

An independent publisher founded in 1986, they now publish around 100 works of nonfiction and literary fiction every year. They work with distributors and authors worldwide, although they are only open to unsolicited submissions of nonfiction. Read the full review here.

15. Princeton Architectural Press

Princeton Architectural Press is a small press that focuses on publishing books on architecture, design, photography, landscape, and visual culture. They also publish beautiful stationary and children's books. They are based in New York. In 2009 they were bought by McEvoy Group. They are now a sister company to Chronicle Books. Read the full review here.

16. Black & White Publishing

Black & White Publishing was founded in 1995 and is now one of the largest Scottish publishers. They currently have over 200 books in print. They have good distributor and are starting to break into the eBook publishing world. They publish general nonfiction, biography, sport, and humor, as well as fiction -- commercial women's fiction (e.g. chick lit, saga, romance), general fiction, including historical, commercial literary and contemporary, crime and psychological thrillers, and young adult / new adult fiction. Read our full review here.

17. McSweeney's

McSweeney's was founded in 1998 by Dave Eggers. They publish literary fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. They originally started out publishing a literary magazine, and now they are responsible for a number of publications, online and off, as well as podcasts, and books. They are based out of San Francisco. Learn more here.

18. The Quarto Publishing Group

The Quarto Publishing Group is an international publishing house known for its illustrated books. They publish most of their work through a number of niche imprints, each with their own focus. All of their US imprints are distributed by Hachette. Their imprints are

all nonfiction. They publish a lot of cookbooks and gift books. They also have imprints covering almost any nonfiction topic you can think of, including children's nonfiction, parenting, vehicles and architecture. To learn more, read our full review here.

19. Holiday House

Holiday House is an established and reputable children's book publisher. Holiday House has been around for over 75 years. They publish picture books as well as books aimed at children grades 1-3, grades 4-6, and grades 7 and up. They are based out of New York City. They have published many well known books and authors, including Kenneth Grahame. The books that they have published have won numerous respected awards and honors. To read our full review go here.

20. Penny Candy Books

Penny Candy Books is a publishing company focused on children's picture books that was founded in 2015 by two poets who met in graduate school. It is a newer company but they seem off to a good start with interviews in various established publications. Their plan from here on out is to publish 5-8 books a year. Read our full review here.

21. Bookouture

A digital publisher that was purchased in 2017 by Hachette. They primarily publish women's fiction, chick lit, romance, and thrillers. Learn more here.

22. Chicago Review Press

Chicago Review Press was founded over 40 years ago. They are an established independent publisher of literary fiction, nonfiction and memoir. They also publish books for children (but not picture books). They were founded by Curt Matthews and his wife, Linda Matthews. Curt was the former editor of the literary journal the Chicago Review. To learn more, read the full review here.

23. Coffeetown Press

Coffeetown Press is a literary and non-fiction imprint owned by Epicenter Press. They primarily publish non-fiction, as well as memoir, literary fiction, and historical fiction. Learn more here.

24. Gibbs Smith

Gibbs Smith is an established publisher with good distribution and a focus on cookbooks, interior design and architecture books, and board books for children. They have published a number of

bestsellers, including a board book version of Pride & Prejudice. Gibbs Smith is primarily a nonfiction publisher which is just now entering the fiction market for adults and middle readers. To learn more, read our full review here.

25. Harlequin

Harlequin is easily the most famous romance only publisher out there. In fact, their name was synonymous with romance novel when I was growing up. They have wide distribution, from grocery stores to bookstores. They are everywhere. You can learn more here.

26. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

Founded in 1911 and located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company is an independent publisher of religious books. They have a large range, including academic books and reference works in theology, biblical studies, and religious history to popular titles in spirituality, social and cultural criticism, as well as literature. Not all of their books, particularly their children's books, are overtly religious. To learn more, read our full review here.

27. Polis Books

Polis Books is an independent publisher of fiction and nonfiction, founded in 2013. Their focus is on publishing new voices. They are a technologically driven company. They publish print and digital books. Polis Books was founded by Jason Pinter. Mr. Pinter had over a decade of experience in editorial, marketing and publicity for a variety of publishers including Random House, St. Martin's Press, and The Mysterious Press. You can submit here.

28. Quirk Books

This Philadelphia-based press publishes just 25 books a year in a whole range of genres, from children's books to nonfiction to science fiction. Unlike many publishers that tackle a large range of topics, Quirk Books has a clear marketing plan and to a certain degree their books have a cohesive feel, because they all are quirky. To learn more, read our full review here.

29. Albert Whitman & Company

Albert Whitman & Company has been around since 1919. Their best-known series is *The Boxcar Children*. Over the past few years they have started to focus on publishing a larger number of books each year. Their goal is to be publishing 150 new books a year by 2020. They publish middle-grade fiction, picture books, and young

adult novels. They consider proposals and unsolicited manuscripts in all of these categories. They publish fiction and nonfiction picture books. To learn more, read our full review here.

30. Page Street Publishing

Page Street Publishing is a publisher of full color, mostly hardcover, gift books, cookbooks, and craft books, children's books, and young adult fiction. Most of them have an important visual component. To get a good feel for what they have published in the past, you can go here. They are distributed through Macmillan in every country but Canada (where they have a different distributor). They publish around 60 titles a year. To learn more, read our full review here.

31. Sunbury Press

Sunbury Press is a small publisher of hardcover, trade paperback, and eBooks based in Pennsylvania. They currently have about 600 titles available over nine different focused imprints. You can learn more here.

32. Crooked Lane

Crooked Lane was established in 2014 as a press specializing in

crime books. They have an experienced staff and have managed to publish some well known authors already. They publish a range of mysteries that lean towards the cozy, and they are not opposed to publishing a series of books. To learn more, read our full review here.

33. Ripple Grove Press

Ripple Grove Press is a newer family-run children's book publisher based out of Portland. They focus on publishing original, beautifully illustrated children's books. Their website is clear and transparent. It lists their distributor and their literary agent for other publishers interested in translating their work. Read our full review here.

34. Square One Publishers

Square One Publishers focuses on publishing adult nonfiction books. They are looking for books by authors that are experts in their field. Their books are focused on meeting the needs of niche audiences. They are not a publisher of bestsellers, they have a specific market/markets and they cater to them. Read our full review here.

35. Storey Publishing

The mission of Storey Publishing is to provide practical information that encourages independence in a way that is harmonious with the environment. The books they publish encourage and instruct readers of all ages of ways to enrich their lives through hands-on activities and experiences. All of what they publish is nonfiction and they covered such varied topics as home reference, crafts, beer & wine, raising animals, homesteading, and mind/body/spirit. Read our full review here.

36. Versify

Versify, a new imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers, is accepting submissions via email. Versify was started by the Newberry Award winning author Kwame Alexander, who you can learn more about here. The goal of Versify is to publish risky, unconventional books for children. They are looking for novels, nonfiction, picture books, and graphic novels. Read our full review here.

37. Prometheus Books

Prometheus Books is a large established publisher of what they like to call "intelligent nonfiction." They specialize in publishing nonfiction books that fall into the following categories: popular

science, philosophy, atheism, humanism, and critical thinking. They used to run two imprints but recently sold them to Start Media. Read our full review here.

38. Arcade Publishing

Arcade Publishing is an imprint of Skyhorse Publishing, a large independent publisher with a number of imprints. They have good distribution. They publish nonfiction and fiction. Read our full review here.

39. Text Publishing

Text Publishing in an Australian press that has published a wide variety of best sellers. They have won the small publisher of the year award three times. You can get a feel for what they publish here. One of their biggest hits in recent years is the internationally bestselling novel The Rosie Project, by Graeme Simsion (the first in a series of Rosie novels). Read our full review here.

40. Microcosm

Microcosm is a Portland-based publisher that specializes in nonfiction DIY (Do-It-Yourself) goods that focus on the reader and teach self-empowerment. They are on Powell's 24 of Our Favorite Small Presses list. The authors they publish have to have

expertise and lived experience in the subject area they write about. Read the full review here.

Glossary

Advance: An advance is a signing bonus that is paid to the author before the book is published. It is paid against future royalty earnings. So, for every dollar you receive in an advance, you have to earn a dollar from book sales before you receive any additional royalty payments. Most independent publishers do not offer advances.

Anthology: A published collection of poems or other pieces of writing, usually on a theme.

"Big Five": Previously known as "The Big Six," this term refers to: Penguin Random House, Macmillan, HarperCollins, Hachette and Simon & Schuster—the five largest publishers in North America. All of these publishers have multiple imprints. All of these publishers and most of their imprints require agents.

Chapbook: A ten- to twenty-page collection of poetry, or less commonly, fiction or creative nonfiction, by one author.

First Publication Rights: This term is most commonly used in the context of literary journals and magazines. Most publications will not publish work that has previously appeared in a different literary

journal, print or online. Because of this, most publishers require First Rights. These can also be called First North American Serial Rights or First Serial Rights. No matter what they are called, it usually means that you are giving that publication exclusive rights to publish your submitted work first. After they publish, the rights revert to you, sometimes right away, sometimes after six months. Many publishers of poetry and short story manuscripts want your work to have been previously published in literary journals.

Genre: A category of artistic composition, characterized by similarities in form, style, or subject matter. Genre can refer to poetry or prose in terms of form. Or it can be a subject matter classification referring to science fiction, mysteries, or various other established types of stories. If a literary journal or publisher says they are not interested in genre work, they are using it as a subject matter classification.

Imprints: An imprint of a publisher is a trade name under which a work is published. Many larger publishers use imprints as a way to market specific books. For example, science fiction books are usually published by a different imprint than mystery books, even if they are published by the same publisher.

Independent Publishers: A publisher that is not an imprint of the Big Five or a large media corporation. Independent publishers can

be small startups, or large, established presses like Chronicle Books. Most do not require agents in order to submit.

Literary Agent: A literary agent is someone who represents writers and their written works to publishers and assists in the sale and deal negotiation of the same. Many publishers require authors to submit their work through a literary agent.

Literary Journal: A magazine that publishes primarily poetry, fiction, and/or creative nonfiction. Also, commonly referred to as *journals* or *reviews*.

Manuscript: An unpublished book-length work of fiction, nonfiction, or poetry.

Reader: Used mostly in the context of larger journals and contests who generally have volunteer readers, they are individuals who read a large chunk of the work submitted and who decide what part of that work they are going to pass on to the editors.

Reprints: Work that has been previously published elsewhere. This includes self-published work. Some publishers are particularly interested in publishing reprints as long as all the rights belong to the author. The majority of publishers only consider reprints of work that have been previously traditionally published.

Royalties: Royalties, at their most basic, refer to the amount of money an author earns off each copy of their book that is sold.

SASE (Self-Addressed and Stamped Envelope): If you submit to a publisher, a contest, or a literary journal via the mail, then most publishers require that you include a SASE (self-addressed and stamped envelope). This is so they can respond to your work with a rejection or acceptance letter.

Self-Publishing: When you publish your own work either directly on a platform like Amazon's KDP, or when you use a vanity press.

Solicited Submissions: Submissions from authors that the publisher's directly requests. Most literary journals publish a mix of solicited and unsolicited submissions. Editors can solicit the work of friends or of famous or emerging writers. Most of the time, when your work is solicited, it is published.

Submission Manager: An online program that handles submissions electronically. The most common one is Submittable. Both literary journals and manuscript publishers use submission managers.

Traditional Publisher: A publisher who never charges you any fees, and who pays the author for their rights.

Unsolicited Submissions: The bulk of submissions to most journals are unsolicited. They are the submissions sent through submission managers, post, or emails to literary journals. If a manuscript publisher says they do not accept unsolicited

submissions, then you cannot submit to them unless someone at the publisher has explicitly asked to see your work, or you have an agent who can submit your work for you.

Vanity Publisher/Press: Also known as assisted publishing. Any publisher that charges you in order to publish your work is a vanity publisher.

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About the Author

Emily Harstone is the author of many popular books, including *Submit, Publish, Repeat*, and *The 2020 Guide to Manuscript Publishers.*

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