



Australian Society of Authors

Getting Published

It has been said that writing a book is easy; the real work begins when you try to get it published. It may be an exaggeration, but the writing world abounds with heroic failures – manuscripts which should have been bestsellers, but never went beyond that dusty file at the bottom of a wardrobe simply because the writer gave up on publishers and publishing. The information that follows does not promise to eliminate the common frustration inherent in the process of seeing your manuscript through to publication. It may, however, help you ease your way gently into the business of publishing by outlining standard and acceptable procedures for writers approaching publishers. If in doubt about any of the procedures below, contact the ASA for further advice.

Who to approach

Before deciding which publishing house to approach, it is advisable to familiarise yourself with the general image of each particular publisher. Do they specialise in a particular style of publication? Is their catalogue large and diverse or small and specialised? Would your book suit their publishing list?

The *Australian Publishers' Association 2009 Members' Directory* is a handy reference. This book not only provides contact names and addresses of the most reputable publishers in Australia, but also information about each publisher's area of special interest. (The *Directory* can be purchased from the ASA via our website – www.asauthors.org – or by contacting the ASA office on 02 9318 0877). If you do not have a directory, have a browse through a good bookstore to bring yourself up-to-date with the activities of individual publishers. At this point, make a list of preferred publishers for your manuscript.

First contact

It is usually preferable not to send your complete manuscript in the first instance. Publishers are already busy with their established authors, and the time available for unpublished writers is limited. Your first step is to interest the publisher in you and in the concept of your book. If you can do that, the publisher will invite you to submit your full manuscript. At first, what the publisher needs to know in a few typed pages is:

- Who you are
- Whether or not you are a competent writer
- What your book is about
- What form it takes, and
- Whether there is a commercial market for your book.

For this purpose, the following will usually suffice:

Biographical notes

These should provide details of the author's writing experience, published work (if any), qualifications, and any other information about the author that may be relevant to the manuscript.

Outline

State the broad purpose or theme of the manuscript, its distinctive qualities, potential readership, comparable books, etc.

Synopsis

This should be a chapter-by-chapter summary including notes on illustrations if appropriate.

Two or three sample chapters

Since it is not uncommon for publishers to take months to respond to unsolicited manuscripts (indeed some never respond!), it is a good idea to include a brief covering letter and mention that you will contact them by telephone six weeks after they have had an opportunity to look at the project. Make a note in your diary to do just that. When you telephone, keep the conversation brief and businesslike. You simply want to confirm that your submission has been received, and to ask whether or not the publisher is interested. If it has not yet been assessed, ask for some estimate of how long it might take, and suggest that you will contact them again after that period. Your proposal may be submitted to as many publishers as you wish. However, publishers can be sensitive about multiple submissions. If you are submitting your proposal to more than one publisher concurrently, we advise you to submit to no more than three at a time. You may also like to mention in your covering letter that, in order to save time, you have submitted your proposal to one (or two as the case may be) other publishers. You are under no obligation to name these publishers or to discuss how many other companies you have previously approached.

Manuscript presentation

Once a publisher has invited you to submit your manuscript, do so with a covering letter which includes your:

- Name
- Address
- Telephone number/fax/email, and
- Copyright notice.

Your manuscript should be:

- Typed double-spaced, with
- Margins wide enough for editorial notes, and
- Page numbers on the top right hand corner
- On A4 white paper, one side only

Don't send your only copy! Publishers take no responsibility for manuscripts lost in transit. Many publishers will only return your manuscript if you include return postage.

What to do if ...

You are told that the publisher does not accept unsolicited manuscripts

Several publishers have closed their doors to writers, and are only accepting manuscripts through literary agents. You will need to either find an agent to represent you, have your work appraised by a manuscript assessment service and then send a query letter with the assessment report to the publisher, or find another publisher.

You receive a number of rejections, but no explanation

A professional assessment may help to point out the weak spots in your manuscript. Professional assessors charge a reading fee that varies depending on the length of the manuscript. For further information and contact information, go to the “Writers’ Services” page on the ASA website: www.asauthors.org

You are offered a publishing contract

If you have not already joined the ASA, you are strongly advised to join now. The ASA’s Contract Advisory Service is unique and available only to members. The ASA’s contract assessors will provide a clause-by-clause breakdown of your contract, alerting you to unfair clauses and suggesting points for negotiation. If you would like to learn about publishing contracts, then you can obtain a copy of *Australian Book Contracts* (4th Edition) from the ASA.

You want to find an agent

Since the number of reputable literary agents in Australia is very small, it is usually difficult for an unpublished writer to find an agent. Agents should be approached in the same manner as publishers. There is a list of agents on the “Writers’ Services” page on the ASA website (www.asauthors.org). Other good sites to try are the Australian Literary Agents’ Association (www.austlitagentsassoc.com.au), and for international agents, Lit Match (www.litmatch.net). If an agent offers you a contract, seek legal advice or contact the ASA before signing.

You are unsuccessful in finding a suitable publisher

You might like to consider self-publishing. This is costly, but has the advantage of returning much higher profits to you if the book is successful. The ASA sells the book *Self-Publishing Made Simple* (Euan Mitchell), as well as providing a free, downloadable paper *Hints for Self-Publishing Authors*, on the “Free ASA Papers” page of the website: www.asauthors.org

You are concerned about protecting your copyright

In Australia, copyright protection does not depend upon registration, publication or any other procedure. Material is automatically protected by law from the time it is first written down or taped. Your ownership of copyright should be indicated by a copyright notice that is recognised internationally. The notice consists of the symbol © (or the word ‘copyright’), the name of the copyright owner, and the year of first publication. For further comprehensive information about copyright, go to the Australian Copyright Council’s website: www.copyright.org.au

You want to be part of a professional association

The ASA protects and promotes the professional interests of Australian literary creators. The organisation provides a number of services for 3000 members which include a contract advisory service for print and digital works; a regular newsletter; the *Australian Author* journal; mentorships; training in new technologies; negotiation in legal disputes between author members and their publishers; coordination of special interest groups such as children's writers, Indigenous writers and the Society of Book Illustrators; staging events which showcase Australian writers; representing literary creators on policy making bodies, and many other activities. Join online, or contact the office on 02 9318 0877.

And above all, keep on writing!

Australian Society of Authors 2009 (9th Edition)
Originally published in 1987



Australian Society of Authors

Australian Society of Authors

PO Box 1566, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 www.asauthors.org

Ph: 02 9318 0877

Fax: 02 9318 0530

www.asauthors.org

Copyright © 2009 Australian Society of Authors

Detail from ASA Medal design by Darrell Sibosado