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 online *Industry Directory* is a handy reference. This guide is searchable by company name, services to the publishing industry and whether or not they accept unsolicited manuscripts. Visit [https://www.publishers.asn.au/industrydirectory](https://www.publishers.asn.au/industrydirectory). Another guide is the *Australian Writers’ Marketplace*, a book which includes a list of publishers and agents in Australia and the types of manuscripts they accept. You can purchase a copy of the Australian Writers’ Marketplace from [www.asauthors.org](http://www.asauthors.org).

To get an even better sense of the types of books different companies publish, 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.
Submission guidelines

It is crucial that you check the publisher’s website to find out if they have guidelines for manuscript submission before sending your work. Some publishers will state that they don’t accept unsolicited manuscripts, which means a manuscript sent to them by an unknown contact. If this is the case, you may need to seek a literary agent to represent you.

These days, many Australian publishers accept unsolicited manuscripts submissions online on a specific day of the week or month. Here is a list of Australian publishers’ online open call-outs:
HarperCollins Australia, Wednesday Post: www.wednesdaypost.com.au

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
What to do if ...

You receive a number of rejections, but no explanation

A manuscript assessment may help to point out the weak spots in your manuscript. Manuscript assessors charge a reading fee that varies depending on the length of the manuscript. For further information and contact information, go to the “Writers and services” FAQ 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 assessment 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 “Publishing” FAQ on the ASA website (www.asauthors.org). Other good sites to try are the Australian Literary Agents’ Association (http://austlitagentsassoc.wordpress.com/). 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. If you decide to self-publish, spend some time researching different companies, asking them for itemised quotes so you can easily compare costs. Be sure to ask companies about their distribution channels and the revenue you will receive when books are sold. The ASA provides a number of resources for self-publishing authors. Visit the “Publishing” FAQ on the ASA website (www.asauthors.org) for the most up-to-date list of resources.

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

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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 assessment service for print and digital works; a regular newsletter; the Australian Author journal; mentorships for writers; and more. Join online, or contact the office on 02 9211 1004.

And above all, keep on writing!

Further resources

For further advice about finding and approaching publishers see ...

- *A Decent Proposal* by Rhonda Whitton and Sheila Hollingworth, available at www.asauthors.org
- *The Australian Writers’ Marketplace* published by the Queensland Writers Centre, available at www.asauthors.org
- Your local or state writers’ centre, links at www.asauthors.org

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