

WRITING WHEN TIME IS SCARCE

Sample Lesson by Elaine L. Orr Section 5: Thinking About Working with a Publisher

WORKING WITH A PUBLISHER

You've watched shows such as *Murder She Wrote* or *Castle*, and the television authors often refer to their editor, publisher, or a book tour. Doesn't it look fun? A car picks you up at the New York City hotel where you're staying, fans line up twenty deep, and your hand gets a cramp from signing books.

Such relationships with a publisher are possible, but they are more likely to be in the Jessica Fletcher or Richard Castle model if you are already a bestseller. Think James Patterson or Sarah Paretsky.

If you put your name in the equation, especially as a first-time author, things will be a different. Not bad, just different. Given the mergers in the publishing industry and the increasing production costs, publishers don't have a lot of money to spend on promotion. More than ever, your role matters in marketing.

TRADITIONAL PUBLISHER TASKS

The nuts and bolts of the publisher's pre-publishing steps, the acquisition role, would include:

- Read a draft your agent submits.
- Let the agent know they are interested.
- Present the contract for your agent and you to review.
- Negotiate to get to a contract that the author and publisher agree on in terms of – royalties, submission deadlines, author input to final product and cover, publisher contribution to marketing, number of (free) copies to the author, foreign rights negotiation, and more.
- Let the literary world know you are under contract and when your book will appear.



PUBLISHER AS PRODUCTION MANAGER

If you think your work is done when a publisher accepts your book, think again. Among the things to expect are requests for:

- Revision, usually with detailed information on what the publisher believes will improve quality and marketability.
- Information needed to fact-check your book. Or, the publisher could ask you to submit this material. (More for nonfiction)
- Contact information if others need to sign a release saying it is okay to quote them or refer to them in any way.
- Consultation on cover design.
- Review of galleys – edited copy as the publisher plans to print the book.

Publishers spend a lot of money to get your book to readers, and they want it to be perfect. It may seem that some requests detailed, even picky, but authors need to remember that they are one of many.

PUBLISHER’S ROLE IN MARKETING

Your contract needs to specify what the publisher will do to promote your book. Ultimately, you will do most promotion – arranging book signings, driving to various bookstores to ask them to carry your books.



Try to get the publisher to agree to at least do the following:

- Send press releases to trade publications or local media, with follow-up calls from the publisher’s representative.
- Give you well designed bookmarks, preferably months before a book is out.
- Provide you with author’s copies that you can use for marketing. Ask for fifty and be prepared to receive fewer.
- Send copies to book review publications or websites, including review writers in local media.
- Maintain an active social media campaign through at least Twitter, Pinterest, and Facebook posts.
- Create a short video and load it to You Tube.

- Talk to you a few times a year about how well the book is selling and if there is more promotion they would like you to do.

Your role in marketing is key. If you stress your willingness to work hard to keep the book in front of potential readers, it could help you secure a publisher.

THE ONLY REAL DON'T

Don't be a pain in the tailbone to work with. You want to be firm when needed, but mostly you want to be a joy to work with. Whiners don't get a second contract.

It may sound corny, but the fictional author Jessica Fletcher (played by Angela Lansbury) in *Murder She Wrote*, is a perfect example of a no-nonsense author who is always pleasantly businesslike.

For every author selected there are thousands who would love to work with a publisher - whether one of the big five, a university press, or a niche publisher. If you are a royal pain but your book sells well, you may get a second contract. You'll also get a reputation for being difficult. Whether it's conscious or not, your publisher's representative may not work as hard on your behalf as they do for other authors.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

Am I on Jane Friedman's payroll? Of course not. But I have met her at conferences several times, listened to her presentations, and read her materials. Lots of people offer good advice, but hers is the most comprehensive. She has scoured who knows what, and brings it to you.

General Industry Resources from Jane Friedman

- Especially good for sussing out scams and not-quite-legitimate publishers and agents: [Writer Beware](#). It's also a great 101 site for learning about the publishing industry.
- Wondering how to get published? [Read my "start here" post](#).
- Wondering how to find publishers and agents? [Here are free resources](#).

Publishing 101: A First-Time Author's Guide to Getting Published, Marketing and Promoting Your Book, and Building a Successful Career, by Jane Friedman, 2014. Good chapter on how to get traditionally published.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00QLLDVJY/>

The Publishing Process, by Bill Swainson, on Writers and Artists. Superb overview.

<https://www.writersandartists.co.uk/writers/advice/145/preparing-for-submission/what-does-a-publisher-do/the-publishing-process>

Writer's Market is an online subscription that is periodically updated. It references publishers and agents, and has good background material. You can also buy a paper copy at most bookstores.

<http://www.writersmarket.com/cms/open/agent>

WHAT'S DIFFERENT IF YOU SELF-PUBLISH?

In some ways a lot, in some ways not much. You still need to have a polished draft, which has been critiqued by other writers and been through a copyeditor. You don't get the benefit of a publisher's editing staff, which can be substantial assistance – worth the time you will spend revising to meet the publisher's standards.

The publisher will present your book to readers (as an ebook and paperback) rather than you doing the formatting and initial promotion. If you are working with one of the “big five” traditional publishers, this means major access to bookstores. If you are working with a small publisher, they could get your book into few bookstores, but their marketing efforts will be very limited. That's not bad; you still get to say you have a publisher. You simply need to have fewer expectations about the publisher's role.

Where an author's role – whether self-published or with a publisher – is similar is in marketing. It is the author's job to get press releases to local media, set up book signings, conduct outreach to local bookstores, and develop a strong social media presence. The author does this forever, but the publisher will soon do far less than the author does. This makes sense – there are always new books, and if an author does not bring in substantial revenue, it's not worth continuing publisher investment.

You want to find a publisher? Go for it!

If a publisher (via your agent) does not select your book, don't be discouraged. You can teach yourself a lot about self-publishing and learn to put books on e-retailer sites (Amazon, Barnes and Noble) and create a paperback.

You can also take advantage of what I've learned in publishing more than twenty books, and reduce your learning curve substantially. I offer self-paced, economical courses, with information at <http://elaineorr.com/ElaineOrrWritingCourses.html>

You can also check out the index to my blog, where I regularly post articles about writing, publishing, and reaching readers. <http://elaineorr.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>. It's never too late to start something new!