

The Publishing Process

By: Paige Wheeler

- Author thinks of and begins to execute salable idea.
- Author fleshes out idea. I recommend beginning with a table of contents or outline.**
- Non-fiction author concentrates on proposal or mini-proposal. Fiction author writes book.
- Research good agents [Favorite source: Jeff Herman's *The Writer's Guide to Book Editors, Publishers, and Literary Agents*; Publisher's Lunch].**
- Write an engaging query.
- Choose your favorite agent or do a multiple query (that's okay, as long as you let them know it is a multiple query).**
- Agent will respond favorably and request your proposal or manuscript or will respond negatively. --**Keep good records of who responds.**
- If the agent decides to represent you, he or she will call you or meet you to make sure there is some chemistry and to explain guidelines. You, too, should discuss your requirements and expectations.
- Agent sends author contract.**
- If necessary, agent advises author on how to revise the proposal and/or sample to make it just right. Title is reexamined and chosen carefully.
- Let the agent know: Are there any particular publishers you would like agent to approach? What do you think the agent should stress or mention in a cover letter to publishers?**
- Agent calls publishers on the "A" list.
- Agent circulates your project.**
- Wait, get some much-deserved rest.
- You're probably going to see some rejections.**
- Talk to your agent to determine if the rejections all say the same thing; if so, see if you can adjust the proposal or manuscript before submitting further.
- One or two publishers bite [but they need to take it to editorial board].**
- One publisher makes an offer based on what they think they could sell, but they almost always play "low ball."

- Agent talks to author.**
- If offer is too low – agent negotiates. Agent confers with author.
- Agent accepts advance and basic offer on behalf of author. [See Mark Levine's *Negotiating a Book Contract*]. Standard terms, based on cover price:**
 - 10% to first 5000;
 - 12.5% to next 5000;
 - 15% thereafter for hardcover;
 - 7 or 7 1/2% paperback (sometimes escalates higher);
 - 6-8% mass market (10% after 150,000)
- Agent/author talks to clarify further contract needs.
- Agent gets boilerplate from publisher and improves contract terms.**
- Author is usually consulted at this point.
- When agent is happy, contract is sent to author.**
- Author queries agent if anything is not understood.
- Author signs all copies of contract and sends all to agent, who sends all to the publisher [pub sometimes signs first – pluses and minuses; speedier payment, but harder to negotiate last minute changes].**
- Publisher sends to agent the fully signed contracts and check [usually half-payment on signing].
- Money clears in bank. Agent deducts commission and expenses, if any, and sends check to author.**
- Non-fiction author writes book.
- Editorial process begins for fiction author who has already written book.**
- While author is writing/editing, publisher plans for publication [sales department, comp of cover, catalog, advance sales taken from catalog and at booksellers' convention, promotion plans].
- Author still writing.**
- Author delivers on time.
- Publisher accepts.**
- Publisher pays remaining \$ on acceptance [via agent].
- Publisher line edits. [Sometimes this happens before \$ are released.]**
- Queries are sent to author.
- Publisher copyedits [perhaps more queries to author].**

- Book is designed and put in galleys.
- Author proofreads galleys [sometimes publisher proofs theirs].**
- Publisher creates a horrible cover [author throws a diplomatic fit and publisher relents].
- Book is put in pages.**
- Sometimes publisher solicits great quotes for book jacket. [Author is sometimes asked to gather quotes; if not, author should offer!]
- Mechanicals/repro or disk to printer.**
- Publisher decides – based on advance sales, advance paid, etc. – how many to print.
- Foreign and other subright sales efforts begin (sometimes this happens right after the original sale of the manuscript).**
- Sometimes, publicity department sends out galleys or bound galleys to reviewers.
- Author gets books [book sometimes arrives in stores long before author gets copies].**
- Publisher sends book to reviewers, radio stations, and newspapers with a press release. [Sometimes author hires own publicist to supplement publisher's effort.]
- Books arrive in bookstores.**
- Author may do some book signings, radio programs, maybe tv, maybe public speaking, and rarely, a paid tour.
- Often lots of self-work generating publicity, such as going to bookstores.**
- 6 week window of opportunity.
- Perhaps author does mail order or sells books at seminars [if the right has been granted in the contract].**
- 5 years later, author revises the book or rights revert to author.
- Occasionally a small sale is made to another publisher, but it's hard to sell a book that has gone op (out of print).**
- Author might consider updating and recycling contents of old book into a brand new book with a great new title.